



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The Palestine National Council voted overwhelmingly to scrap sections of its charter calling for Israel's destruction.** The move was hailed by Israeli, U.S. and Jewish organizational officials. [Page 1]

■ **President Clinton signed anti-terrorism legislation into law at a somber yet elaborate ceremony on the White House's South Lawn.** Among the 250 people in attendance were family members of Americans killed by Islamic terrorists.

■ **President Clinton pledged \$1 million for humanitarian assistance to Lebanon at a meeting with Lebanese President Elias Hrawi in Washington.** The pledge came as Israeli bombs continued to land in Lebanon and Katyusha rockets continued to slam into northern Israel.

■ **The U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva overwhelmingly adopted a resolution denouncing Israel's attacks in southern Lebanon.** The United States was the only country to vote against the statement, which passed with 50 votes and two abstentions by the 53-member forum.

■ **President Clinton threw his support behind the World Jewish Congress' efforts to recover assets of Holocaust victims that are being held by Swiss banks.** WJC President Edgar Bronfman met with Clinton after Senate Banking Committee hearings investigating what Jewish officials believe are billions of dollars of Jewish assets lost after World War II.

■ **A small bomb exploded outside the Interior Ministry offices in eastern Jerusalem in what police believed was a terrorist action,** Israel Radio reported. The blast outside the offices, which were closed for Israel's Independence Day, caused no injuries.

■ **A Jewish cultural center was looted in Smolensk, a city about 220 miles southwest of Moscow.** In addition, a swastika and the words "beat the kikes" were painted on the center's front door.

■ **Swastikas were spray-painted on a dozen tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Budapest.**

PNC decision to amend charter hailed by U.S., Jewish officials

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. and Jewish officials are giving a hearty thumbs up to the Palestine National Council's decision this week to amend the portions of its charter calling for the destruction of Israel.

Their enthusiasm echoed that of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who hailed the vote, saying that "maybe ideologically it is the most important change in the last 100 years."

During a closed-door session in Gaza on Wednesday night — as Israel concluded its 48th Independence Day celebrations — the PNC brought to an end worldwide uncertainty about the outcome of the critical vote.

Knowing that the future of the peace process was at stake, Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat had strongly urged the so-called Palestinian parliament in exile to fulfill the obligation to change the covenant, as called for under the peace accords with Israel.

In the end, council members overwhelmingly supported Arafat's appeal with a vote of 504 in favor, 54 against and 14 abstentions.

The tally, taken during a closed-door session in the Gaza Strip, exceeded the two-thirds majority of the 669 PNC members needed to change the 1964 covenant.

In Washington, some Jewish officials learned of the news directly from President Clinton.

"They did it," Clinton told American Jewish leaders as he finished signing anti-terrorism legislation into law at the White House on Wednesday afternoon.

Flashing the thumbs-up sign to a small group of Jewish organizational leaders attending the signing ceremony, Clinton shared a cable on the decision that had just been handed to him by his national security adviser, Anthony Lake.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said this "incredible achievement is another milestone in the peace process."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, responded, "Good news. We waited three years to have Arafat fulfill his promise to Rabin and he did."

Foxman said that now was the time for the Palestinians to translate their acceptance of Israel from "words into deeds" and stop terrorism.

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who has closely monitored the Palestine Liberation Organization's actions since the signing of its accords with Israel, said, "I am delighted to see that this has been done."

'A historic milestone'

A co-chairman of the Peace Accord Monitoring Group in Congress as well as an original sponsor of legislation that linked PLO compliance to receiving U.S. assistance, Specter called the PNC action a "first step" and said Congress would continue to watch the PLO closely on other issues, such as its war against terrorism.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher, arriving back in Israel amid his shuttle diplomacy in the region, called the vote "a historic milestone on the road to reconciliation and peace between the people of Israel and the Palestinians."

"They did what they said they would do," Christopher told reporters as he was trying to conclude a cease-fire and a longer-term settlement in Lebanon. "I think this will give a lot of forward movement" to the peace process, he said.

The PNC vote came amid sharp Palestinian criticisms of Israel for its current military actions in Lebanon, as well as long-standing protests against Israel's prolonged closure of the West Bank and Gaza, imposed after the first of four Hamas suicide bombings against Israel in late February and early March.

Despite the criticisms of Israeli actions, Arafat this week had prodded the PNC to amend the charter, warning them that failure to do so could jeopardize the entire peace process. "Make up your minds," he said to recalcitrant PNC members Tuesday. "Are we going to have a Palestinian

dream or not? Are we going to have a Palestinian state or not?"

The vote came in the wake of repeated Israeli warnings that failure to amend the covenant would bring the peace process to a halt.

Arafat reportedly appointed 98 people to the PNC on Tuesday, prompting accusations from hardline opponents that he was stacking the vote in his favor.

Israel had allowed some of the most extreme Palestinian terrorists into Gaza to take part in the session, but it was not clear who exactly took part in the vote.

Even those council members who opposed amending the charter were quoted as saying that Arafat's strong lobby within the council had predetermined the results.

The council's vote was also crucial for Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who faces next month's national elections.

A vote against amending the charter would have undermined Peres' position, providing ammunition to his right-wing opponents that the Palestinian peace track was a failure.

During its closed-door session, the PNC reportedly voted on a written text that said: "The Palestine National Council decides to amend the Palestinian National Charter by canceling clauses which contradict the letters exchanged between the PLO and the Israeli government."

Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had exchanged letters of mutual recognition as part of the 1993 peace accord.

In its decision, the PNC did not adopt a new covenant, but appointed a legal committee to draw one up.

The draft of a new covenant is not expected to be brought before the PNC prior to the May 29 Israeli elections, Israel Radio reported. The draft is expected to be based upon a PNC resolution made in 1988 in Algiers, declaring an independent Palestinian state.

The council vote came amid recent reports that implementation of the interim-phase accord, on hold since the suicide bombings, would resume, and that preparations were under way for the Israeli troop redeployment from parts of Hebron.

Under the agreement, Israeli troops will pull out of Arab neighborhoods, but remain stationed in other sites in the city and around the Jewish enclave in the center of the town, home to some 450 Jewish settlers. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Congressmen urge extradition of man behind 1985 hijacking

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Members of Congress are calling on both Yasser Arafat and Israeli authorities to arrest and extradite to the United States the mastermind of the 1985 Achille Lauro hijacking.

Mohammed Abbas, known as Abul Abbas, was in Gaza this week as the Palestine National Council voted to amend its charter.

Israel had allowed Abbas and other known terrorists safe passage to Gaza for the PNC meeting to enable the Palestinians to change parts of the charter calling for the destruction of Israel.

The PNC voted 504-54 on Wednesday to amend portions of its charter calling for the destruction of Israel. Palestinian officials said they would write a new covenant within six months.

An Italian court convicted Abbas in absentia of the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American Jew aboard the cruise ship.

"The killing of American citizens by known

terrorists cannot go unpunished," Rep. Mike Forbes (R-N.Y.) said at a Manhattan news conference Tuesday. "Abul Abbas has escaped prosecution long enough and now must be brought to justice."

Forbes, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), New York state Assemblyman Dov Hikind (D-Brooklyn) and the Zionist Organization of America joined in calling on the Clinton administration to work with Israeli authorities to apprehend Abbas and bring him to trial in the United States.

"Israel has a moral obligation to either prosecute Abbas or surrender him to another nation so that he may be brought to justice, and the United States certainly must send the message that the hijacking and killing of American citizens will not go unpunished," Hikind said.

After the hijacking, the United States issued a warrant and offered a \$250,000 bounty for Abbas' arrest. The Justice Department lifted the warrant in 1988 after his conviction in Italian court, saying that it was not "critically important" to have a conviction in the United States.

A spokesman at the Justice Department said this week that the United States would not request Abbas' extradition.

In Gaza this week, Abbas told the Washington Post that Klinghoffer "was not killed because he was an American or Jew. He was killed because he made a lot of fuss."

Abbas said, however, the death was "a mistake, and we do not support it."

Klinghoffer's murder aboard the Achille Lauro set off a worldwide uproar that culminated with U.S. fighters forcing an Egyptian plane carrying Abbas to land in Italy. The Italian government, however, prevented U.S. military personnel from capturing Abbas, ignored a U.S. extradition request and sent him to safety in Yugoslavia. □

Clinton hears Jewish concerns about Russian Communist gains

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — President Clinton sent a clear message that he did not trust the Communists when he met with Jewish leaders last week during a visit here.

"Moreover, President Clinton clearly wanted [the Communists] to know it," said Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, who also serves as a member of the executive of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Clinton, on a three-day visit to Russia to attend a nuclear summit, used the trip to make a thinly veiled attempt to bolster the prospects of President Boris Yeltsin, who is running neck and neck in the polls with Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, before the country's June presidential vote.

While in Moscow, Clinton held a brief meeting with Jewish leaders, who voiced their fears for the future should Zyuganov win the election.

Clinton said he was unable to predict whether conditions for the Jewish community would worsen under a Zyuganov presidency, according to those at the meeting.

Attending the session at the Moscow Radisson along with Goldschmidt were Irina Scherban of the Va'ad, a Jewish umbrella group; Russian Chief Rabbi Adolph Shayevich; Julie Brooks of the National Conference for Soviet Jewry, who organized the meeting; and anti-fascist activist Alla Gerber.

During the meeting, Clinton showed an interest in the recent development of the Russian Jewish community.

Zinoviy Kogan, leader of the Hineini Moscow Reform Jewish Congregation, presented Clinton with a copy of the Labor of the Soul prayer book, the first Reform collection of prayers ever printed in Russia. □

Nation of Islam leader claims his father had Jewish lineage

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Louis Farrakhan suspects that his father may have been Jewish.

At least that's what he tells Henry Louis Gates Jr. in the current issue of *The New Yorker* magazine.

Speaking of his father's white Portuguese parents, the Nation of Islam leader said, "I'm going to tell you something. You really want to know what I think? I think they were members of the Jewish community."

He added, "I believe that in my blood, and not in a bad way. Because when I was a little boy I used to love listening to the Jewish cantors in Boston. They had a program, and every week I would listen. I was struck by the cantor, and I've always loved the way they sing or recite the Torah."

Gates, citing an academic source, says Farrakhan's assertion about his lineage is "highly probable" given that nearly all people of Iberian descent in Jamaica and Barbados are of Sephardi Jewish ancestry.

Farrakhan was born in 1933, the son of Mae Clark, who was from Barbados. He was named Gene after his father, a light-skinned man with straight hair from Jamaica. His father, Gates writes, was a philanderer whom the family rarely saw.

"If in my lineage there are Jews, I would hope that in the end, before my life is over, I not only will have rendered a service to my own beloved community of black people but will also have rendered a service to the Jewish community," Farrakhan was quoted as saying.

In the interview with Gates, which reportedly lasted nine hours, the Nation of Islam leader also made reference to "wise Jews who plan evil," the international conspiracy of Jewish bankers and overwhelming Jewish complicity in the slave trade.

'Bizarre and ludicrous'

Jewish groups expressed outrage over Farrakhan's latest public statements.

"Farrakhan's effort to make it appear that he is merely criticizing the 'evil' he finds in his own 'Jewish' antecedents is a reflection of the bizarre and ludicrous nature of his entire behavior towards Jews," Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, a planned protest against the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith fizzled last week when Washington, D.C., police denied former Nation of Islam spokesman Khalid Abdul Muhammad entrance to the B'nai B'rith building.

Flanked by four bodyguards in black fatigues, Muhammad took a moment to rail against the ADL and the Jewish community before he departed the scene.

"This is a criminal organization and a criminal enterprise that has lied and spied on black leaders and black organizations," said Muhammad, who was dismissed as Farrakhan's spokesman in 1994 in the wake of a national controversy surrounding a vehemently anti-Semitic speech he delivered at Kean College.

Muhammad called the ADL and its parent organization, B'nai B'rith, one of the "main arteries of improper propaganda and nefarious activity" that has greatly influenced the larger American Jewish community.

In brief remarks to reporters, Muhammad said the black man and black woman "are the chosen people of God and we want to put an end to this lie of the so-called Jews, these people who crawled out of the caves and hills of Europe just a few years ago claiming our birthright."

Standing next to Muhammad was Malik Zulu

Shabazz, the leader of the Washington-based Unity Nation who gained notoriety for leading anti-Semitic chants at Howard University student rallies in 1994.

Shabazz said the ADL is an "oppressive" organization that "comes from a people that are by nature evil and wicked."

Tommy Baer, international president of B'nai B'rith, called the protesters "messengers of hate" who "are harming relations between blacks and Jews, and between blacks and whites."

"We would prefer that there be serious dialogue between responsible Jewish and black leaders who oppose this hateful rhetoric to improve relations and discuss important issues," Baer said in a statement.

Muhammad said that by locking their doors, B'nai B'rith and the ADL showed that they are "afraid to deal with us head on."

He added, "It would be better to just deal with me because there could be an occasion where we would return with an army."

After the abortive protest, another rally against the ADL planned by Muhammad and Shabazz fell flat when officials at Howard University announced that they would not be allowed onto the campus.

The two have been barred from the historically black university since 1994. □

Arab Americans stage protests against Israel's raids in Lebanon

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Amid chants of "Israel out of Lebanon" and "We vote, too," more than 1,000 Arab Americans gathered this week at the White House to protest Israel's continuing raids in Lebanon.

Protesters unfurled banners Tuesday across the street from the White House. The signs spanned the gamut of Arab American opinion on the Israeli operation.

"Peace Not Bombs," one read.

"Don't Cut Medicare; Cut Aid to Israel," another said.

"Israel the hate state," read another.

Planners handed out signs with a graphic photo of a rescue worker carrying a Lebanese infant from the U.N. compound after the Israeli bombing last week.

The photo was displayed side by side with the infamous photo of a firefighter carrying an infant from the Murrah Federal Building after the Oklahoma bombing a year ago.

The well-organized protest included Arab Americans from New York, Cleveland and Michigan.

Ramzi Saab traveled to Washington from Dearborn, Mich., to join in the second protest at the White House in three days.

"We're here to deliver a message to the administration: Exert your influence to stop Israeli attacks," he said. Saab, an employment counselor for the Michigan government, stood under a banner likening Peres to Hitler.

"Peres and Hitler are the same. The only difference is the name," the banner read.

"If you kill innocent people, then you are a terrorist," Saab said.

"Hitler killed innocent Jews and Peres is killing innocents in Lebanon."

Organizers from the Arab American Institute estimated that about 1,500 protesters attended the Lafayette Park rally.

Arab American members of Congress addressed the protesters later in the day.

On Sunday, scores of activists gathered to protest the Israeli operation. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Chabad project marks decade of saving 'Chernobyl children'***By Michele Chabin*

LOD, Israel (JTA) — Many tears were shed when Lena Maslov was reunited this week at Ben-Gurion Airport with her children, 11-year-old Yula and 10-year-old Igor.

Although the vast majority of Russian children come to Israel with their families, Yula and Igor were sent ahead more than a year ago to receive medical treatment.

Natives of Gomel, the city with the highest rate of thyroid cancer in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the children were evacuated to Israel by the Children of Chernobyl project.

A decade after the reactor released at least 100 times more radiation than the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, the Chabad organization, which runs the Children of Chernobyl program, marked this week's somber anniversary by bringing another 20 children to Israel.

While those still living in the radiation-affected areas had little to celebrate this week, the scene at the airport was anything but downbeat.

As the newcomers entered the arrivals area, they were greeted by 30 "old-timers" — Russian children evacuated by Chabad in recent years who now reside at Kfar Chabad, not far from the airport.

As the waiting children sang Israeli songs, Lena Maslov fiercely hugged her two children, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I have not seen them for so long, I'm truly overwhelmed," she said through a Russian translator.

Her visit, to see her children and to learn more about Israel, was sponsored by Chabad.

This week's evacuation — the 23rd since Chabad began its program in 1990 — brought the number of Children of Chernobyl evacuees to 1,300.

At a cost of nearly \$15,000 per year, Chabad identifies children at risk in the former Soviet Union, flies them to Israel and houses them in dormitories at Kfar Chabad.

At least 10 percent were Jewish

There, the children are examined for signs of radiation poisoning and receive state-of-the-art medical care.

About 40 percent of those evacuated suffer from some degree of thyroid disease, a possible precursor to thyroid cancer.

The children, based at Kfar Chabad until their parents make aliyah, also receive their education at Chabad schools.

Although the children themselves tend to be secular, the environment is religious in nature.

Once their parents make aliyah, usually within two or three years, the children leave the program and go to local, usually non-religious schools.

In addition to the 1,300 Chabad evacuees, more than 150,000 Jews from the contaminated areas have immigrated to Israel in recent years, and tens of thousands have moved to the United States and other Western countries.

While thousands of the youngest victims have come with their families, thousands more remain behind because their parents cannot or will not leave the former Soviet Union.

At least 10 percent of the nearly 5 million people touched by Chernobyl's radioactive cloud were Jews.

When a nuclear accident at the Chernobyl plant occurred April 26, 1986, a radioactive cloud ascended

above western Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The area, once referred to as the Jewish Pale of Settlement, had been an enormous ghetto where 5 million Jews were forced to live from the late 1700s to the early 1900s.

At the time of the reactor meltdown, an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 Jews still resided in the region.

According to research studies, the 4.9 million victims of Chernobyl have a higher-than-average risk of developing radiation-linked illnesses.

Because the Chernobyl accident was unprecedented, and because radiation illnesses can take decades to develop, Chernobyl's legacy is still uncertain.

There are also indications that Jews appear to be more susceptible to the damaging effects of radiation than non-Jews.

A report recently published by the U.S. National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements found that the rate of radiation-induced thyroid cancer was three times higher in Ashkenazi Jews and nine times higher in Jews of North African descent than it was in the general population.

What is certain, says Jay Litvin, the organization's medical liaison, "is that radiation poisoning is a potential time bomb.

"When they arrive, many of the children have thyroid problems and weakened immune systems.

"Within a few months of leaving the contaminated areas, their health begins to improve. Just eating non-contaminated food, breathing non-contaminated air makes a difference."

On average, childhood thyroid cancer in the affected areas has jumped 200- to 300-fold, though the incidence is still extremely low because thyroid cancer is extremely rare. There also appears to be a greater risk of leukemia.

In the former Soviet Union, medical studies have shown a higher rate of birth defects, causing many couples to avoid having children.

With thousands of Jewish children still living in places such as Gomel and Kiev, where contaminants remain in the food chain, Chabad officials say they will continue their work as long as funds can be raised.

More than 80 percent of the cost of maintaining the children comes from private donations.

Litvin says Chabad has also been sympathetic to the needs of non-Jewish children.

"We would like to help every affected child, but we are a Jewish organization and our first responsibility is to help Jewish children," he said.

"About a year ago, we began sending food and medicine to hospitals in the contaminated areas, and these supplies help both Jews and non-Jews."

Chief rabbi sheds tears of joy

Of all the people who had come to welcome the newly arrived children, perhaps the most affected was Yisrael Meir Lau, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel.

Lau, a child Holocaust survivor who lost almost every person dear to him in the Shoah, could barely contain tears of joy as he watched Lena Maslov embrace her children.

Referring to the fact that the children arrived Tuesday, when Israel held Memorial Day ceremonies to honor its fallen soldiers, Lau said, "I've come just now from the national memorial at Har Herzl, where 18,200 fallen soldiers were honored. We paid tribute to the past, to the sons and daughters who sacrificed themselves to give us a chance to live in Eretz Yisrael.

"Now, watching these children, I see the fruit that will promise us the future. With God's help, the future of the entire Jewish family is in our hands." □