



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A new survey found that 79 percent of American Jews support the Israeli-Arab peace process. The figure reflects an increase in support since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. [Page 1]

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel's Board of Governors approved a plan to launch an Israeli campaign to raise about \$40 million within five years. The plan is part of an effort by Agency Chairman Avraham Burg to reform the financially strapped agency.

■ U.S. Reps. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) and Peter King (R-N.Y.) asked Secretary of State Warren Christopher to revoke the passport of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who recently met with leaders in Iraq, Iran and Libya.

■ U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) announced that the Senate Banking Committee would launch an inquiry into the status of assets deposited by European Jews into Swiss banks during World War II.

■ Five homes in an affluent New York City suburb were spray-painted with anti-Semitic graffiti. The police commissioner of Mamaroneck, N.Y., said it appeared that one person was responsible for the attack.

■ A new Jewish school, which 600 Hungarian Jewish children will attend, was inaugurated in Budapest. The school, funded with a \$4.5 million grant from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, is the first to be privately built in Hungary since World War II.

■ Israel's Labor Party won a key parliamentary vote on Jerusalem, scrapping right-wing legislation that would have made any future change to the city's status almost impossible. [Page 2]

■ An alleged terrorist flying in a glider was killed in an explosion north of the southern Lebanon security zone. [Page 4]

■ An earthquake measuring 5.4 on the Richter scale — with an epicenter about 75 miles south of Eilat — shook areas as far north as central Israel. [Page 2]

## Jewish support for peace process rises in aftermath of assassination

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — American Jewish support for the Israeli-Arab peace process has increased 11 percentage points in the wake of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, according to a new survey released by the American Jewish Committee.

The survey found that 79 percent of the respondents support the "Israeli government's current handling of the peace negotiations with the Arabs."

That figure is up from 68 percent from a similar survey released in September, but is still lower than the 84 percent support found immediately after the 1993 signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

At the same time, an overwhelming number of those surveyed believe that criticism of the peace process is legitimate.

The survey comes as the American Jewish world continues to wrestle with the political and religious chasms that erupted over the peace process after the November assassination.

The survey is the fourth in a series by the AJCommittee begun in September 1993.

Most of the respondents to the newly released survey endorse U.S. economic aid to the Palestinians, when told that such aid is favored by the Israeli government.

But almost half of the respondents do not think that the Palestinians are interested "in a true and lasting peace with Israel" and more than three-fourths believe that the Palestine Liberation Organization "is not doing enough to control terrorist activity against Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian extremist groups."

Also, a resounding 85 percent said they have a favorable view of Labor Party Prime Minister Shimon Peres, while 37 percent report an unfavorable view of Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud opposition party.

At the same time, confusion about key Israeli political players surfaced as nearly half of the respondents — or 46 percent — said they were not sure whether the two men belonged to the same party.

### Overcoming lingering suspicions

For David Harris, the AJCommittee's executive director, the survey's overriding finding is that American Jews "support the peace process and have faith and trust in the democratically elected government" of Israel.

It also shows that "it will take time to overcome the lingering suspicions" Jews have of the PLO, which has been "Israel's implacable enemy for decades," Harris said.

The survey was undertaken to measure the impact of the assassination on attitudes toward the peace process as well as on levels of attachment to Israel, which, according to the results, have remained unchanged since September.

The survey was conducted by Market Facts, Inc., in telephone interviews with 1,013 self-identified Jews between Jan. 10 and Jan. 16, but not on Saturday.

The margin of error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Those opposed to the current peace process account for 13 percent, slightly down from 15 percent five months ago. The remaining respondents were not sure.

Support for U.S. aid to the Palestinians is up from the last survey, but the questions were phrased significantly differently.

In the current survey, respondents were told: "The government of Israel favors United States economic aid to the Palestinians as a way of re-enforcing the peace process. In light of this fact, do you support or oppose such aid to the Palestinians?"

Fully 59 percent said they support it, 36 percent oppose it and 4 percent were undecided.

In the previous survey, respondents simply were asked: "Should the United States at present provide economic aid to the Palestinians?" Sixty-

three percent said no, 30 percent said yes and 7 percent said they were unsure.

The United States has committed \$500 million to the Palestinians over five years.

Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America and a vocal critic of the current peace process, said he was disturbed by the "blatantly biased wording" of the aid question as well as some of the other survey questions.

"When the question was asked in an unbiased manner five months ago, 63 percent of American Jews opposed aid to the PLO," Klein said.

The current survey suggests that support for the peace process is much higher than the confidence in Israel's negotiating partners.

When asked whether the Palestinians and Syrians "are interested or are not interested in a true and lasting peace with Israel," the respondents were about evenly divided.

"American Jews recognize the basis of the peace process goes beyond intentions" of the Arabs to Israel's concrete interests, said Gary Rubin, executive director of Americans for Peace Now.

For Rubin, the recent rise in support for the peace process goes beyond the Rabin assassination.

He said it is also due to the conclusion arrived at since the last survey that the interim accord with the PLO, from the Israeli redeployment to Palestinian elections, "has been successful."

Meanwhile, the majority of respondents, 59 percent, said they do not agree that U.S. Jewish organizations have not done enough to "show support for the peace process."

Organizations here have been under fire from some Israeli political leaders and U.S. activists for not doing enough to mobilize support and for letting opponents take over the field.

Several survey questions revolved closely around the Rabin assassination.

For example, participants were asked to identify which groups contributed most to the "climate of hate that led to the [Rabin] killing."

Forty percent said "opponents of the peace process in Israel and the United States" contributed "heavily" to the climate of hate, while 85 percent said these opponents contributed "heavily" or "somewhat."

Fully 31 percent said "West Bank settlers" contributed "heavily" to this climate, while 24 percent said the same about "Orthodox rabbis in Israel and the United States."

Fourteen percent leveled the same criticism at "both sides of the political spectrum."

#### **'Climate of polarization and vituperation'**

Nonetheless, a resounding 90 percent of respondents said the killing "should not be used as a reason to stifle debate about the peace process" and 79 percent disagreed with the statement that criticism of the peace process is "no longer legitimate."

For Harris, the results show that respondents "don't absolve any group of some responsibility for the climate of polarization and vituperation," despite heavy finger-pointing at peace process opponents.

Based on the survey, he said, "everyone needs to be engaged in self-examination and stepping back from the brink."

The tragic event of Nov. 4 in Tel Aviv may have prompted more support for the peace process among American Jews, but it did not alter the level of personal attachment to Israel.

Twenty-five percent of those surveyed said they

feel "very close" to Israel, while 45 percent said they feel "fairly close."

Those numbers in September were 26 percent and 43 percent respectively.

Orthodox Jews, 7 percent of the sample, reported the highest level of attachment to Israel and the lowest level of support for the peace process at 40 percent.

Among Conservative Jews surveyed, 80 percent support the peace process, as do 85 percent of Reform Jews and 80 percent of those who called themselves "just Jewish."

The ZOA's Klein said he was disappointed not only by the "biased" language in the poll, but its omission of questions about "the PLO's failure to change its covenant, which calls for the destruction of Israel; the PLO's refusal to honor Israel's 17 requests for the extraditions of terrorists"; and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's speeches calling for "jihad," or holy war, and praising terrorists "as heroes and martyrs." □

#### **Likud loses bid to require two-thirds vote on Jerusalem**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Knesset has turned back an attempt by the Likud opposition to push through a bill that would make any future change in the status of Jerusalem virtually impossible.

The Likud — which has latched onto the Jerusalem issue as a central point of its campaign in Israel's upcoming national elections — has launched a barrage of charges that Prime Minister Shimon Peres would agree in negotiations with the Palestinians to divide the city if elected to the premiership this spring.

On Wednesday, in a 55-52 vote, with two abstentions, the Knesset rejected a bill that would make any change to the city's status conditional on the support of two-thirds of the 120-member Knesset.

Prior to the vote, Justice Minister David Liba'i said the proposal endangered the legislative process by giving a minority of 41 Knesset members the veto power over any future legislation affecting the status of Jerusalem.

Under current law, the issue would be decided by a simple majority of Knesset members.

In the current Knesset, the government has been able to muster only a razor-thin majority for its peace process initiatives.

The two-thirds majority Likud envisioned would have made it all but impossible for any Israeli government to make any change in the capital city's status.

Peres, who has repeatedly denied any plans to alter the status of Jerusalem in future negotiations with the Palestinians, called Wednesday for continued development and investment in the city. □

#### **Earthquake strikes near Eilat**

*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An earthquake registering 5.4 on the Richter scale shook parts of Israel this week.

No damages or injuries were reported as a result of the tremor, which struck early Wednesday morning.

The earthquake, whose epicenter was 75 miles south of Eilat, was felt as far north as the coastal city of Netanya.

Officials at Israel's Institute for Petroleum Research and Geophysics said the tremor was part of a series of aftershocks from a stronger earthquake that killed eight people in November.

That quake rocked Eilat and caused serious damage in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. □

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### Last of Chechen refugees prepare to leave for Israel

By Lev Krichevsky

PYATIGORSK, Russia (JTA) — Every week, some 30 to 50 Jews from Russia's Northern Caucasus region board Russian Airlines charter flights from an airport near here to fly to Israel.

In this region, between the Black and Caspian seas, where there were never any significant tensions between the Jewish and predominantly Muslim populations, Jews do not appear to be leaving because of fears of persecution.

"What makes more and more Jews in the region consider moving to Israel is economic instability, crime and the ongoing war in Chechnya," said Chaim Chesler, head of the Jewish Agency for Israel's delegation to the former Soviet Union.

Jews of the Northern Caucasus are leaving for Israel in a larger proportion than elsewhere in Russia, he added.

Since Russia sent troops in December 1994 to suppress brutally an independence bid in the breakaway republic of Chechnya, some 400 Chechen Jews have departed for Israel under the auspices of the Jewish Agency.

A Jewish Agency refugee camp located in this city near Chechnya recently closed its gates when the last of its occupants left for Israel.

By the end of February, when the processing of their emigration papers is completed, the last Jewish refugees from the Chechen capital of Grozny will have emigrated to Israel.

According to Chesler, about 40 Jews, most of them elderly, do not want to leave Chechnya.

"They want to stay where they spent most of their lives. However, if they want to go, the Jewish Agency will help them to move to Israel," Chesler said.

Among the passengers on last week's Russian Airlines flight to Israel were four members of the Davidov family who used to live in Grozny.

The Davidovs left Chechnya with their two sons in January 1995, shortly after the fighting broke out.

The family fled to Nalchik, a city in the neighboring republic of Kabardino-Balkaria.

"When leaving Chechnya, we were afraid of both Russian and Chechen soldiers," said Svetlana Davidov, 48, a former deputy director of a factory.

### 'An unhappy holiday'

Her husband, Boruch Davidov, a 54-year-old former crane operator, said he did not work for almost two years. "My life was like a holiday — but not a happy one," he said.

The Davidovs' older son, 22-year-old Pavel, was a student of history at the University of Grozny when the war began. He said both Russian and Chechen authorities had sought to draft him.

Sergei Davidov, 14, the younger son, said he did not want to leave his home in Grozny. He was upset that he was leaving behind his closest friend, a 14-year-old Chechen boy. As he was about to board the flight to Tel Aviv, Sergei said he wished his friend could go with him.

By going to Israel, Boruch and Svetlana Davidov said, they are hoping to secure a better future for their children.

"I am very hopeful that in Israel, our children will have better lives than we had in Chechnya," said Svetlana Davidov.

"I'm looking forward to seeing a clear sky above my head there in Israel," her husband said.

The Davidovs were able to go to Nalchik when they fled Grozny because they had relatives there.

Not every Jewish family in Chechnya was fortunate to have relatives living outside the battle-scarred region.

Vladimir Hudaynatov, a 24-year-old graduate of the Grozny Institute of Oil, left Chechnya only three weeks ago. For more than a year, his family struggled to survive in the besieged Chechen capital.

The apartment the Hudaynatovs lived in was damaged because of an air strike by the Russian forces two weeks after the hostilities broke out. The basement in their apartment building was turned into an air-raid shelter, and they had to seek safety there at least four times a week.

As the war continued, living conditions in Chechnya grew increasingly harsh. With a monthly budget of about \$100, the family could hardly make ends meet.

"Even under such conditions my parents believed the war would end soon," Hudaynatov said.

But for all their attempts to cling to the only life they knew, Vladimir's parents finally gave up and left with their son.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Jewish population of the Northern Caucasus has decreased by more than half.

According to Svetlana Danilova, a Jewish community leader in Nalchik, the city of Pyatigorsk now has a Jewish population of 5,000; Nalchik, 4,500; Derbent and Makhachkala, both in the nearby republic of Dagestan, 3,500 and 300, respectively.

For the average Jewish family in the region, emigration generally starts with the children — particularly those of draft age — leaving for Israel.

Dmitri Styopin, 22, and his younger brother Konstantin, 19, of Nevinnomyssk, located some 200 miles northwest of Grozny, were among those who left for Israel last week. Their parents are planning to join them this summer, after a third brother, 17-year-old Mark, finishes high school.

"I don't know much about Israel," said Riva Styopin, the boys' mother. "However, I see it as a safer place for my sons to live."

A significant portion of Jewish life in the region is organized under the auspices of the Jewish Agency, which has its headquarters in Pyatigorsk and maintains local offices in Nalchik, Kislovodsk and Vladikavkaz.

Along with providing prospective emigres to Israel with assistance with their documents, the offices offer Hebrew courses to help the olim prepare for life in Israel.

Yarek Wajntraub, head of the Jewish Agency's office in the Northern Caucasus, believes that Jewish emigration from the area is an irreversible process. "Only older people are likely to be here soon," he said.

Some local Jewish businessmen seem to disagree. A Jewish day school for 200 children was opened recently in Pyatigorsk with the help of a few local donors. □

### Japanese dance hora in kimonos

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Some 1,500 Japanese pilgrims sang and danced their way through Jerusalem's streets this week as part of their visit to commemorate the capital's 3,000-year anniversary.

Members of the pro-Israel Makuya sect, which was formed in the aftermath of World War II, are Christians who believe in the Hebrew Bible.

The pilgrims, some dressed in traditional kimonos, held a jubilant procession through downtown Jerusalem.

They converged on Safra Square, outside the city hall, where they danced the traditional hora — to the strains of "Hava Nagila." □

**Peres cancels plan to expand Jewish West Bank settlements***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres has decided against building hundreds of new homes in the West Bank for fervently Orthodox Jews.

Housing Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer had proposed building apartments in the new settlement of Kiryat Sefer.

The settlement is located just outside Israel's pre-1967 boundaries.

But the prime minister's spokeswoman, Aliza Goren, said Peres had called for a suspension of the construction and asked planners to look for another site within Israel for the new housing.

After his decision, a meeting planned for this week of the ministerial committee that oversees building in the territories was canceled.

The committee had been scheduled to review a proposal calling for the construction of some 6,300 new homes in the existing settlements of Ma'aleh Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, Betar, Alfei Menashe and Har Adar as well as in Kiryat Sefer.

The decision to cancel the committee meeting was sharply criticized by local leaders in settlements surrounding Jerusalem, where some of the building was planned.

Ben-Eliezer was reportedly concerned that any decision to stop the construction would create a backlash among settlers in the country's upcoming national elections.

Last week, Ben-Eliezer came under fire from several Cabinet colleagues for his plan to build thousands of apartments in West Bank Jewish communities near Jerusalem.

Meretz ministers Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Sarid, along with Labor Party Minister Yossi Beilin, attacked Ben-Eliezer's construction plans in the territories.

The proposal has also drawn angry reactions from Palestinians, who claimed that the new construction would violate the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. □

**Gliding terrorist explodes in flight over southern Lebanon***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A man in a glider that exploded over southern Lebanon this week had planned a terrorist attack on an Israeli target, according to Israeli security officials.

The head of the Israel Defense Force's northern command, Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine, said the terrorist was likely operating for Hezbollah.

The charge was denied by officials of the militant Islamic fundamentalist movement.

The glider was sighted Tuesday afternoon some five miles north of the Israeli border town of Kiryat Shmona.

Security forces in the southern Lebanon security zone were put on alert after the sighting.

But the terrorist, who was flying slowly in a motorized glider, blew up north of the zone, apparently due to a mishap.

IDF officials said that if the terrorist had entered the zone, he most likely would have been shot down.

Levine told Israel Radio that lessons had been learned from what has become known as "the night of the gliders."

On that night in 1987, six Israeli soldiers were killed by a Palestinian guerrilla who had crossed from Lebanon into Israel on a hang glider. □

**Researcher: Health officials knew of missing Yemenites***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — According to a letter submitted before a state commission of inquiry into the disappearance of Yemenite children in the 1950s, health officials were aware of instances in which some of the children did not return to their parents after receiving medical treatment.

The letter, dated April 1950, was uncovered in the archives of the Jewish Agency for Israel and submitted as evidence by a university researcher who appeared this week before the commission in Jerusalem.

The letter was signed by Dr. M. Lichtig, the head of the hospitals department in the Health Ministry and was distributed to state hospitals at the time.

"There have been instances in which children were released from hospital and did not return to their parents. Apparently, they were found by people seeking to adopt," the letter said.

"The bereaved parents searched for their children, and there is no need to explain and stress that we must make every effort to ensure that such incidents do not repeat themselves."

In presenting the letter before the panel, Dr. Dov Levitan of Bar-Ilan University said that given the senior level of the letter's author, other high-ranking officials, such as the health minister, must have been aware of the situation.

But just the same, Levitan said he did not think that hundreds of Yemenite children were involved — as the Yemenite community has alleged. He said he thought that there were only a few cases.

In his first appearance before the panel two weeks ago, Levitan claimed that in 1986, then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres and other government officials had rejected an appeal to establish a state commission of inquiry into the disappearance of the Yemenite children.

Levitan also said he had been advised by a number of "sources close to the current government" to stick to the academic aspects of the case and not to mention any political figures by name.

During a closed-door session Sunday, Levitan also presented papers documenting what he said were efforts in the 1960s by the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, to locate children who may have been smuggled out of the country for adoption.

Levitan said the Mossad investigation was superficial, but added that his own inquiry into the allegations indicated that no children had been smuggled abroad.

"Children were not sold and not smuggled," he said. "That is a myth." □

**Arrow missile test successful***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel conducted this week what it described as a successful test launch of a missile intended to destroy incoming rockets.

The test of the Arrow 2 anti-missile missile was carried out Tuesday off the coast of Israel, in the presence of Israeli and American experts overseeing the project.

As intended by project engineers, the missile destroyed itself a minute after its successful launch.

"The preliminary results of the test indicate that all systems of the missile operated well," Israel's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The two-stage, solid-fuel missile system, which the United States is helping fund, is expected to be operational in 1997. □