



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Leaders of the Conservative movement's five major organizations issued a policy statement urging a vigilant stand against intermarriage. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak is expected to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher on Wednesday to discuss the establishment of a defense alliance between the two countries. The two head a steering committee aimed at formalizing U.S.-Israeli military cooperation.

■ Newly declassified CIA documents support long-standing claims that Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved Hungarian Jews from the Nazis, served as a spy for the United States. The new revelations come as the U.S. Postal Service unveiled a postage stamp in his honor. [Page 4]

■ Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, drew sharp protests from Jewish leaders after she told a television interviewer that Adolf Hitler "was good" when he first assumed power, but that later he "just went too far."

■ Israeli soldiers and Palestinian demonstrators clashed for a second straight day near the West Bank town of Kalkilya, where the protesters charged that Israel was confiscating Arab land in order to build a security fence. Some 12 Palestinians have been wounded in the clashes.

■ The Justice Department's case against accused Nazi war criminal Aleksandras Lileikis is scheduled to make its way to federal court in Boston on Wednesday. The government is seeking to denaturalize the Massachusetts resident for allegedly helping to kill Jews in Lithuania during World War II.

■ A Latvian man suspected of collaborating with the Nazis died in Germany at age 92 without a verdict ever being reached in his case. In 1994, after being deported from the United States, a German judge ended a four-year trial against Bole-slavs Maikovskis, saying he was too infirm for proceedings to continue against him.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Conservative Jewry reaffirms strong stance on intermarriage

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Leaders of the Conservative movement's five major organizations have jointly issued a policy statement detailing what they believe is the proper approach to the high rate of intermarriage.

The six-page statement, which is strongly worded in places, can be read as an affirmation of the movement's long-held standards.

It can also be read as a rebuke to those within the movement who would like to see Conservative policies relaxed vis-a-vis the intermarried in order to make it more comfortable for non-Jews to participate in synagogue life, much the same way the Reform movement has.

The statement's closing paragraphs say: "In the midst of our confusion and pain we should not ask of Judaism to adopt strategies which do violence to its integrity.

"At the very heart of this movement stands our belief that we must find the proper application of traditional Jewish norms and values to the modern context."

The 1990 National Jewish Population Study confirmed what many in the Jewish community had long known in their hearts: There are as many Jews marrying non-Jews as there are those marrying Jews.

The movements have varied in their approaches to the crisis. In the Orthodox community, where the rate of intermarriage is lowest, nothing much has been done to address it directly.

In the Reform movement, which has the highest intermarriage rate of any population claiming religious affiliation, policies began to change long before the demographics were confirmed.

The Reform movement has long been actively engaged in outreach and inclusion of non-Jewish spouses. In the early 1980s, it adopted a controversial policy, known as patrilineal descent, formalizing its practice of recognizing as Jewish those children who are born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, as long as they are educated as Jews.

That decision continues to be viewed by other movements as a deeply divisive change from the traditional definition of Jewishness, which comes from birth to a Jewish mother or conversion.

Among Reform Jews, the issue continues to be debated at every national convention held by the movement.

'The mitzvah of inmarriage'

Contrasting the Conservative position with the other movements, Alan Ades, president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, which represents 800 Conservative congregations, said: "We're not going to go to the extremes that some others might be doing. We respect their feelings, but Conservative Judaism has a different standard."

His movement, he said, emphasizes the importance of Jews marrying Jews, or, as the new statement describes it, "the mitzvah of inmarriage."

Failing that, the statement says, the movement encourages the halachic conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.

If that does not work, the movement focuses on keruv (outreach), which means inviting the family's non-Jewish spouse and non-Jewish children into the life of the Jewish community, but not altering the community's standards or practices to do so. "We are determined and committed to challenge intermarriage, rather than accept it," says the policy statement.

What is new is the fact that the organizations overcame a history of working independently of one another — and at times, disagreeing with one another — to coordinate a larger effort to communicate a movement-wide approach on intermarriage.

"Since everyone recognizes the urgency" of the intermarriage crisis, "we've developed a wonderful relationship" among the arms of the movement, Ades said.

"We don't agree on everything. But when you find a project that has the importance and meaning that this one does, we're all going to devote the utmost of our resources to making it work."

The leaders of the movement's five principal organizations meet

regularly in a forum called the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism.

The participating groups are: the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs and the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

The first step in the group's new, concerted effort was to issue the six-page statement on intermarriage, basically an explanation and reaffirmation of its approach.

The statement was released to the media at a news conference during the annual convention of the 1,400-member Rabbinical Assembly. The assembly's convention is being held this week at the Concord Hotel at Kiamesha Lake, N.Y. Some 575 rabbis were expected to attend.

"This statement is important because in the absence of a clear public position easily accessible to the laity as to where we stand on these front-burner issues, people get their answers from popular culture, from [television shows like] Seinfeld," said Rabbi Alan Silverstein, whose term as president of the Rabbinical Assembly ended at the convention.

"It's very important that our message be a very public message today, easy to comprehend and comprehensive in its scope so that it will enable people to plug into an activist program."

Elements of the planned program include expanding the use of a toll-free number established last year by the Rabbinical Assembly to respond to questions and provide information about an introduction to Judaism and other courses offered by Conservative synagogues.

The number, 800-ASK-N-LEARN, has received several hundred phone calls over the past year, Silverstein said. But limited people-power means that calls are picked up by an answering machine rather than a live voice, and limited funding has meant that it has not been widely promoted.

Congregation programs to expand

Now the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational arm, is joining in to improve both the people-power and the promotion-power with a High Holiday campaign, said Silverstein.

Two books written by Silverstein and published last September, titled "It All Begins With a Date," and "Preserving Jewishness in Your Family After Intermarriage has Occurred," will be promoted and more thoroughly distributed through synagogue gift stores.

A few dozen synagogues currently offer a pre-Bat and Bar Mitzvah seminar for parents and their children to promote "inmarriage," and that will be expanded throughout the network of Conservative congregations, Silverstein said.

"Parents are increasingly uncomfortable explaining why it's important and special to be Jewish. They know it in their kishkes but we have to help them be able to say it," he said. "That becomes the framework for teen-age years," he added.

The movement is also working with the national network of Jewish family service agencies to develop support groups for the parents of teen-agers, and parent-teen dialogues.

Also emphasized will be reaching young singles after they graduate from college and before they marry.

"If we don't provide more than a support setting, opportunities for them to meet young Jews, we will suffer, and we have suffered as a result of that," said Ades.

The policy statement ends with a "reaffirmation of standards" including:

- Matrilineal descent, meaning a child's religion is the same as the mother's.

- Prohibition against Conservative clergy officiating at intermarriages and against them officiating or being present at purely civil ceremonies.

- Only Jews may belong to Conservative synagogues and only Jews may be granted ritual honors such as being called to read from the Torah.

- Intermarriages should not be publicly acknowledged in any official synagogue forum. Congratulations on the birth of a child may be extended to an interfaith family if the child is Jewish according to Jewish law (i.e., the mother is Jewish) or if not, if both parents have committed themselves to converting the child.

- Sincere Jews by choice should be warmly welcomed by the community.

- Sensitivity should be shown to intermarried Jews and their families, and they should be offered opportunities for Jewish growth and enrichment. □

FDA reform legislation threatens kosher labeling

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Legislation pending in Congress to improve and streamline federal Food and Drug Administration regulations could undermine kosher labeling laws.

Orthodox groups are warning that provisions in the FDA reform legislation, which would replace existing state food safety and labeling laws with uniform federal laws, could make it more difficult for kosher consumers to verify the authenticity of kosher products.

Although the fate of the legislation remains unclear, Orthodox groups are actively trying to alert lawmakers to their concerns.

Their chief concern is to safeguard the kosher labeling laws, now in effect in at least 19 states, which protect consumers from fraudulent labeling.

"These laws are of great importance to kosher consumers and we must oppose any federal legislation — whatever its other merits — that may jeopardize their ongoing viability," said Abba Cohen, director and counsel of Agudath Israel's Washington office.

State laws, which deal with consumer protection rather than rabbinic designation of what is kosher, have been found to be highly effective, according to Betty Ehrenberg, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs.

Orthodox groups are afraid that if regulating authority "were pushed up to the federal level that it would be watered down, neglected, and that you'd lose the ability to carefully monitor whether or not a store or a company is in compliance with kosher laws," Ehrenberg said.

The comprehensive FDA reform legislation seeks, among other things, to speed up the process of approving new drugs and medical devices.

But it is the additional provisions of the measure, which deal with food safety and food labeling procedures, that have sparked concern in the Jewish community.

The House version of the legislation currently contains provisions that would impose national uniformity on food-labeling laws, thereby pre-empting state and local regulations.

On the Senate side, an amendment to impose such uniformity has been stalled.

Orthodox groups expressed the hope that lawmakers would strike out these provisions once they understood the implications for kosher laws.

"I don't think they've thought this out from the kosher point of view," said Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Orthodox Union. □

U.S. Jews heed call for caution over Jewish Agency flap in Russia

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Recent Russian actions against the Jewish Agency for Israel have provoked a flurry of diplomatic activity to sort out whether there is more afoot than bureaucratic machinations, as the Russians maintain, or whether a real threat to Jewish emigration looms.

At the same time, U.S. Jewish organizations involved with emigration are on alert, but have heeded a call by the Israeli government to allow Israeli-Russian diplomacy on the matter to take its course.

Jewish officials here are quietly warning that any high-profile protest against the actions could backfire by playing into the hands of Russian politicians anxious to exploit nationalist sentiment in advance of next month's presidential elections.

Last month, Russian authorities revoked the operating license of the Jewish Agency, the quasi-governmental body responsible for bringing hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union to Israel in recent years.

Spearheaded by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, organizational leaders here say it is critical that the community remain informed and ready to act if necessary.

But, they say it is essential for everyone to act in unison to avoid exacerbating Russian reaction with mixed public messages.

"The stakes are very high," said Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference.

"We are continuing to not call for a broad-based community action," he said.

"We believe at this time the most appropriate thing our community can do is continue to express our concern and be supportive of the diplomatic initiatives that are underway."

'Not the time for a public campaign'

Said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations: "There is a clear consensus that the matter is being handled" privately through diplomatic and organizational channels and "this is not the time for a public campaign."

Late last week Jewish Agency Chairman Avraham Burg was in New York consulting with Jewish leaders.

Burg had come "to share information and prepare contingencies for worst-case scenarios," he said, alluding to the possibility of a crackdown on emigration.

But, during an interview in the agency office here, he said the full intention of the Russian authorities will be decipherable only after June 16, the day the elections are slated to be held.

Said Burg, "Between now and then will be a very sensitive" time, during which the Jewish Agency strategy will be "not to provoke them."

Until then, the agency plans to conduct "business as usual, and where they come and say 'stop,' we stop," he said.

Last week, Russian officials broke up an agency-sponsored immigration seminar in the Russian town of Pyatigorsk.

No other similar incidents have been reported since then and Burg said there has been no evidence of any change in policy governing exit visas.

For his part, Levin, of the National Conference, warned against complacency.

"When the agency responsible for the preparation and transport" of emigrants is having difficulties operating,

he said, the issue must be resolved quickly or it could "cause long-term problems."

Until last week's incident in Pyatigorsk, Jewish Agency officials had said they accepted Russian assurances that the cancellation of its license was a technicality. It was an explanation other experts were willing to buy in light of constantly changing rules and regulations in a chaotic country.

The argument was buttressed by the fact that other foreign organizations also were notified that their operating permits had expired and had to be reissued under new protocols.

At the same time, virtually everyone involved with the issue privately acknowledged the possibility that some larger political factors were at work.

For one, they said, this could be yet another in a series of Russian muscle-flexing in the international arena as government leaders seek to boost their public standing.

After the seminar incident, Burg announced that he had written to Russian Justice Minister Valentin Kovalyov that "the Jewish Agency operates in dozens of countries throughout the world and has never been subject to such treatment."

Sources say the Israeli government was dismayed that agency officials had intensified their public protest.

The Israeli government issued a statement, saying that it is "dealing with the issue on a bilateral level and at the moment" it "sees no need for further initiatives."

It also expressed the hope that "any action" taken by the U.S. Jewish community would be "taken in coordination with the Israeli government."

Meanwhile, Russian diplomats are still telling their Israeli counterparts that the revocation of the agency's accreditation was a "technical problem connected to new laws for non-profit organizations," according to a highly placed Israeli source.

For their part, U.S. State Department officials said they have raised their concerns about the agency's status "at senior levels of the Russian government," but that it is "very difficult" to determine "whether this is motivated by domestic politics or other concerns." □

Institute for Jewish Studies to open at Slovakian university

By Marta S. Halpert

VIENNA (JTA) — A university in Slovakia has announced plans to open an institute for Jewish studies.

The institute, which will be part of the academic program at Comenius University in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava, will hold its first sessions in September.

The Slovakian ambassador to Austria, Jozef Klimko, recently hosted a meeting at his residence here to discuss the new institute with prominent scholars and Jewish personalities from both Austria and Slovakia.

Slovakia, which left the former federation of Czechoslovakia in January 1993 to become an independent republic, has some 3,000 Jews out of a total population of 5.3 million. About one-third of the country's Jews live in Bratislava. In the 1930s, there were some 70,000 Jews in Slovakia. Only 15,000 survived the Holocaust and most of them emigrated between 1948 and 1968.

"Bratislava has been the famous center of Jewish studies in the 19th and beginning of [the] 20th century," said Peter Volko, chairman of the planning group for the Institute of Jewish Studies. "We have to restore some of that spirit to this country once again."

Juraj Svec, a renowned medical scientist who is the rector at Comenius University, said some 80 to 150 students had already expressed interest in pursuing Jewish studies. □

Declassified CIA documents show Wallenberg was U.S. spy

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Newly declassified CIA documents support long-standing claims that Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis, served as a spy for the United States and survived well beyond his disappearance in 1947.

A new study conducted by the weekly newsmagazine U.S. News & World Report "shows conclusively that Wallenberg was a valued U.S. intelligence asset" for the Office of Strategic Service, the precursor of the CIA.

Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), who, as a 16-year-old living in Hungary in 1944 escaped to a Wallenberg safe house in Budapest, welcomed the new revelations.

"If he provided information that got back to U.S. intelligence officials which was helpful in the Allied effort to defeat the Nazis, that is wonderful," said Lantos, whose wife, Annette, was also saved through efforts inspired by Wallenberg.

Lantos stressed, however, that Wallenberg went to Budapest to save lives. "His was a humanitarian mission, but he may have provided some intelligence information. Clearly he was not a spy who just happened to save lives."

Arriving in Budapest in July 1944, Wallenberg established buildings of refuge under the protection of the Swedish flag where he distributed food, medical supplies and Swedish passports. His efforts saved the lives of at least 20,000 Hungarian Jews facing deportation and extermination in Nazi death camps.

Wallenberg's service to the OSS was approved by President Roosevelt, although he was not formally on the OSS payroll, according to U.S. News. "His mission was not only to save Jews," the article states, "but to provide U.S. spymasters with access to anti-Nazi resistance forces trying to break up Budapest's alliance with Berlin."

The article also asserted that Wallenberg browbeat and bribed Nazis to free Jews using funds from the U.S. War Refugee Board, which the declassified files showed had links to U.S. spy operations.

Soviet authorities, aware of Wallenberg's ties to U.S. intelligence, "spirited him out of Budapest in January, 1945," U.S. News reported.

The Soviet claim that Wallenberg died in 1947 has long been disputed, and U.S. News offered eyewitness and secondhand reports that placed Wallenberg in the Soviet Union decades after that date.

'Let that old man go'

One of Wallenberg's closest colleagues, retired Swedish Ambassador Per Anger, believes he was alive as late as 1989 and may be alive today.

Anger told U.S. News he urged German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to help probe Wallenberg's fate in 1989.

"Holding an extension phone," the article states, "Anger listened as Kohl called Mikhail Gorbachev and pleaded 'let that old man go.' The Russian had no answer, says Anger, who then went to Moscow to appeal personally to the Soviet leader. 'He showed no interest' and 'implied that he had no control over the KGB.'"

The new revelations about Wallenberg come as the U.S. Postal Service unveiled a postage stamp this week paying tribute to the Swedish humanitarian.

It is only one of a succession of honors to be bestowed upon him. In 1981, he was named an honorary U.S. citizen; in 1986, a Washington, D.C., street, where the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum now stands, was renamed "Raoul Wallenberg Place"; and late last year, he was honored with a bronze bust in the U.S. Capitol. □

Oklahoma jury convicts three in plot to bomb ADL office

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A federal jury has convicted three would-be terrorists of plotting to bomb various targets, including the Anti-Defamation League's Houston office.

Prosecutors in the Muskogee, Okla., trial said that self-proclaimed prophet Willie Ray Lampley, his wife, Cecilia, and John Dare Baird believed in an imminent foreign invasion, and thought that bombing civil rights centers, welfare offices, gay bars and abortion clinics would somehow ward off the attack.

No bombs were ever detonated by the three.

Lampley, 65, is the leader of the Oklahoma Constitutional Militia and an organization called the Universal Church of God.

Last November, Lampley told the Muskogee Phoenix newspaper that he and his followers discussed blowing up ADL's Houston office because Jews and international bankers have "robbed this country until the money has no value whatsoever."

Lampley, according to the ADL, has written letters to public figures prophesying their deaths as divine retribution for what he claims to be their corrupt ways.

In one such letter to the governor of Idaho in 1994, Lampley wrote, "According to the plan of Almighty God, each State in this Union was supposed to have been a mini-republic under the GOVERNMENT OF GOD, not under Jewish international bankers," adding, "this whole national governmental system will now be destroyed."

Welcoming the jury's recent verdict, ADL said in a statement, "The conviction of these anti-government, anti-Semitic and bigoted individuals demonstrates that extremist threats of violence aimed at institutions and citizens of this country will not be tolerated."

The government based much of its case on conversations that were secretly recorded by FBI informant Richard Schrum after he joined Lampley's militia group last summer.

Defense attorneys argued that the three were entrapped by Schrum and sought to portray them as simple country folk — a preacher, a homemaker and a family man down on his luck.

Lampley testified that he began cooking ingredients for a bomb under Schrum's orders.

His wife, 49, said she was unaware of the plot, and Baird, 54, testified that he was simply with the couple because he was behind in his rent and they had offered him a free place to live.

The three were arrested last November when they were found in possession of 210 pounds of fertilizer, a gallon of nitromethane and part of a toaster to be used as a detonator.

Lampley faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

His wife could receive five years, and Baird faces 10 years. □

Dollar rises against shekel

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The dollar rose against the shekel, which traded this week at a rate of 3.2 shekels to the dollar.

The shekel's decline was attributed to a strong demand by Israeli businesses for foreign currency.

The decline also came amid growing expectations here that sharp budget cuts will be implemented by whichever party takes power after Israel's May 29 national elections. □