

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The Council of Jewish Federations targeted the House of Representatives Rules Committee in an effort to stop legislation that limits advocacy by not-for-profit organizations that receive federal funds. A new version of the measure unveiled last week could cripple advocacy and lobbying by Jewish organizations.**

■ **The Jewish Agency Board of Governors approved a reform plan that calls for cutting its expenses by \$500 million by the year 2000, including a \$110 million cut during the next two years. Agency leaders are meeting in Jerusalem this week to work out the details of the plan. [Page 2]**

■ **The Islamic Jihad fundamentalist group vowed to take revenge against Israeli targets around the world after its leader, Dr. Fathi Shakaki, was assassinated Thursday in Malta. Israel declined to comment on whether it was behind the shooting. [Page 3]**

■ **Government leaders and business-people from more than 60 countries gathered in Amman for a regional conference aimed at recruiting support for a number of development projects in the Middle East. In Jerusalem, investors also gathered for an economic conference.**

■ **The 2,000-year-old Jewish community in the war-torn, former Soviet republic of Tajikistan is moving toward extinction. Many of the Jews there eagerly await the occasional visit of an Israeli diplomat who comes to stamp visas for emigration to Israel. [Page 4]**

■ **Eight people were killed and 18 injured when an Egged bus traveling from Jerusalem to Ein Gedi, near the Dead Sea, skidded off a rain-slicked street, plunging into a ravine below. Traffic authorities believe that the accident was caused by the driver, who was driving at an excessive speed.**

■ **Forty Mountain Jews from the Caucasus who work as vendors at an outdoor market in Moscow were beaten by police and dragged off on foot across the city to a police station. The vendors said that besides being beaten, they were searched and robbed at the police station.**

NEWS ANALYSIS**Early elections in Austria boost chances for far right**By *Marta S. Halpert*

VIENNA (JTA) — The collapse of Austria's governing coalition has created a significant opportunity for Jorg Haider, the country's far-right political leader.

The possibility of Haider's strong electoral showing is particularly disturbing to Jewish observers, given the strong xenophobic and anti-Semitic views often ascribed to Haider and his Freedom Party's supporters.

After the governing coalition of the Social Democrats and the conservative People's Party collapsed in early October over a budget dispute, the Austrian government called for early elections, to be held Dec. 17.

The elections may well bring a historic change to the country.

According to the latest polls here, Haider's right-wing, anti-immigrant Freedom Party is poised to rise from its origins on the radical fringe to become Austria's second strongest party.

When Haider took over the small Freedom Party in 1986, it was a refuge for former Nazis. At the time, it garnered less than 5 percent of the vote.

But in the last parliamentary elections, which took place in October 1994, Haider's party took 22.5 percent of the vote, earning it 42 seats in Austria's 183-member Parliament and making it the strongest far-right party in Western Europe.

Recent polls for the upcoming elections indicate that the Social Democrats, led by Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, will get 31 percent to 33 percent of the vote.

The polls show that Haider's party may tie or even surpass Wolfgang Schuessel's conservative People's Party.

The strong showing concerns Jewish observers. Some 7,500 Jews live in Austria.

According to an American Jewish Committee survey released in May, one in three supporters of the Freedom Party manifests strong anti-Semitic prejudice.

David Singer, AJCommittee director of research, said at the time that "more than one in three Austrians who support the Freedom Party see Jews as having too much influence on world events in Austrian society, reject Jews as neighbors and maintain that Jews are exploiting the Holocaust for their own purposes."

"A significant portion of Freedom Party supporters are open to Holocaust denial as well," he added.

In recent years, groups of neo-Nazis have desecrated Jewish cemeteries and perpetrated other anti-Semitic acts in Austria and elsewhere in Europe, saying that they carried them out to demonstrate their support for Haider.

Denials of anti-Semitic leanings

But Haider, as his popularity grows and he sets his sights on one day gaining the Austrian chancellorship, has attempted to distance himself from any Nazi leanings.

"Neither in our party program nor in all my remarks will you find anything anti-Semitic," Haider said last week through a spokesman.

"The fact that we have not only Jewish people who sympathize with us but are also party members is being purposely withheld" by the media, he charged.

Haider also dismissed any connection with anti-Semitic acts carried out by neo-Nazis in his name.

"I have always repudiated the desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and similar activities," he said.

He likewise denied that his party is xenophobic.

"There is no racism in our ranks," he said.

"The media and our adversaries keep very silent about the fact that we have, of course, party members and activists of very different origin, not only Europeans."

He said his party's immigration policy is "very clear" — deportation

of illegal immigrants and the requirement that legal immigrants "have a proper living place and living quarters."

Haider's statements in self-defense were blasted by Elan Steinberg, the World Jewish Congress' executive director.

"That kind of double talk would have gone down very well in pre-World War II Austria," said Steinberg, who charged that Haider, rather than using blatant anti-Semitic or xenophobic public utterances, couched his attitudes in code words that his audience would undoubtedly understand.

"He has a lot of baggage to carry with him because his party was originally composed of Nazi SS men," Steinberg added.

"People avoid making anti-Semitic statements because they don't want to be labeled anti-Semitic. But actions speak louder than words."

To bolster his image, Haider recently insisted that John Gudenus, a member of the Austrian Parliament belonging to the Freedom Party, resign after a television interview in which Gudenus left the impression that he did not believe that the Holocaust took place.

But even as he attempts to erase traces of extremism from his public persona, certain facts stand out in Haider's record.

In 1988, Haider was forced to resign as governor of the Austrian province of Carinthia after he expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler.

In February 1993, he attempted to collect between 780,000 and 1 million signatures for a popular initiative to declare Austria closed to foreigners and to institute several race-based laws.

The petition was signed by only 7 percent of Austria's eligible voters.

The entire incident was viewed at the time as a major political defeat for Haider.

Expected gains by Haider's Freedom Party in the upcoming elections are part of what is being viewed as a sea change in Austrian politics.

Since the end of World War II, Austria has been governed by either the Social Democrats or the People's Party, often in a so-called "grand coalition" of the two parties.

Leading parties lose support

But in recent years, the popularity of the two parties has dropped off.

This occurred despite the fact that under the stewardship of the Social Democrats and People's Party, Austria has become the eighth wealthiest country in the world.

The country is also the third richest within the European Union, which Austria joined in January after a contentious national referendum that took place in June 1994.

But, despite the country's wealth, many voters have become disenchanted with what they view as a system of political cronyism in which the benefits of the country's economic growth only belatedly filter down to the public at large.

Some segments of the public have also grown disaffected with the high influx of foreigners — including refugees from the former Yugoslavia and immigrants from former Communist countries seeking a better economic future.

This growing anti-foreigner sentiment has clearly played into the hands of the xenophobic platform of Haider's Freedom Party.

As they witness erosion of public support for their grand coalition, the leaders of the Social Democrats and the

People's Party are now speaking of going their separate ways and forging new coalition alliances to form the country's next government.

Schussel and his conservative People's Party believe that they have a real chance at leading the next government, and they may rely on Haider's support to achieve that end.

The Social Democrats, by the same token, may turn toward the left and seek a partnership with the Greens and the smaller Liberal Forum.

Haider, meanwhile, keeps his gaze firmly fixed on the Austrian chancellorship.

In preparation for parliamentary elections that were originally scheduled for 1998, his campaign organization was giving away umbrellas that carried the slogan, "Haider '98."

But now that the elections have been moved up to December, the imprint on the umbrellas are being corrected to read, "Haider '96." □

(JTA staff writer Mitchell Danow in New York contributed to this report.)

Jewish Agency approves plan to cut deficit over five years

By Jacob Schreiber

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After a series of tense meetings, the Jewish Agency for Israel's Board of Governors has approved a framework for slashing \$500 million from the Agency's budget during the next five years.

The dramatic plan adopted Sunday is designed to revamp the ailing social service and education organization, and save it from a collision course with projected deficits of \$689 million by the year 2000.

The first cuts of \$110 million — \$43 million from the Aliyah and Absorption budget — will be implemented during the next two years.

Diaspora representatives at the meeting pledged to raise an additional \$230 million in the next five years.

The Agency is the primary recipient of United Jewish Appeal funds targeted for overseas that are raised by local federations.

The most acrimonious issue still to be resolved, according to Agency sources, is the future of the agency's commitment to its Youth Aliyah villages.

Although the Youth Aliyah villages are traditionally one of the Agency's highest-funded education and social welfare programs, some believe that the government should assume most of the responsibility for them because most who attend them are veteran Israelis, not new immigrants. □

Mother says she met with 'The Engineer'

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The mother of a notorious Hamas fugitive told an Israeli court this week that she met with her son during the past year.

Aishe Ayash is the mother of Yehiya Ayash, who is thought to have masterminded a number of suicide attacks against Israel.

He is known as "The Engineer" because of his expertise with explosives.

Aishe Ayash, who is from the West Bank, appeared Sunday in the Ramle military court, where she was being detained.

She was charged with a number of offenses, including contact with a hostile organization.

Israel Television reported that she confirmed that she had seen her son in the Gaza Strip and that his wife and child were hiding out with him. □



Israel braces for terror attacks after killing of Islamic Jihad head

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces have reportedly gone on alert for possible reprisals in the wake of the assassination of the leader of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad movement.

Islamic Jihad officials vowed to take revenge against Israeli targets around the world after Dr. Fathi Shakaki was assassinated Thursday in Malta.

Israel declined to comment on whether it was behind the shooting.

Islamic Jihad said in a statement issued in the Gaza Strip that "this horrendous crime will make every Zionist, wherever they are on the face of the earth, a target to our amazing blasts and our bodies exploding in anger" — an apparent allusion to renewed suicide bombings of Israeli targets.

The Palestinian Authority called on Islamic Jihad to refrain from retaliation, saying that it could ultimately hurt the self-rule government.

But Islamic Jihad officials rejected the Palestinian appeal. In its statement calling for revenge, it vowed to "set the ground on fire underneath the feet of the criminal Zionists."

The threats of renewed violence by Islamic Jihad came days after the spiritual leader of the militant fundamentalist Hamas movement called on his followers to abandon terror.

In an interview from his jail cell last Friday, Sheik Ahmed Yassin asked his followers to stop attacks on Israel and run in the Palestinian elections. Yassin, a wheelchair-bound Muslim cleric serving a life sentence in Israel for ordering the deaths of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israelis, founded Hamas in December 1987.

Shot five times in the head

The Islamic Jihad statement was the first confirmation that the man shot outside a hotel in Malta was indeed Shakaki.

Authorities in Malta initially reported last Friday that a man identified as Libyan businessman Ibrahim Shawesh had been shot five times in the head by two men on a motorcycle. On Sunday, Maltese officials identified the victim as Shakaki after they asked Israeli police to provide fingerprints of the Islamic Jihad leader.

The Maltese authorities described the assassination of Shakaki as a "professional job."

Shakaki, 43, had reportedly stopped over in Malta on his way back to Syria from Libya, where he had met with Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi to discuss Tripoli's recent expulsion of Palestinians from Libyan soil. According to some reports, Islamic Jihad and Gadhafi had conspired together on the expulsions, meant to undermine the Palestinian Authority's peace moves with Israel.

While declining to comment on possible Israeli involvement in the shooting, Israeli leaders said they were not sorry the Islamic Jihad leader was dead.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told reporters that Shakaki had led "a murderous terrorist group that committed murderous attacks against citizens."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said he did not think the killing would be detrimental to the peace process.

"I think his business was murdering, so if there will be one murderer less, I don't see how it's going to affect the peace process," he said. Peres added that he was not concerned about Islamic Jihad threats of terrorist attacks.

"The threats existed all the time," he said. "There's nothing new about that."

Shakaki, a medical doctor who was born in Gaza, established Islamic Jihad in the early 1980s. After being expelled by Israel to Lebanon in 1988, Shakaki set up his base of operations in Syria.

Islamic Jihad, which violently opposes the Israel-Palestinian peace accords, has carried out terrorist attacks against Israel. This year Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the Jan. 22 suicide bombing near Netanya, in which 21 people were killed and 60 wounded.

The group also claimed responsibility for the April 9 bombing of a bus near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim in Gaza. Seven Israeli soldiers, along with American student Alisa Flatow, were killed in the explosion.

Islamic Jihad officials, meanwhile, announced the appointment of Ramadan Abdullah as Shakaki's successor.

A spokesman for the group in Damascus gave no details about the new leader, or where he would be based.

Shakaki's death touched off disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza. A commercial strike was called in the West Bank towns of Hebron and Ramallah. University students demonstrated in Gaza, where leaflets announcing Shakaki's death and vowing revenge were distributed. □

Role of Israeli president debated after meeting with Arab leaders

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman's comments to a group of Israeli Arab leaders regarding the peace process has renewed public debate over whether the president of Israel should comment on politically controversial issues.

Weizman reportedly told the Israeli Arab leaders last week that the agreement signed last month in Washington for expanding West Bank autonomy was concluded hastily and is not a real agreement.

At the meeting, sharp words were reportedly exchanged between Weizman and Labor Knesset member Saleh Tareef, who said the president gave Israeli Arabs the impression that he had abandoned the peace process.

Tareef later asserted that Weizman had said the Interim Agreement was not a real accord, that it was hastily negotiated and that because it was passed in the Knesset by a 61-59 vote, it had "no majority" to back it.

The President's Office later said that Weizman's remarks had been taken out of context and that he wholeheartedly supports the peace process.

The role of an Israeli president has in the past largely been ceremonial. But in matters relating to the peace process, Weizman has taken stands that diverge from the policies of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Reacting to the incident, Cabinet ministers Yossi Beilin and Uzi Baram said Weizman, by speaking out against the accord, had done a disservice to his reputation and to the role an Israeli president is supposed to play.

But Knesset member Zevulun Hammer of the National Religious Party said that Weizman was expressing the feelings of the majority of what Hammer called "the Zionist public in Israel."

Meanwhile, Meretz Knesset member Dedi Zucker, chairman of the parliamentary law committee, backed legislation that would hamstring an Israeli president's ability to make statements that run counter to government policies. "He can speak out on public issues, definitely," Zucker told Israel Radio. "But no one [in the office before him] has allowed himself to express daily positions against the government."

Deputy House Speaker Ovadia Eli, of the Likud Party, presented a bill under which the Knesset or Cabinet could be required to hold special discussions on matters the president considered crucial. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD
**Visits by Israeli envoy inspire
Jews living in war-torn Tashkent**
By Alexander Lesser

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan (JTA) — Michael Bar, first secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Tashkent, the capital of neighboring Uzbekistan, does not relish his periodic visits here.

In Dushanbe, the Tajik capital, he stays at the Hotel October, formerly reserved for top Communist Party officials.

Presumably it was once worthy of the officials, but the hotel, like much of Tajikistan, has since fallen on hard times.

“The food, if you can call it that, is terrible. And there’s no hot water,” he says. “But it’s my job.”

His job is to stamp Israeli visas for the remaining Jews in Tajikistan, the poorest and most remote of the ex-Soviet republics.

Torn by civil war since 1992, the nation of Tajikistan is now witnessing the departure of many of its remaining Jews.

The room reserved for Bar’s visits here is on the first floor, down the hall from rooms occupied by members of the Islamic fundamentalist opposition to the Tajik government.

They have been living in the hotel since last year, conducting peace talks with the government of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov, an ex-Communist supported by Moscow.

Gun-toting, fatigue-clad men

The hotel houses the American Embassy on the fourth floor, the Russian Embassy on the third and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the second.

One finds it hard to say who among the gun-toting, fatigue-clad men lounging in the hotel lobby is working for whom.

“Security is a problem here, so we don’t stay for more than a few days,” says Bar, 26.

Things are quieter these days than they were in 1992-1993, when the civil war was at its height.

For more than a year, a fragile cease-fire has held.

But neat rows of bullet holes remain in the hotel’s facade, which serve as a reminder of the war, in which 50,000 to 100,000 people died, according to a Tajik Foreign Ministry official.

The casualties are far higher than those incurred during Moscow’s war in Chechnya.

But little is known in the West about the Tajik civil war because the Moscow-based foreign press corps did not fly down to cover it.

When the war broke out in February 1992, the Jewish Agency mounted an airlift that brought thousands of Jews to Israel.

However, several thousand stayed behind, according to Bar.

Somehow, word of his visits always gets around.

During one recent visit, some 100 people were gathered by 9 a.m. in the lobby, mingling with the armed guards, awaiting Bar’s arrival from the airport.

“My mother was ill, so I couldn’t leave when the war started,” one local Jew, Avram Ibraghimov, 28, said in explaining why he stayed.

“Now she is dead, so my wife and I are going,” he added.

“I hope someday I can come back and bring my mother’s body to Israel.”

Some in the lobby also spoke of sick relatives —

or uncertainty about going to a new place — as their reason for remaining here. Others said they stayed because they were hopeful that things would get better in Tajikistan.

But conditions here have not improved, despite the cease-fire.

The economy has collapsed. Wages, averaging \$20 per month, are lower here than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

Not that there is much to buy. Food deliveries from the countryside are erratic.

There is also little heat or hot water because Uzbekistan cuts off the supply of natural gas that runs the turbines whenever Tajikistan falls behind on payments, which is often.

A curfew no longer exists, but the streets are deserted by dusk.

People are accustomed to staying home.

There is no night life anyway, because the cinemas, theaters and restaurants are closed.

The government’s armored car patrols come out about 10 p.m.

Gunfire after dusk is not uncommon. In September, two Russian officers who were part of a peacekeeping force were shot to death while walking home on a Dushanbe street.

Before the war, some 8,000 Jews lived in Tajikistan, mostly Farsi-speaking Bukharan Jews, with a minority of Ashkenazis who came as engineers or other specialists after World War II.

The Farsi-speaking Jews can trace their history here — as well as in the great ancient cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in Uzbekistan — back 2,000 years.

That history is coming to an end.

“We never had any problems with the Tajiks until now,” said Ibraghimov, a refrigerator serviceman. “The Soviet Union fell apart, and these fundamentalists came out of nowhere.”

“This craziness is not from the local people. It’s all coming from Iran and Afghanistan,” he added. Tajikistan shares a border with Afghanistan.

Eleanora Sidorova, an Ashkenazi Jew in her early 30s whose retired father was a senior Communist Party official in Dushanbe, said she could have spent her life elsewhere.

“I studied at Moscow University, and I could have stayed there,” she said.

“But I came home after graduation because my parents and all my friends were here. This was a beautiful place to live before all this.”

Sidorova declined to say much about the civil war, sharing only that she had been in the country when the fundamentalists stormed the presidential palace in February 1992.

Tears forming in her eyes, she added: “Friends of mine died.”

Sidorova, who said she was caring for her elderly parents, was not among those waiting to see Bar.

“We’re not going anywhere,” she said. “This is our home.” □

Court dismisses Munich games suit

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A German court has dismissed a \$28 million damage suit brought against the government by 22 relatives of the 11 Israeli athletes killed at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

The judge said the plaintiffs had already been compensated some \$1 million under the terms of a 1973 agreement in which they agreed not to pursue any further claims in the case. □