



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A West Bank yeshiva student died after being wounded in a drive-by shooting near the Jewish settlement of Beit El, north of Jerusalem. [Page 2]

■ Israeli security forces averted possible terrorist incidents with the arrest of a Palestinian who was trained by a militant Islamic group based in Syria to carry out attacks in the Jewish state.

■ B'nai B'rith International officials denied published reports that the organization might be forced to declare bankruptcy. But officials are scrambling to make up a \$2 million budget shortfall during the last six weeks of the group's fiscal year.

■ Christina Jeffrey, the former House of Representatives historian who was fired after being accused of holding anti-Semitic views, threatened to sue House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) for defamation and breach of contract if an immediate settlement is not reached in her case.

■ Israeli opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly promised to strengthen Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip if he is elected prime minister. But he suggested that a government controlled by his Likud Party might limit its policy to expanding existing settlements rather than building new ones.

■ Norwegian and Israeli officials and Palestinian representatives met to finalize the stationing of Norwegian observers in Hebron, where Israel has delayed redeployment of its forces.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres deemed a pamphlet calling for a new intifada illegal. The brochure was distributed in eastern Jerusalem.

■ Australian Jews entered the debate on gun ownership in the wake of the fatal shooting of 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania. Jews criticized pro-gun lobbyists who have tried to use Holocaust images to bolster their campaign, saying that gun registration was a precursor to the Shoah. [Page 4]

STILL ON THE SIDELINES [Part 1]

Russian olim adjust to Israel, but still resent stereotyping

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nearly seven years after the former Soviet Union opened its gates for large-scale Jewish emigration, many of the more than 600,000 immigrants who have made their home in Israel are still struggling to feel at home.

"Things are extremely tough. I can't find a job as a music teacher, so I am working as a sales clerk," says Natalya, who came here five years ago and, like many newcomers, is reluctant to share her full name. "If it weren't for the children, who are doing so well here, I think we would go back to Belarus."

Like the millions of immigrants who arrived before them from other countries, the olim from the former Soviet Union are attempting to cope with a new language, a foreign culture and the stress that accompanies radical transitions.

They must also cope with Israel's unique security problems and the fact that negative stereotypes of Russian immigrants abound in the Israeli media and in society as a whole.

But not all of these newcomers share Natalya's opinion; ask a random group how it is adjusting to life in Israel, and the answers are surprisingly varied.

"Life is good," says 21-year-old Ludmilla, who works at a supermarket checkout counter. "My husband and I have a new baby and just bought an apartment in the Katamonim [a working-class neighborhood in Jerusalem]. We're hopeful about the future."

"Life is what you make of it," says 50-year-old Gregory, a physician who is working in his profession.

"Sure, Israelis assume I'm not a good doctor because I received my medical training in Russia, but once I treat them they give me a lot of respect.

"My son just graduated from university and got a good computer job. That compensates for any difficulties my wife and I have experienced here."

'A great success story'

From a purely statistical standpoint, "this aliyah is a great success story," says Edith Rogovin Frankel, a senior political science lecturer at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

"On the one hand, more than 90 percent of the olim are employed, and most own their own apartments.

"This is very admirable, but on the other hand, you have the experience of an immigrant who was a doctor or lawyer in the former Soviet Union who is now working as an orderly or selling shoes. For him, that's not a success story."

Much, Frankel says, depends on the immigrants' expectations.

"The Russian-speaking population isn't a monolithic group. There are the older people, retirees, who never expected to get a job in Israel. There are middle-age people, some of whom get jobs in their profession and some who don't.

"Then there is the younger generation — soldiers, university students — who within a short time will be reading [the Israeli daily newspapers] and will be watching Hebrew programs on television. As a group, they are less disillusioned than their older relatives."

With the exception of the young people, Frankel adds, immigrants from the former Soviet Union "tend to group together, but often this is because new immigrants, regardless of background, gravitate to outlying areas, where apartments are available and less expensive."

As part of their effort to create a Russian subculture in Israel, the emigre community publishes more than a dozen Russian-language newspapers and has founded a Russian theater company and several orchestras.

But unlike some Israelis, who view these efforts as "un-Israeli," Frankel views the trend as "a fairly normal phenomenon."

"It's the same thing as when English speakers join the AACI [Association for Americans and Canadians in Israel] or seek out the

English-language events at the Israel Festival. It's just that because the Russians are such a large group, their tendency to stick together is seen in an exaggerated form," says Frankel.

While the older generations do indeed cling to Russian culture and take advantage of the many Russian-language services provided by banks and government offices, the younger olim soon become largely Israeli in appearance and outlook.

Although those who came from the former Soviet Union share many of the same problems as other immigrant groups, they also face some unique challenges, said Rinat Cohen, spokeswoman for the Zionist Forum, an advocacy organization.

"The Russians are the best-educated group of immigrants to ever come to Israel, and are top-heavy with professionals — doctors, scientists, engineers. The country simply can't absorb them all.

"While 91 percent of the immigrants are employed, only 30 percent work in their chosen professions. Many earn low salaries and are understandably frustrated," Cohen says.

Another cause of frustration: the negative stereotypes many Israelis have of recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Frankel says: "This group is definitely receiving worse press than other immigrant groups had to contend with. This is partially due to the sheer size of the aliyah.

"In addition, Israelis sense that the newcomers aren't here for ideological reasons."

In the past, Frankel adds, "immigrants, including the Russians who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, made aliyah because they felt strongly about Israel, not because they couldn't go anywhere else."

"With this group there is a different motivation: uncertainty about life in the [former Soviet Union]," Frankel also says.

"This dictates how they feel about Israel, and how Israelis feel about them."

Cohen maintains that "the more successful the immigrants become, the more Israelis feel threatened by them.

"This is a high-quality aliyah. Many people have 13-plus years of education," Cohen says.

Israelis view the immigrants "as competition for housing, jobs," Cohen adds.

"It's not anyone's fault, really. It's very hard on both groups."

'Media spread negative stereotypes'

Ida Nudel, a former Prisoner of Zion, sees the competition as regrettable but inevitable.

"The newcomers have a different culture and value system.

"It creates resentment, and the politicians use this natural fear to pit one group against another."

Galaina Nabati, a music teacher who immigrated 17 years ago, feels that "the Russian immigrants in this country get no respect."

"The media spread negative stereotypes, painting Russian olim as criminals, prostitutes and members of the [mob]," Nabati says.

"Criminals account for something like 3 percent of the olim population, which means that 97 percent are law-abiding citizens.

"But you never read about the 97 percent who are doctors, engineers, scientists."

Still others, like Lev Elbert, insist that given time, most of these immigrants will be completely absorbed into Israeli society.

Sounding every inch a native Israeli himself,

Elbert, a former Prisoner of Zion, now works as a civil engineer.

"It's unjust to give immigrants subsidized mortgages when native Israelis who have served in the army and paid their taxes don't receive one," he says.

"This is something you learn when your own children, who are Israelis, go into the army and want to buy an apartment." □

Settlers seek stronger action after yeshiva student is killed

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — This week's drive-by shooting near the West Bank settlement of Beit El has prompted Israeli hardliners to contend that Israel bargained away its security needs for an uneasy peace with the Palestinians.

Monday's shooting, which killed David Baum, 17, an Israeli who emigrated from the United States with his family 11 years ago, comes in the midst of Israel's heated election campaign.

Observers have noted that a terrorist attack near the May 29 polling date could tip the balance among the as-yet undecided voters and deliver a victory to Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu over Prime Minister Shimon Peres in their tight race for the premiership.

The drive-by shooting at a hitchhiking station near Beit El, located north of the West Bank town of Ramallah, prompted settler leaders to demand more stringent anti-terrorist measures.

Settler leader Aharon Domb called on the Peres government to "stop its idle chat and give security forces the green light" to crack down on terrorists.

Rehavam Ze'evi, head of the right-wing Moledet Party, blamed the attack on Israel's handover of Ramallah to Palestinian self-rule late last year.

Heightened security alert

Foreign Minister Ehud Barak countered that Israel was determined to crack down on the "enemies of the peace process" as it continued to pursue that process with the Palestinians.

Israel has been on a heightened security alert prior to the elections.

Several Israeli officials have warned that terrorists would launch attacks in an effort to sway Israeli voters to vote for Netanyahu, who the terrorists believe would halt the peace process.

Minutes before firing on the hitchhiking station, terrorists traveling in a silver Subaru or Mitsubishi opened fire on a bus traveling on the Jerusalem-Ramallah road, witnesses said.

No one inside was struck because the bus, like many Israeli vehicles in the territories, had been bullet-proofed.

Two passengers were lightly hurt when the bus driver hit the brakes after the shooting.

The car containing the terrorists then continued north.

Farther along the road, they opened fire on the hitchhiking stand, severely wounding two yeshiva students, including Baum, who later died after sustaining wounds to the head.

The terrorists continued driving northward, but their car flipped over as they fled the scene.

The terrorists then fled the scene in a second vehicle.

Israeli security forces exploded the abandoned car, fearing that it was booby-trapped, and pressed on with their search for the attackers. □

Prayer legislation in Florida awaits governor's signature

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The fate of a school reform bill authorizing group prayer in Florida's secondary schools rests with Gov. Lawton Chiles.

But what he will do with it is anyone's guess.

Both houses of the Florida Legislature overwhelmingly have approved legislation that would allow voluntary, student-initiated prayer at school events.

The move has galvanized Florida's Jewish community to embark on the most significant Jewish mobilizations against school prayer legislation in recent years.

Local Jewish communal leaders, grass-roots organizers and a coalition of Jewish umbrella organizations are urging Florida's nearly 650,000 Jewish residents to voice their opposition and call for the governor's veto.

The Florida Legislature, which has been pushing for group school prayer for years, is not charting new territory. Throughout the South, Conservative state legislatures have moved in recent years to pass laws sanctioning various forms of school prayer.

Several of the laws in these states, including those in Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia, have been contested as a breach of constitutional separation of church and state.

But this marks the first time such legislation has moved this far in a state with a large Jewish population, experts say.

Florida has the fourth largest Jewish population in the country.

"This should be a wake-up call to the Jewish community across the country that even where you have large numbers, you've got to constantly be working and vigilant," said Stephen Silberfarb, deputy executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

"The radical right and those that support these kind of amendments, they're not going to shy away from places where there are large Jewish populations," Silberfarb said.

Chiles has not yet decided whether to veto or sign the Florida legislation, which was scheduled to land on his desk this week.

"When the bill gets to us, he'll review it and make his decision," said Karen Pankowski, a spokeswoman for Chiles.

Chiles, a Democrat in his second term, is not up for re-election and therefore "does not have to worry about political fallout" from the action he takes, Silberfarb said.

Still, Chiles faces public opinion polls in Florida showing wide support for prayer in school, Silberfarb said.

'Worded to sound innocuous'

"If we give him a legal reason to veto the bill, that gives him cover," he said. "He's got to see that this is a core issue with our community and really cuts to the heart of the opposition between church and state."

Opponents say the prayer provisions of the Florida legislation, which also seeks to raise the requirements for high school graduations, have been deliberately worded to sound innocuous.

It would authorize public school boards to allow "the use of an invocation or a benediction at a secondary school commencement exercise, a secondary school-related sporting event or a secondary school-related student assembly." It further states that the prayers shall be "at the discretion of the students," that it must be "given by a student volunteer" and shall be "non-sectarian and non-proselytizing in nature."

The measure says, "School personnel shall not participate in, or otherwise influence the exercise of, the

discretion of the students in the determination of whether to use an invocation or benediction."

Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of the American Jewish Congress, believes that the bill is patently unconstitutional. "The statute creates a captive audience of listeners, and the Supreme Court has made it clear that you can't be coerced into listening to someone else's religious speech," he said.

Moreover, opponents say authorizing group prayer in school would only serve to highlight differences among students at a time when schools need to promote inclusion and tolerance.

"The Legislature, while purporting to support religion, has created the fertile soil for religious divisiveness through the passage of this bill," said Art Teitelbaum, who is based in Miami and is the southern area director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Florida state Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, one of the initial sponsors of the school reform legislation, dropped her support when prayer advocates succeeded in linking prayer to the wider legislation.

She said of her opposition to the bill, "When I was in the eighth grade, I had a homeroom teacher who prayed out loud to Jesus Christ every single day during what was supposed to be a moment of silence," said Schultz, who is Jewish. "I remember how uncomfortable it made me feel because that wasn't what we did in my home."

"All I've been able to think of is how many of the little kids are going to be squirming in their chairs if this bill becomes law," she said, referring to the sixth- to twelfth-graders to whom the law would apply.

As Chiles mulls a decision, opponents of the legislation are having difficulty sizing up his stance on the issue. Chiles has said in the past that he believes that government has no place in the prayers people say.

"Governor Chiles does not like to mix government and religion," said Judy Gilbert-Gould, director of the Community Relations Council of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. "That's been a public position of his."

But earlier this year, Chiles told a group of Christian fundamentalists on National Prayer Day in Tallahassee, "If students have the right to pray silently, they should have the right to pray out loud."

Jack Karako, southeast regional director of the AJCongress, downplayed the governor's remark. "We're not sure whether that's his philosophical belief or if it was just a convenient statement to make in front of that particular crowd," Karako said, adding that Chiles made the comment before the bill passed the House and Senate.

Most Jews working on the issue are confident that Chiles will consider their views. "He was elected in large part due to the Jewish community," Karako said, adding, "I think we still have a friend in Lawton Chiles." □

Netanyahu seeks Pollard's release

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu has sent a letter to President Bill Clinton requesting the release of Jonathan Pollard.

Pollard is serving a life sentence in the United States for spying for Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres also raised the Pollard issue during a recent meeting with Clinton.

Netanyahu conveyed his letter in a meeting last week with the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, Israel Radio reported. Netanyahu, who is running for prime minister in the upcoming elections, wrote that all Israeli citizens wish to see Pollard free, regardless of their political outlook.

Pollard was granted Israeli citizenship last year. □

Prosecutor in Priebke trial aims to perpetuate memory*By Polly Stroud*

ROME (JTA) — With family members shouting “executioner” as the accused entered the courtroom, the trial began here of a high-ranking Nazi official accused of war crimes.

“This is a trial for the memory of a history that cannot be forgotten,” said prosecutor Antonino Intelisano.

Former SS Capt. Erich Priebke, 82, is charged with “multiple homicide aggravated by cruelty” for his role in the March 24, 1944, massacre of 335 men and boys in the Ardeatine Caves, outside Rome.

Adolf Hitler ordered the massacre in retaliation for an attack by Italian partisans that killed 33 German soldiers the day before.

On Monday, defense lawyer Velio Di Rezze reportedly told the military court, in what was the first detailed defense of Priebke, that the massacre was an apt reprisal for the attack on the soldiers and that it should not be considered a war crime.

The trial, which convened May 8, will also include a civilian lawsuit brought by relatives of the victims.

The trial is expected to be one of the last of its kind, given the advanced age of victims and perpetrators.

About 75 of the massacre victims were Jewish.

If convicted, Priebke could be sentenced to life imprisonment. Capital punishment was outlawed in Italy after World War II.

The prosecution said it expects a verdict in about a month.

Priebke, who was extradited to Italy from Argentina last year, has admitted to drawing up the list of victims, checking the names off at the caves and personally shooting two people.

But he contended that he would have been killed himself if he had not carried out orders.

History books as evidence

“The defense aims to show the defendant isn’t subject to punishment because he was obeying a legitimate order,” Di Rezze said in opening arguments.

The prosecutor told the court that in addition to proving Priebke’s guilt, he also sought to give a firm grounding to higher legal principles. “This is a trial to reconfirm certain principles of law and of humanity that were violated with brutality,” Intelisano said.

Among those packed into the small military courtroom were more than two dozen relatives of the victims, who were appearing as plaintiffs in the accompanying civil case.

“Verifying the facts is necessary so that memory and justice can really mean something to the relatives,” said Marcello Gentili, a lawyer for the civil suit.

Prosecutors read a list of more than 80 witnesses they hoped to call in the civil trial. They also entered into evidence seven history books. Among the witnesses they hoped to call were two former SS members, Col. Dietrich Baelitz, 89, and Cpl. Heinrich Perathoner, 77.

Judge Agostino Quistelli approved 10 witnesses, adding that he would decide on the rest this week.

Priebke has been front-page news in Italian newspapers since an American television news team found him in Argentina in 1994.

While Jews made up less than one-quarter of the Ardeatine Caves victims, the attitude of Roman Jews toward the case has received particular attention in the media.

There is “no spirit of vengeance” among Italian Jews, said Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian

Jewish Communities. “But,” she added, “this is probably one of the last such trials in Europe, and it is useful that the details and truth come out.”

In the old Jewish Ghetto near the Tiber River, where many Jews still live, the Priebke trial was the main topic of conversation.

Rome Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff recently touched off a controversy by suggesting that if convicted, Priebke should be kept under house arrest rather than in prison because of his advanced age.

Graziella Limentani, 75, proprietor of a pastry shop in the ghetto, lost her husband and 16 other members of her family to Rome’s Nazi occupiers.

She said she sees no reason why any form of mercy should be granted to Priebke.

“If I could, I would make him suffer the same fate as my husband,” she said. “Anyway, I hope they give him the maximum penalty there is because he truly deserves it.” □

Pro-gun lobbyists in Australia invoke Hitler to advance cause*By Jeremy Jones*

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Australian Jews have sharply criticized pro-gun lobbyists who have tried to use the Holocaust to bolster their campaign.

The debate over gun ownership has heated up in the wake of the April 28 massacre of 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania. A gunman opened fire on tourists in what has been described as the worst mass murder case in modern Australian history.

After Prime Minister John Howard declared his intention to strengthen controls on firearm ownership, Ian McNiven of the Firearm Owners’ Association made references to “Führer Howard.” He also claimed that “the first thing” that Adolf Hitler did as chancellor was “introduce the registration of guns.”

John Schuttloffel, chairman of the Military and Service Rifle Discipline of the mainstream Sporting Shooters’ Association, said the Australian government was “behaving like the Nazi Party” and compared the Australian population to the citizens of countries invaded by the Nazis during World War II.

Jewish community leaders voiced indignation over these remarks.

“It is obscene to compare Australia in the 1990s to Germany in the 1930s, and the Jewish community is disgusted that history should be misrepresented in such a manner,” said Diane Shteinman, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

The council issued a statement saying that it was “appalled” at the claim that “the prime minister and others who seek to place restrictions on firearms ownership are in any way ‘like Hitler.’”

Shteinman also said, “The Jewish community is deeply concerned at the lack of adequate gun controls in this country.”

Another Jewish leader, Doron Ur of the Council of Western Australian Jewry, slammed “the connection between the rise of Hitler or the Holocaust and firearms.”

Ur, a Holocaust survivor, said in an interview that firearms not only “were shunned” by the general population in Europe, but even if Jews had been in possession of weapons, they would not have been effective against anti-Semites.

Synagogues and several Jewish organizations held memorial services for the massacre victims.

One of the victims, Zoe Hall, 28, was memorialized at a service at Sydney’s Temple Emanuel, where several close relatives of the victim are members. □