



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The Clinton administration agreed to back Israeli retaliation against Hezbollah attacks on Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. The understanding was part of a side letter that followed last week's cease-fire agreement. [Page 2]

■ The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a measure calling on the Justice Department to seek the extradition of Abul Abbas, the mastermind of the 1986 Achille Lauro hijacking who recently entered Gaza for the Palestine National Council meeting. Justice Department officials say his extradition will not be requested.

■ The Jewish Agency sent a letter of protest to the Russian government after a seminar it was conducting in Pyatigorsk was halted. The disruption of the meeting follows the suspension of the agency's accreditation in early April by Russian authorities. [Page 3]

■ The State Department's annual report on terrorism lists Syria among the state sponsors of terrorism. Members of Congress criticized the Clinton administration for agreeing to cooperate with Syria on monitoring Hezbollah activities. [Page 4]

■ Argentina and Paraguay denied reports that a squad of Hezbollah suicide bombers were found in a town along the two countries' border.

■ The federal budget deal reached last week hurts Jewish federation-supported programs in housing and employment and training, according to the Council of Jewish Federations. The deal covers discretionary programs that get annual appropriations, but does not affect entitlement programs such as Medicare or Medicaid, upon which community hospitals and nursing homes depend heavily.

■ A former Nazi concentration camp guard was freed from a lifelong prison sentence because she is ill. [Page 4]

Elections in Israel, U.S. occupy center stage at AIPAC conference

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Farley Weiss sat in his seat at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference and cringed when President Clinton spoke glowingly of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

"His clear endorsement of Peres was outrageous," said Weiss, a pro-Likud activist from Phoenix. "Clinton should not be so involved in internal Israeli politics."

Weiss clearly had a minority view of the president's speech.

Taking the podium after the Israeli prime minister Sunday night, Clinton received thunderous applause when he addressed the more than 2,000 delegates gathered for the pro-Israel lobby's annual conference.

Amid chants of "four more years," AIPAC delegates cheered the two leaders as they were honored in a "Salute to the Peacemakers" ceremony.

As AIPAC delegates from across the country gathered here this week for a three-day conference, the upcoming elections in Israel and the United States took center stage.

Predictions that the policy conference would be held in the midst of an Israeli military assault fizzled with last Friday's cease-fire agreement in Lebanon and Israel.

With no other urgent issues topping the pro-Israel communal agenda, most eyes here turned to the ballot box.

"Elections are more than just a backdrop," said Morris Amitay, a former AIPAC official and longtime activist who now serves as treasurer of the pro-Israel political action committee Washington PAC.

"This year politics are at the forefront," he said.

A senior AIPAC official agreed.

"The timing and proximity of the conference to the elections is on everybody's mind," said the official, who asked not be named.

Indeed, many of the speakers tailored their remarks with the election campaigns in Israel and the United States in mind.

White House officials openly acknowledged that Clinton used the occasion to rally behind Peres.

Israeli voters go to the polls in less than one month. Labor leader Peres is facing Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu in a closely contested race.

During his Sunday speech, which was peppered with praise for Peres, Clinton called the Israeli leader "our full partner for peace and security."

Mutual admiration society

For his part, Peres returned the effusive praise, thanking Clinton for being "a true friend of the State and people of Israel" who "embraced a whole nation when we were in pain."

The mutual admiration was widely noted here.

"It's as if each one is running a campaign for the other," said Rosalie Zalis, a senior policy adviser to California Gov. Pete Wilson. "It's a tango that works for both of them."

The session irked Likud supporters who criticized AIPAC for not inviting Netanyahu.

"AIPAC is inserting itself into the pre-Israeli election by providing Shimon Peres a podium not available to Likud and [Netanyahu] at this critical time," said Yoram Ettinger, who served as congressional liaison at the Israeli Embassy during the government of Yitzhak Shamir and has continued to lobby for Likud policies on Capitol Hill during the Labor government.

AIPAC officials responded to the criticism, saying that the group's policy is to invite the sitting prime minister and not to expand the podium to the Israeli opposition.

Although Peres received a warm welcome from the AIPAC delegates, sessions throughout the conference revealed a clear split in loyalty among American Jews to Israeli political factions.

On the domestic political front, Clinton used the occasion to try to solidify the Jewish voting bloc, a key to his re-election strategy.

Even Republican activists said Clinton shined in the Jewish spotlight. "The president knows that this is his constituency. He has been a great

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president for the Jewish community," Zalis said, adding that "this year's conference is the most political in recent memory."

The congressional elections in November were clearly on the mind of AIPAC staff members as they prepared delegates for a day of Capitol Hill lobbying on issues such as foreign aid and sanctions against Iran.

"There's going to be an awful lot of new faces on Capitol Hill next year," an AIPAC official said, referring to the potential for a record turnover in Congress. "We can't have complacency in our community."

Throughout the conference, Democrats and Republicans took the podium, some more partisan in their remarks than others.

Rep. Dick Armey (R-Texas), the House majority leader, delivered a sharply partisan speech at a luncheon session in which he vowed to use his power as majority leader to protect Israel's interests.

Lynn Lyss, former chairwoman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said she was "surprised and somewhat dismayed" by the partisan tone of Armey's speech. "AIPAC is not the place to split along partisan lines," she said.

Meanwhile, the AIPAC executive committee got so bogged down in debate over a resolution concerning the Palestine National Council's decision to amend its covenant that time ran out before the policy-making body could adopt other positions.

In the end, the executive committee adopted a resolution praising the PNC's vote as an "important and positive step."

For all the partisan sniping in the halls and sessions of the conference, most AIPAC delegates sought to carry out the lobby's mission.

Taking up AIPAC President Melvin Dow's call for "productive diversity" within the organization, Weiss of Phoenix said, "I'm here to support AIPAC."

"This year we disagree on policy and we disagree on substance and we disagree on strategy," he said, "but I'm here to change it from within." □

Peres ends visit bolstered by new security guarantees

By Lisa Hostein and Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As a final gesture of goodwill as Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres concluded his visit here, President Clinton agreed to back Israeli attacks against Hezbollah gunmen if Israeli soldiers come under attack in the security zone in southern Lebanon.

Letters received from U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher further clarified last week's cease-fire agreement in Lebanon.

The letters recognize Israel's right to strike back against attacks on its forces in the southern Lebanon security zone.

"The U.S. understands that if Hezbollah or any other organization" launches attacks "on Israeli forces in Lebanon," Israel retains the right to retaliate.

The original agreement only prevented attacks on civilians in Israel and Lebanon.

Peres read the letter to reporters after meeting Tuesday afternoon with Clinton and Christopher.

Another side agreement further restricts Hezbollah from using civilian areas to store or make weapons for attacks on Israel. Last week's cease-fire agreement only banned the launching of attacks from civilian areas.

At a White House meeting Tuesday, Peres and Clinton also launched a committee to craft the first formal U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation agreement.

One working group of the steering committee will

formalize security and defense cooperation between the United States and Israel.

Another working group will discuss broad policy matters affecting the strategic cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem.

In a joint statement released after their White House meeting, Peres and Clinton reiterated the United States' "unshakable" commitment to Israel's security and their commitment to the peace process.

They also "welcomed the decision by the Palestinian National Council to cancel all the provisions of the Palestinian National Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist." And they reiterated their goal to "eliminate discrimination against Israel in all international organizations, including the United Nations."

Peres and Clinton signed a terrorism accord Tuesday at the White House.

The measure will:

- expand the sharing of intelligence;
- exchange counterterrorism experts;
- provide for the extradition of known terrorists;
- enable the sharing of technology to combat terrorism; and

- establish a joint committee on counterterrorism.

Clinton hailed the agreement as a way to "strengthen our partnership to stop the enemies of peace."

After the signing ceremony, Clinton asked Peres to teach him how to write his name in Hebrew.

Peres responded, "It's easy." The Israeli prime minister then took out a piece of paper and wrote "Bill" in Hebrew. Clinton copied it just below.

Peres was scheduled to meet Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat before leaving Washington on Tuesday night.

Arafat's visit to Washington was hastily arranged after the Palestine National Council voted last week to amend its covenant.

Clinton is scheduled to meet with Arafat on Wednesday morning in the Oval Office.

The meeting marks the first time Clinton will meet the Palestinian leader outside the framework of a peace signing ceremony.

The meeting is being seen as a gesture to Arafat after last week's decision by the Palestine National Council to revoke the sections of its covenant that call for Israel's destruction.

Search for 'creative propositions'

Meanwhile, at a meeting Monday night in New York with Jewish leaders, Peres reaffirmed the commitment to maintain a united Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

"I'm very much surprised people are spreading doubts when there is no room for such doubts" about Jerusalem's future, Peres said at an appearance Monday at the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

When challenged that the Labor Party has reversed previous party platform positions, he said negotiations require a search for "creative propositions" and are not about searching the "file for an old plan."

Meanwhile, Peres responded to a question about the planned redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron by pledging to keep the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Israeli hands and the roughly 450 Jews there under Israeli protection. But, "to run the lives" of the 160,000 Arabs in Hebron is not in Israel's interest, he said.

Peres said the "dates and procedures" of the redeployment had not been finalized, but the commitment to redeploy would be honored. □

(JTA staff writer Cynthia Mann in New York contributed to this report.)

Jewish Agency voices concern about official Russian actions

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Russian authorities this week halted an immigration seminar sponsored by the Jewish Agency, prompting agency officials to express concern about their status in the country.

"The Jewish Agency operates in dozens of countries throughout the world and has never been subject to such treatment," wrote Avraham Burg, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, in a letter of protest Tuesday to Russian Justice Minister Kovllov Valentín.

The disruption of the seminar Tuesday in Pyatigorsk, in Russia's northern Caucasus, follows the cancellation of the agency's accreditation in early April by Russian authorities.

Agency leaders repeatedly have downplayed the suspension of their license as a technicality and insisted that their operations in Russia remained unchanged. The agency encourages and oversees the immigration of Jews to Israel.

Nonetheless, the loss of accreditation had given rise to a host of speculation that sensitive politics are at play in advance of Russia's June presidential elections and that Jewish emigration could be at risk.

The agency's muted tone changed after Russian authorities arrived Tuesday at its offices in Pyatigorsk and asked emissaries for documents proving that they were operating legally in the area.

According to an agency statement, the Russian officials then asked the agency emissaries to accompany them to an immigration seminar being held nearby. There, the officials read aloud the government's orders canceling the accreditation and then halted the seminar.

"The cancellation of the immigration seminar is one more episode in a string of events through the past few weeks that have raised a doubt as to a possible change in the position of Russian authorities regarding Jewish Agency activity in Russia," an agency statement said.

"Any disruption in Jewish Agency activity in Pyatigorsk has an immediate effect on the process of immigration to Israel," the statement said. Pyatigorsk is "an area with many ethnic and political tensions" and, hence, a source of steady emigration to Israel, it added.

In a telephone interview from Jerusalem, Burg said, "The concern is we don't know whether it is bureaucratic stupidity or if there is a policy here."

Walking a fine line

Burg planned to hold meetings this week in the United States with Jewish organization heads to discuss steps to be taken in light of the new developments.

But in arriving at a strategy, it is clear that he is walking a fine line.

Burg noted that in a meeting with the Russian ambassador to Israel, Alexander Bovin, it was agreed that "there would be no positive outcome" if the problems surrounding "the legal registry of organizations were to be blown out of proportion or become an issue with widespread repercussion."

Meanwhile, even before the seminar was halted, the accreditation issue had caused concern in the Jewish world.

"It's something that has to be watched," said Martin Wenick, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

"This is a transitional period in the former Soviet Union with a lot of uncertainty," he said. "It's not clear if it's Jewish Agency-specific or is in relationship to the political situation and the operations of foreigners."

Said another U.S. Jewish expert who asked to remain anonymous: "This could be part of a broader campaign to make [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin and his government appear more nationalistic."

If he is re-elected, he said, "the tone and tenor may go back to what it was or there could be a re-emergence of the old apparatchiks (Soviet-era bureaucrats) and their desire to see a return to what once existed: greater control over the flow of people in and out" of the country.

The Israeli media reported this week that new restrictions are being placed on the emigration of Jews of army age or working in security-related institutions.

But a well-placed Israeli official said any new restrictions on exit visas are related to the enforcement of "secrecy" laws protecting national security and that they are not specific to Jews.

When the Russian Ministry of Justice notified the agency last month that new laws rendered its license to operate invalid, other foreign organizations operating in Russia received similar letters.

That prompted the agency to dismiss claims by some that anti-Semitic or anti-Israel trends were at work and to insist it was not being singled out.

Other experts in the field confirmed that rules and regulations for organizations in Russia are constantly changing.

Burg said the agency is working to comply with new accreditation laws. Jewish Agency officials in Israel last week traveled to Russia to meet with officials about the accreditation. □

U.S. seeks to deport man who aided Nazis in Hungary

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — The U.S. Justice Department has begun deportation proceedings against a New Jersey man who promoted the persecution of Jews in Hungary during World War II.

The proceedings against Ferenc Koreh, 86, were launched April 19, after a federal court upheld a 1994 decision to strip Koreh of his U.S. citizenship.

Koreh, a retired Radio Free Europe producer and broadcaster, admitted two years ago in U.S. District Court in Newark to being the founder and editor of a virulently anti-Semitic, anti-American newspaper between 1941 and 1944 in Hungary.

"Propagandists such as Koreh laid the foundation for Nazi genocide by fostering a climate of hate in which inhumane measures could be carried out without protest," Eli Rosenbaum, director of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, said in a statement after the deportation proceedings began.

Some 435,000 Hungarian Jews were sent to Nazi concentration and death camps between May and July of 1944.

In February, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's decision regarding Koreh's citizenship.

The court noted that as editor of the Hungarian newspaper, Koreh fostered "a climate of anti-Semitism in northern Transylvania which conditioned the Hungarian public to acquiesce, to encourage and to carry out the abominable anti-Semitic policies of the Hungarian government in the early 1940s."

The Justice Department alleges that Koreh served as a press officer and then deputy section chief in the information section of the Hungarian government's Ministry of National Defense and Propaganda and that he was an editor and writer for three other pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic publications. □

State Department report: Syria remains on list of terror states

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the U.S. and Syria prepare to work together to monitor Hezbollah terrorist activity in Lebanon, the State Department has once again placed Syria on its list of countries that sponsor international terrorism.

In a new report covering terrorist activities around the world in 1995, the State Department said there is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or executing terrorist attacks since 1986.

However, the report said, "Syria provides safe haven and support for several groups that engage in international terrorism."

While noting that Syria has used its influence to moderate the activities of Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups, the State Department said Syria had "allowed Iran to resupply Hezbollah via Damascus."

In light of the report, members of Congress and foreign policy analysts criticized the Clinton administration for agreeing to cooperate with Syrian President Hafez Assad on rooting out terrorism at the same time that Damascus "grants basing privileges or refuge to a wide variety of groups engaged in terrorism."

Those groups include Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Islamic Jihad.

Daniel Pipes, an outspoken critic of U.S. policy toward Syria, said U.S. cooperation with Syria on terrorism "fits into a larger pattern of inconsistency."

With other countries, the United States imposes economic boycotts; with Syria, he said, "it's a policy of co-option."

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) agreed that there is a "dichotomy" in U.S. policy toward Syria, but expressed hope that the report "will encourage the Syrians to do more" to moderate their position and crack down on terrorist activity.

In a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee at its annual conference, Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) criticized U.S. reluctance to put greater pressure on Syria.

Overall decline in deaths

"In light of Syria's support of terrorists and its intransigence in the peace process, sanctions should also be imposed on Syria," Lieberman said.

He added that because there is "reason to believe that Assad manipulated the situation in Lebanon," it may be time to "take a moment to step back and ask ourselves whether Assad should be treated differently."

In a news briefing Tuesday, Undersecretary of State Phillip Wilcox defended the U.S. relationship with Syria.

"Maintaining diplomatic relations and contacts with Syria is not at all inconsistent with the efforts that we have made through sanctions to persuade Syria to desist from its support for these terrorist groups," Wilcox told reporters.

"We expect those who have influence and control over" Hezbollah "to use that influence."

The United States, Wilcox said, has sanctioned Syria by withholding the trade of materials that could be used in any way to support terrorism. In addition, Syria has been denied economic assistance from the United States.

The report, meanwhile, pointed to an overall decline last year in deaths resulting from acts of international terrorism — from 314 in 1994 to 165 in 1995. At the same time, the total number of international terrorist acts rose in 1995 from 322 to 440.

For Israel, the reverse was true; the number of terrorist attacks by Palestinians against Israelis declined by more than half, but those fewer attacks proved deadlier.

In 1995, 33 terrorist incidents resulted in the deaths of 45 Israeli soldiers, civilians and U.S. citizens, while wounding another 280 people. During the previous year, 79 incidents claimed 55 lives and wounded 150. An increase in suicide bombings during 1995 accounted for the high number of fatalities, the State Department said.

The report did not include the most recent string of suicide bombings in Israel, which claimed 59 victims.

As expected, the report lists seven countries sponsoring international terrorism — Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. The list remains unchanged from last year.

Iran, the report states, remains the "premier state sponsor of international terrorism and is deeply involved in the planning and execution of terrorist acts both by its own agents and surrogate groups." □

Early release for Nazi camp guard

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish groups reacted sharply to the release from prison last week of a former Nazi concentration camp guard because she is ill.

We are expressing "revulsion and outrage at this development," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

In 1981, a German court in Dusseldorf found Hermine Ryan, a guard at the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland, guilty of murder and sentenced her to life in prison.

Some 200,000 people, including about 70,000 Jews, died at Majdanek.

Ryan, whose maiden name was Braunsteiner, had fled to the United States after the war and married an American.

In 1975, she was extradited to Germany.

Ryan, now 76, was released from the prison hospital, where she had been since 1990.

According to German law, after a prisoner has served 15 years, the court must examine whether there are any grounds for parole.

The release of former Nazis on grounds of illness is "all too common an occurrence," said Steinberg, who added, "As brutal as she was, she should receive medical attention." □

Hungarian Jewish cemetery marred

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Anti-Semitic graffiti and slogans were painted on graves last week at the Central Jewish Cemetery on the outskirts of Budapest.

In addition to the swastikas and Stars of David on the graves, some 15 tombstones were overturned on the night of April 22.

And slogans were spray-painted that praised Ferenc Szalasi, the Hitler puppet who led the fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross Party in the 1940s and who was executed after World War II as a war criminal.

Hungarian police said their investigation had not yet turned up any suspects.

Acts of vandalism have increased in recent months in Hungary, not only at Jewish sites, but at Christian cemeteries and churches as well.

Jewish cemeteries and synagogues have been attacked primarily for anti-Semitic reasons. Incidents of vandalism at Christian churches and cemeteries have generally involved thefts of precious religious objects. □