



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

### BEHIND THE HEADLINES

#### As Russian elections approach, Jewish voters split on favorites

By Lev Krichevsky

■ Jewish activists from across the country declared their "unequivocal support" for the Middle East peace process at a National Peace Process Advocacy Day in Washington. [Page 3]

■ Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel joined President Clinton to urge Congress to support sending American peacekeeping troops to Bosnia. The joint call came as Clinton prepared to depart for Paris for the signing of the Bosnian peace accord. [Page 2]

■ N.Y. Gov. George Pataki denounced the firebombing of a Jewish-owned store in Harlem by a gunman. Terming it an act of "unconscionable violence," he said, "It is a tragic reminder that racism and anti-Semitism have no place in a civilized society. This episode reminds us that words do indeed have consequences."

■ An American Jewish Committee symposium trained attention on the question of Jewish unity. But some of the dialogue showed that toning down the rhetoric is not always easy. [Page 4]

■ Italy arrested a skinhead leader in Rome who had put up posters urging authorities to free SS Capt. Erich Priebke, who was extradited to Italy from Argentina to face trial on war crimes charges. An 83-year-old former Italian resistance fighter now living in Buenos Aires may be a key witness for the prosecution of Priebke. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres stopped off in Morocco for talks with King Hassan II after winding up his visit to the United States. Peres reportedly proposed a summit between Israeli and Arab leaders.

■ A videotape clearly showing the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin will be given to prosecutors for possible use during the trial of confessed assassin Yigal Amir, which is scheduled to begin Dec. 19. The tape, shot by an unidentified man who was standing on a roof overlooking the spot where Rabin was killed, has already been provided to the state commission that is investigating the Nov. 4 assassination.

MOSCOW (JTA) — On the eve of parliamentary elections in Russia, Jews here, like other Russian citizens, are divided over whom to support.

Whatever its composition as a result of Sunday's elections — only the second such elections since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union — the lower house of Parliament, or Duma, will be confronting a legislative agenda that will be of particular significance to Russia's estimated 500,000 to 2 million Jews.

In addition to dealing with issues of importance to the populace — such as Russia's badly faltering economy and rising crime rates — the Duma may also confront such hot-button issues for the Jewish community as drafting a law for minorities, compensating former concentration camp inmates and restoring properties that formerly belonged to the Jewish community.

There are also fears that if a majority of reactionary parties triumph over reformist ones, the law allowing Jews to emigrate freely could be amended.

The fear is inspired by recent polls, which indicate that many Russians, fed up with the deteriorating economic situation, may turn their backs on the reformists and throw their support behind such groups as the Communist Party, the nationalist Congress of Russian Communities and the inaptly named Liberal Democratic Party of Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

Some polls indicate that these parties could claim half the votes in Sunday's elections. The Communist Party, headed by Gennady Zyuganov, has been making an especially strong showing in recent days, with polls giving him more than 20 percent of the vote.

Although the Duma, as the lower house of Russia's bicameral Parliament, has very little effect on the makeup of the government, the election's primary importance is the balance of political forces in today's Russia — a situation that can heavily influence the presidential elections slated for June 1996.

Voters will confront a wealth of candidates Sunday, with some 43 parties and blocs in the running. Although Jews are not monolithic in their political thinking, Jewish voters generally show "that their loyalty to democratic parties is stronger than the average support these parties are likely to gain on the national level," said Michael Chlenov, chairman of the Va'ad, the Jewish Confederation of Russia.

Among the more democratically oriented parties are Our Home is Russia, the party of President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin; the Democratic Choice of Russia, also known as Russia's Choice and headed by former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar; and Yabloko, headed by Grigory Yavlinsky, who is part Jewish.

### No overt anti-Semitism

The Congress of Ethnic Unions of Russia, known as KNOR, which has a Jewish section, is backing Russia's Choice, which is the only political party that has a practical program for dealing with the country's ethnic minorities.

None of the parties seeking election has included overt anti-Semitic slogans in their electoral campaign, Chlenov said. But, he added, the election platforms of some parties are cause for serious concern.

"Parties like the Communists or Liberal Democrats are calling openly for a return to the past," he said, noting that this could lead to a revision of the steps toward economic privatization that have marked the post-Soviet era.

"For ordinary folks, it means they might be deprived of their right to own the apartments they occupy," Chlenov said. "For those Jews who plan to emigrate or repatriate to Israel, such measures would lead to personal economic catastrophe." He also noted another possible concern for Jews — the "hypothetical possibility of the restoration of the Iron Curtain and the closing of Russia's borders."

Although Jewish emigration from Russia has declined dramatically

from its peak in 1992, shortly after the gates opened, there are still Jews who want to emigrate.

Beyond the general concerns about the direction of the country, there is a set of minority-related issues that has to be solved on the parliamentary level, said Valery Engel, a Moscow Jewish activist.

Although some of the issues are important to all ethnic minorities in Russia, others are specifically important for the Jews, he said, citing the need "to adopt a law on national-cultural autonomy for the minorities."

"For Russian Jews, the effect of the law can be twofold: It should incorporate guarantees of combating national chauvinism and anti-Semitism on the state level; on the other hand, the law should ensure state support of Jewish education and culture."

Engel, a businessman and vice president of the reform-minded Congress of Ethnic Unions of Russia, is running on the Russia's Choice slate. The party has agreed to back its minority candidates running on that slate.

Engel believes that he has a good chance to win a seat in the Duma.

If so, Engel, who some 10 years ago was active in the Moscow underground Jewish movement teaching Hebrew to young dissidents and future immigrants to Israel, would become the first member of the post-Soviet Russian Parliament who is fluent in Hebrew.

Jews make up about 3 percent of all candidates running for the Duma, but only a handful of them has a special Jewish agenda in the upcoming elections.

Engel is clearly worried about the future of emigration if parties appealing to the more orderly times of the Soviet era or those with a strong nationalist leaning gain control over the Duma.

"We must not allow the law on emigration to be revised," Engel said. "One could hear an oblique call to do this from the mouth of the leadership of the Congress of Russian Communities, one of the most successful parties in the race for the Duma.

"It is clear why Jews are particularly sensitive about such statements," he added.

Engel also said the issue of compensating former prisoners of ghettos and concentration camps, as well as the restitution of property formerly belonging to Jewish communities, remains unsolved.

Another Jewish leader, Tancred Golenpolsky, founder of Moscow's Jewish biweekly newspaper *Evreyskaya Gazeta*, which has the biggest circulation among the Russian Jewish media, is running on the slate of the Inter-Ethnic Union, a bloc backing the administration of Yeltsin.

### **Promising the masses everything**

Golenpolsky, who is running in Birobidzhan, the Jewish Autonomous Region, is clearly worried about the shape of the new Parliament.

He believes that most people are unlikely to "vote for those politicians who already had a chance to be at the helm of the state," such as Gaidar or Chernomyrdin.

Regardless of the outcome, Golenpolsky said, "I don't think Russia will see any economic and political stabilization in the next three to four years."

"The success of the left-wing parties, like the Communists, which many experts predict, seems to be quite natural when the Communists and different populists promise to give the masses everything," he said.

Golenpolsky believes that Jews are taking too active a part in the electoral campaign and in Russia's political life in general.

It is not good for Russian Jews, he said, when "economic difficulties remain unsolved while the chief aide on economic issues in the Yeltsin administration, Alexander Lifshitz, is Jewish."

Interviews with Jewish voters revealed that they do, in fact, back a number of different candidates.

"For me, there is no question of whom to support," said Olga Pozern, a retired engineer. "I will vote for Yegor Gaidar's Russia's Choice Party.

"I do not believe I will live to see real changes for the better in our everyday life," she said, but "voting for a party of democratic orientation, I want to ensure the continuity of reforms that should be seen through to the end."

But younger voters find Gaidar less appealing.

"I will cast my vote for Yabloko, the bloc of [liberal economist] Grigory Yavlinsky," said Anna Chernomordik, 22, a law student from St. Petersburg.

"I think if these people are given a chance, they can help turn Russia into a civilized democracy," she said. After all, I like their leader, Yavlinsky, who is half Jewish."

Religion was not so important to Eduard Mirkin, 56, who was born in Uzbekistan and now lives in Moscow.

"I don't care much who is Jewish and who is not in the elections," he said. "Why should I believe Democrats, who have had a lot of time and did nothing but ruin the Soviet economy?"

"I give my vote to the Communists," he said. "We need a strong power to put an end to all this turmoil and crime." □

### **Wiesel joins Clinton to support an 'honorable' mission in Bosnia**

*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel joined President Clinton on Wednesday to support the deployment of U.S. peacekeeping troops to Bosnia.

Wiesel, who had long urged the world to stop the atrocities in Bosnia, called the peacekeeping roll "an act of morality" that "will be remembered in history."

"It is with a great sense of pride and pleasure that I came to support your decision," Wiesel said after meeting with Clinton in the Oval Office. "I believe it is right, I believe it is honorable."

Two years ago at the opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Wiesel made an impassioned plea to Clinton to help put an end to the massacre in the former Yugoslavia. "Something, anything, must be done to stop the bloodshed there," he said at the dedication, addressing Clinton directly. "It will not stop unless we stop it."

He recalled these words at a news conference with Clinton after their Oval Office meeting Wednesday. His words came as Congress began debate over whether to support the mission.

The first of 20,000 American troops began arriving in Bosnia this week to enforce the Balkan peace agreement.

As Clinton prepared to depart for Paris on Wednesday to witness the signing of the accord, Wiesel praised the president's leadership in foreign affairs.

"We in the United States represent a certain moral aspect of history," Wiesel said. "A great nation owes its greatness not only to its military power, but also to its moral consciousness, awareness.

"What would future generations say about us, all of us here in this land, if we do nothing? After all, people were dying, people were killing each other, day after day. They stopped, thanks to your leadership."

Clinton called Wiesel a "passionate witness to humanity's capacity for the worst and a powerful example of humanity's capacity for the best."

He thanked Wiesel for "being a conscience of this terrible conflict for the last four years." □

## **Hundreds of Jewish activists vow to support peace process vocally**

*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish leaders and grass-roots activists from across the country gathered Tuesday on Capitol Hill to declare their “unequivocal support” for the Middle East peace process and for the Israeli government.

Timed to coincide with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres’ address to a joint meeting of Congress, more than 300 activists vowed to raise their voices in support of peace and to no longer be labeled a silent majority.

“This is not and never has been a monolithic community. However, we are here in Washington to say in a clear and unhesitating voice that the organized American Jewish community overwhelmingly supports the Israeli government’s pursuit of peace,” said Lynn Lyss, chair of the National Jewish Community Relations Council, which co-sponsored the day with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Congressional leaders, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), flocked to the meeting to declare their support for Israel. Senior members of President Clinton’s peace process team updated the delegates on the status of the peace talks.

Dennis Ross, the State Department’s special coordinator for the Middle East, and Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, hailed the goal of the day.

“Those who believe in peace cannot sit on their hands,” Ross told the gathering.

The activists also used the occasion to engage in a lobbying blitz, calling for passage of a \$12.1 billion foreign aid bill, currently held up in Congress, which includes aid for Israel and Egypt.

The bill also contains an extension of the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act — due to expire Dec. 31 — which allows U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority and diplomatic contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

“Our government, which has long supported bold and innovative efforts to help the Mideast peace process succeed, has a particularly pivotal role to play at this defining moment in the history of the Middle East,” said Steven Grossman, AIPAC president.

“Its continued partnership with Israel in realizing peace with security could not be more essential.”

### **Provide overseas abortions**

The foreign aid appropriations bill, considered critical to the peace process, has been stalled amid an unrelated fight between pro-life members of the House and pro-choice forces in the Senate.

At issue is a provision that would deny funding for organizations which provide abortions overseas and would cut off money for the U.N. Population Fund unless it ceases its operations in China by March 1.

The delay has caused great consternation in Israel, which is accustomed to receiving its \$1.8 billion in military aid and \$1.2 billion in economic assistance by the end of October.

Unless Congress passes the foreign aid bill, Israel will be forced to enter its new budget year without the \$1.2 billion in cash assistance used to pay off its foreign debt.

Following on the theme of the Madison Square Garden peace rally Sunday in New York, Jewish leaders declared that the “silent Jewish majority,” which has long supported the Arab-Israeli peace process, will no longer remain silent in the wake of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination.

“The organized Jewish community has a responsibility to let our elected officials in Washington know where we stand on the peace process,” Lyss said.

“We also have an internal responsibility to develop a culture of civil discourse,” she added. “We need to find effective and constitutional methods in dealing with extremists on the fringe.”

Addressing the Jewish activists, Peres praised their outpouring of support. “We are proud of the position you took,” he said, noting that support of the peace process “wasn’t always fashionable.”

“We are very expectant to see it continue,” he said.

Organizers of the advocacy day — the NJCRAC and AIPAC, with the participation of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations — expressed support for Israel as it forges ahead with peacemaking.

“We’re making a commitment that this is not a one-day operation,” said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chairman for the NJCRAC. “This is part of what we expect will be an ongoing priority of the community to intensify its support of the peace process.” □

## **Mission to find astronaut from Israel appears grounded**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Dozens of Israelis contacted the country’s space agency this week in an effort to become the first sabra to lift off into space.

The sudden interest in space travel was prompted by President Clinton’s announcement Monday that the United States was considering sending an Israeli astronaut on a space mission as part of a cooperative effort with Israel.

But Avi Har-Even, director of the Israel Space Agency, had disappointing news for the would-be space travelers.

“We’re more interested in the market for selling space equipment than in sending off astronauts,” he said, adding that there were no plans yet to open an Israeli space-travel training program.

Israel and the United States have already cooperated in space research, and the proposed joint effort in space would expand on that.

Israel has already won a number of contracts to build small satellites in deals with American companies, according to the Israeli daily Ma’ariv.

The American civilian satellite market was opened to Israel last year after a meeting between Clinton and the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Although the prospect of an Israeli in space is being played down by officials here, the name of one Israeli has already been floated as a likely candidate to participate in an eventual space mission with the Americans.

Dr. Eran Shenkar, 32, is currently studying space medicine at the NASA center in Dayton, Ohio. The Jerusalem native is six months into a three-year program. Among other things, he is learning how to conduct research experiments in a space-shuttle environment.

Shenkar said he was surprised that his name came up. “I was flattered,” he told Israel Radio. But he said his own goals were more earthly.

“Space medicine is the future medicine,” he said.

“When Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, all these monitors were hooked up to his body. Now, 30 years later, you can find them in the emergency rooms in regular hospitals,” he said. “A lot can be invested in humans on Earth. I would like to go back to Israel and invest the research in my country.” □

**FOCUS ON ISSUES**

**Civil discourse: A nice goal, but not always easy to achieve**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Leaders in every part of the Jewish community have agreed on one thing since the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin — that words count.

The hateful language used to vilify Rabin — terming him a traitor and a Nazi — by some who disagreed with his policies created the context for Yigal Amir to murder him at point-blank range, say many.

Yet even though desire for more civil discourse is widespread, the elusive nature of that goal was made clear this week at a rare joint public appearance by the leaders of the seminaries of the three major Jewish denominations — Orthodox, Conservative and Reform.

They, together with Colette Avital, Israeli consul general, spoke at a symposium titled "Are We One People?" It was organized by the American Jewish Committee and took place Dec. 11 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel here.

The tone of the three rabbis' remarks was collegial by and large, but at times the rhetoric became inflamed — and inflammatory, prompting heated remarks from some of the approximately 125 people in attendance.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, began by embracing some element of Orthodox responsibility for the assassination.

There were "groups and individuals" in the Orthodox world "who went to extremes in ways which are both undemocratic and un-Jewish."

"My group got used to hearing this stridency and it became like static to us in the background, sometimes annoying but not something you really notice, and so you just shrug your shoulders and go on with your daily business," he said.

**'Beat their own breasts'**

Amir, Rabin's confessed assassin, who received a religious Zionist education, "was a weed in our garden — in our garden — so it is incumbent upon us to do a 'cheshbon hanefesh,' " or internal stock-taking, said Lamm, reiterating a theme he has used before.

Confession such as the kind done on Yom Kippur is valuable anytime, he said, adding, "It's spiritually a very refreshing thing to acknowledge that I have erred."

But he also made pointed comments against "exploitation of this tragedy for political purposes."

He said people should beat their own breasts in confession, not someone else's, referring to the feeling among many Orthodox Jews that liberal Jews are blaming their entire community for Amir's act.

Lamm's rebuke of the Israeli government, which has questioned many Orthodox rabbis in the wake of the murder, was sharp.

"To haul in rabbis and ask what they are teaching, to review their sermons, this is an inquisition more appropriate for a modern Torquemada than a democratic state," said Lamm.

But Lamm was not the only one to speak pointedly.

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, blamed "Orthodox Messianic temper, which bred a right-wing nationalism perverting Judaism and Zionism," as the root of Rabin's murder and said that "hollow appeals for unity cannot paper over the divide which separates us."

He also spoke vehemently against the Orthodox monopoly on marriage, divorce and conversion in Israel.

"It so grievously impedes mutual respect and social harmony between Jews," he said.

The comments of the seminary leaders led some at the symposium to reflect on the tension between the seemingly contradictory values of civil discourse and not letting dangerous rhetoric go unchecked. Rabbi Joy Levitt, spiritual leader of the Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, on Long Island, N.Y., said there is a Jewish religious "obligation in our community to rebuke" those whose rhetoric goes beyond the limits of acceptability.

Yet each of the seminary leaders spoke at some point about moderating the rhetoric.

Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, president of the Reform movement's seminary, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, put the whole debate in an historical context. "Were we ever one people? No. We were always many segments comprising the Jewish nation," he said.

But "let's watch what we say and how we say it," he added. "Let's learn again how to conduct civil discourse without disrespect." □

**Italian skinhead leader arrested in display of pro-Priebke posters**

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — An Italian skinhead leader has been arrested after being accused of putting up posters calling for the freedom of former SS Capt. Erich Priebke, who was extradited to Italy from Argentina last month to face trial on war crimes charges.

Priebke, 82, who is being held in at a military prison near Rome, is accused of involvement in the 1944 massacre of 335 Romans — including 75 Jews, several Roman Catholic priests and three teen-agers — at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome.

If convicted, Priebke faces life imprisonment for the part he played in what is regarded as the worst war crime committed on Italian soil. A preliminary hearing on his case opened Dec. 7, but the final decision about whether to try him was delayed for procedural reasons.

The posters, put up by local skinheads across the city, featured a picture of a Nazi soldier in a helmet, with the slogan "Freedom for Priebke."

"To you, today prisoner of miserable renegades, we renew the oath that forever has linked the hearts of those who know how to fight," the posters read. "Our honor is called loyalty."

Police arrested Maurizio Boccacci after accusing him of putting up the posters. They charged him with breaking laws against the revival of fascism in Italy.

Meanwhile, an 83-year-old former Italian resistance fighter now living in Buenos Aires may be a key witness for the prosecution of Priebke. Valentino Marsili, vice president of the Argentine-Italian association "Unione e Benevolenza," was identified by the Italian newspaper Corriere della Serra as "a material witness of the massacre who can prove Priebke was involved."

In an interview with the Argentine newspaper Clarin, Marsili refused to elaborate on his role in the prosecution, saying that he has received telephone threats.

Marsili told the paper he was at the massacre. "I was 200 yards away, disguised as a priest, and saw the Germans unload their prisoners and take them into the Ardeatine Caves," he said. "They were pushing them inside five at the time, and then I heard shots."

Marsili refused to say whether he saw Priebke at the site of the massacre.

"That is something I will tell prosecutor Antonino Intelisano if he calls me to testify in Rome," he said. □

(JTA correspondent Sergio Kiernan in Buenos Aires contributed to this report.)