



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A plan to merge American Jewry's central fund-raising organizations was halted after encountering intense opposition at the Council of Jewish Federations' quarterly meetings in Washington. Architects of the plan intend to craft a new, more gradual approach. [Page 1]

■ Russian officials shut down another Jewish Agency for Israel office, this time in Rostov-on-Don. The move came after Russia's justice minister presumably promised to resolve an ongoing problem with the agency. [Page 3]

■ Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz called for a re-evaluation of the military pact between Israel and Turkey, sparking fresh concerns about relations between the two countries.

■ Israel signed an agreement with Azerbaijan to establish a state-of-the-art hospital in Baku, the capital of the former Soviet republic. The pact was signed by Health Minister Ephraim Sneh and his Azerbaijani counterpart in Geneva.

■ Italians still grieving for loved ones killed more than 50 years ago in a German SS massacre gave emotional testimonies at the trial in Italy of former Nazi Capt. Erich Priebke. The 82-year-old is accused of helping organize the World War II atrocity at the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome, where 335 men and boys, about 75 of them Jews, were killed.

■ Oman will open its trade office in Israel before the end of the month, Israel's representative to Muscat said this week. Oded Ben Haim already began his duties in the Omani capital.

■ Flights at Ben-Gurion Airport were disrupted for a second time — this time over sanctions called for by transport workers. Earlier, transmissions from private radio stations interfered with communications at the airport, forcing a shut-down.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 27.

UJA-CJF merger plan shelved for now, in face of opposition

By Cynthia Mann

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A plan to merge the central American Jewish fund-raising organizations by next January has been shelved after hitting choppy waters this week at a gathering here of federation leaders from across the country.

The architects of the plan will go back to the drawing board in July and try to craft an approach that is more gradual and that more effectively assuages the fears and uncertainties of the organizational players who will be directly affected.

The plan's volatility surfaced Monday night during an open "town meeting" at the quarterly meetings of the Council of Jewish Federations, where speaker after speaker expressed unease and doubt about what amounts to a proposed structural revolution in Jewish philanthropy.

Several voiced frustration that they had not been kept more informed about the work of a committee that has been formulating the restructuring plan for roughly two years.

The committee held a closed meeting Tuesday afternoon and decided to revamp its strategy.

"Instead of doing it in a big rush and under awesome pressure," the committee decided to "phase in the entity over a period of time, using the same vision," said Joel Tauber, honorary national chairman of the United Jewish Appeal and co-chairman of the restructuring panel.

The committee realized that "people could not absorb so much so quickly" and take the plan "on faith," he said. Instead, "we'll phase things in, see what occurs and develop the details everyone is asking for."

"People said, 'Give us the chance to analyze and think through the proposal and its impact on us,'" he said. To realize the vision of a consolidated entity "will take longer than anticipated because that's what our broad constituency wants."

Tauber said he did not consider the change of course a "defeat" or a poor reflection on the planning process.

But dissatisfaction with the committee's work was evident at the town meeting Monday night.

Maynard Wishner, CJF president, said as he opened the session, "There is a significant feeling in the federation world that it's been kept in the dark," and there are a lot of "anxieties" about the plan.

Ellen Hellman, a lay leader from the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, reinforced Wishner's assessment when she approached a microphone and said, "I don't know what to ask, because I don't know what it [the plan] looks like."

Said Michael Rukin, chairman of the board of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston: "The plan seems to have gone astray in a number of areas."

No interorganizational consensus

But the biggest jolt came when Ambassador Milton Wolf, president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, one of the four key parties to the plan, stated his opposition to it starkly.

Although he pledged not to stand in its way, his tone and language shattered any sense that there was interorganizational consensus on the plan.

The tension in the room rose high enough at points to prompt protest by Charles "Corky" Goodman, a co-chairman of the restructuring committee and chairman of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

"I hear us beginning to tear ourselves apart," he said. "I don't know if we should go forward or not" with the plan, "but we should come out of this process stronger, not weaker."

As presented to the town meeting, the plan called for the consolidation of the CJF and the UJA. The CJF is the umbrella association of local Jewish federations, which raise money in concert with the UJA to meet Jewish needs. The federations decide how much money to keep at home for local services and give their overseas allocations to the UJA.

The UJA distributes the overseas funds to the JDC, which provides humanitarian relief to Jewish communities around the world, and to the

United Israel Appeal, which funnels it to the Jewish Agency, for humanitarian programs in Israel.

The plan called for the UIA to remain as it is for three years, and then to join the new merged entity.

The JDC would continue getting money from the system and would have a role in its governance but would remain independent.

The designers of the plan argued that the new consolidated entity would be more efficient and effective in raising money and meeting Jewish needs in a rapidly changing demographic, fiscal and philanthropic landscape.

It also would be more accountable and responsive to federations, they said.

But the plan ran into significant opposition from forces concerned that the merger would weaken support for overseas needs, particularly Israel.

The biggest challenge that the plan's authors faced all along was how to ensure that enough money would be funneled overseas without violating the sacrosanct autonomy of local federations.

The federations, which have been hit hard with declining campaigns, federal budget cuts and increased local needs, did not want to be locked into overseas allocation commitments for more than a year at a time.

But leaders of the overseas interests, represented by the UJA, the UIA and the JDC, described such commitments as a "linchpin" of the plan, without which they would have no incentive to support it.

The plan offered a compromise by seeking "assurances" from federations, rather than "guarantees," that collectively they would provide a minimum of \$310 million a year for overseas needs, for three years, to ease the transition for the entities now responsible for overseas interests.

But virtually everyone conceded that such assurances were not enforceable and, in the face of a trend of declining overseas allocations, the issue remained a grave concern.

As it was, during another session at the CJF meetings here, the acting director general of the Jewish Agency, Zvi Ramot, lambasted the federations for habitually giving his agency short shrift and helping to plunge it into fiscal crisis.

For its part, the UIA had hinged its decision to join the new entity on whether the \$310 million commitments would be upheld during the three-year transition period, said its chair, Shoshana Cardin.

"It's critical the assurances be recognized as very serious" and "that they won't diminish over time," she said at the town meeting.

In this way, "we can have some sense of security going into this process."

'We should have learned a lesson'

Norman Tilles, president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, said he, too, had grave concerns about the plan's impact on funding for overseas needs.

"For several years we have seen an erosion in dollars going overseas," but no actions were taken against communities for cuts in their allocations, said Tilles. "It seems we should have learned a lesson."

If communities do not honor their assurances, he said, "we'll be in the same vicious cycle, and if we don't prepare ourselves to take difficult action, then we'll be on the same slippery slide."

The UJA's new president, Richard Pearlstone, made a brief, albeit lukewarm, statement throwing formal support behind the plan.

"We believe this is in the best interest of the Jewish people," he said. "Is it a perfect plan? I doubt it," but "everyone is being asked to sacrifice something."

But at a closed UJA meeting earlier in the day, intense opposition reportedly surfaced, with some sources saying that the UJA might try to stall the plan in the hope of snuffing it out.

Wolf of the JDC was among the most openly critical of the plan, despite the fact his professional leadership has signed on.

He said there are "details I, as an individual, think are dangerous," including concentrating too much power in the hands of the projected lay and professional heads of what he termed an "international Jewish parliament."

While the JDC "has taken the position they'd rather not see this take place," the organization would not "be proactive" in blocking it, Wolf promised.

His comments appeared to provoke Cardin to return to the microphone to state that the UIA had "asked to be left outside the structure, like JDC" but was "informed the federations wanted UIA to be absorbed."

Nonetheless, she did not rule out the possibility that the UIA might opt out of the plan in the end.

"We would like not to be an obstacle," she said. But "I will be happy to go back to the board and ask to remain independent."

Despite the fireworks, the CJF's executive vice president was philosophical about the evening.

"When a system will allow itself to have a public debate, it's a sign of great maturity. It's one of the values we hold sacred," said Martin Kraar. "That's good news, not bad news."

Said another senior federation executive, who asked to remain anonymous: "I still believe — and I think most of our top leadership believes — that integrating CJF and UJA into one fund-raising entity is in our interest. The question is what price we are willing to pay to get there."

"What we heard tonight was second-guessing the price," he said.

Others said the frustration expressed was a result of the fact that the plan had not been finalized and that many questions remained unanswered.

In any event, as of now, no new entity with all four agencies is envisioned for at least a year, Tauber of the restructuring committee said Wednesday. A phased-in approach could mean any number of organizational configurations, he added. □

Strict security measures planned for election day

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Unprecedented security measures will be in place next week for Israel's national elections, which will occur against a background of terrorism threats by Islamic militants.

Police Commissioner Assaf Hefetz briefed senior security officers Wednesday on safety surrounding the balloting.

More than 20,000 police and soldiers will be stationed across the country. About 3,000 of them will be in Jerusalem.

Security plans also call for a full closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip three days before elections in an effort to thwart possible terrorist attacks.

"This is an unprecedented operation," Hefetz said, attributing some of the safety measures to the politically charged atmosphere of the elections.

Meanwhile, members of Israel's Central Elections Committee were moving into full gear to prepare for the May 29 polling. Some 3.9 million people are eligible to vote at the country's 7,000 polling stations.

Israel Television will release its exit poll results at 10 p.m. local time, which is when the polls close. □

Jewish Agency status in Russia unsure amid conflicting signals

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Days after Russia's justice minister presumably promised to resolve an ongoing problem with the Jewish Agency for Israel, officials here shut down another agency office.

On Wednesday, agency officials in Rostov-on-Don were invited to a local visa office, where police demanded that they halt work.

The agency officials said the police notification was read in the presence of some federal security officers.

The office in Rostov-on-Don, about 650 miles south of Moscow, is the latest of several in southern Russia where authorities have recently suspended agency activities.

Last week, Russian authorities disclosed publicly for the first time that they canceled the agency's license last month because, they charged, its practices were violating Russian law.

The latest closure came in the wake of a promise by Justice Minister Valentin Kovalyov to settle the agency issue promptly. Kovalyov made the promise during a conversation earlier this week with the deputy chairman of the lower house of the Russian Parliament, Mikhail Yuriev.

On Monday, Yuriev sent a letter to World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman, informing him that the recent closures of agency offices had "nothing in common with an intention to harass Jewish emigration" from Russia.

Yuriev also wrote that he has received the personal promise of the justice minister "to close the subject soon." Yuriev, also the chairman of Touro College's Moscow campus, said he was confident that the Kremlin had no plans to limit Jewish emigration. "Even ultranationalist, anti-Semitic parties don't say, 'Stop emigration.' Rather, they say, 'Let them all go,'" he wrote.

Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt said he was very surprised by the latest closure of an agency office. "We got the promise from the [justice] minister, but the harassment on the periphery" of Russia continues, he said.

Last week, Russia's chief rabbi openly protested the cancellation of the agency's accreditation. In a letter sent last Friday to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Rabbi Adolph Shayevich wrote: The "Justice Ministry explains the step it has taken by the fact that the Sochnut (Jewish Agency) activities allegedly violated Russian laws. Does personal freedom of movement contradict Russian laws?"

'Obligated to adopt citizenship'

While Russian officials have not specified the violations of law allegedly made by agency representatives, a Moscow daily newspaper published an article detailing the agency's alleged transgressions. In a May 15 front-page article, Nezavisimaya Gazeta referred to an investigation by Russia's security service into the agency's operations.

"According to information [gathered by] Russia's special services, the agency's staff, while covering up its actions with the aim of spreading Jewish culture, has been collecting information on a broad circle of questions," the article said. Referring to unnamed "official Russian representatives," the article claimed that Israeli emigration programs being carried out in Russia "verge on interference in [Russia's] internal affairs."

The article also claimed that the Jewish Agency was "bringing the most gifted Jewish children to study in Israel," where the young people are "obliged to adopt Israeli citizenship."

The Jewish Agency headquarters in Jerusalem issued a protest May 16 against the article, saying that it

was biased and contained "inaccuracies and fallacious statements."

Meanwhile, Sergei Gorlenko, a spokesman for Russia's federal security service, revealed in an interview after the article appeared that his agency had been investigating the case of an unnamed Israeli diplomat expelled from Russia about three months ago. "The Israeli was caught red-handed along with his Russian agent," he said.

But Gorlenko denied any connection between that incident and the status of the agency's operations in Russia.

He added that he had no information on the agency's alleged illegal operations in Russia.

The agency has submitted documents required by the Justice Ministry to renew its accreditation. □

National Geographic challenged for quoting neo-Nazi in article

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — A National Geographic article about Toronto has ignited a controversy because it contains overtly racist remarks by an outspoken neo-Nazi and Holocaust denier.

The generally laudatory article about the Canadian city in the magazine's June 1996 issue accurately described Toronto resident Ernst Zundel as "one of the leading neo-Nazi propagandists in the world."

It went on to quote him as saying, "Canadians deserve all the problems that are coming with immigration." Blacks are responsible for such problems as drive-by shootings, rapes and robberies, Zundel said. "I'm objecting to allowing hordes of racially unabsorbable populations to invade the living space of a specific race," the article, written by Richard Conniff, also quoted him as saying.

Ellen Cole, chairwoman of the community relations committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region, wrote a letter seeking an explanation from the National Geographic Society.

"Ernst Zundel, a German national with landed immigrant status, has been refused Canadian citizenship on the basis of being a security threat to Canada," Cole wrote. "He is, by all accounts, one of the largest distributors of neo-Nazi and Holocaust denial material in the world. He is a racist and a bigot with links to some of the most violent white supremacist and neo-Nazi organizations worldwide."

Cole wrote that a large number of politicians and field workers "would have been more appropriate to speak with credibility on immigration matters. Your choice to utilize Mr. Zundel gave him undeserved credibility and is a stain on your magazine's good name."

Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall, along with four other mayors in the Toronto area, are preparing a joint letter to National Geographic that will also protest the use of Zundel as a source.

"If anybody is unabsorbable, it happens to be Ernst Zundel," said Janis Dembo, coordinator of the mayor's committee on community and race relations.

"He's not a legitimate voice. It's reprehensible that they would actually publish his stereotypically racist comments about the black community."

Bernie Farber, national director of community relations for the Canadian Jewish Congress, noted that Conniff did not quote the local branch of the Ku Klux Klan in a similar article he wrote for National Geographic on the city of Chicago, nor did he present any opinions from the American neo-Nazis who once threatened to march through a neighborhood in Skokie, Ill., where many Holocaust survivors lived.

"There are more credible voices out there to criticize Canada's immigration policy than that of a neo-Nazi," Farber said. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Security issues dominate lackluster election campaign

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — What issues will Israeli voters be thinking about when they go to the polls next Wednesday?

Security, security and security.

Judging from a random survey of voters, as well as from the campaign banners, posters and televised spots that have appeared in recent weeks, the 1996 election is turning out to be a one-issue campaign.

Regardless of where one stands politically, the issue of security has overtaken such issues as the economy, education and the relationship between religion and the state.

The safety issue is influencing Israelis across the political spectrum as they prepare to vote for the next Knesset and, for the first time, vote directly for prime minister.

Recent polls show that the race for the premiership between Labor's Shimon Peres and Likud rival Benjamin Netanyahu may be too close to call.

And whether voters are thinking of the recent Hamas terrorist attacks or the Katyusha rockets fired by Hezbollah from Lebanon, their perception of each candidate's ability to meet Israel's security needs may decide the race.

"Security is the most important thing for me," says Annie Pevoncello, who emigrated from Italy nine years ago. "We need peace and security together. I plan to vote for Labor and Peres because we have to stop terrorism. Remember, there were terrorist attacks under the Likud, too, so Bibi [Netanyahu] isn't offering anything new."

"What we need is a lasting solution, and that means the peace process."

Liana Kanto, an Israeli-born waitress who supports the Likud, agrees that "security will always be the No. 1 issue, unless sometime in the future we have peace with Iran and Iraq. I'll probably vote for Bibi, although Peres is a man of vision, because it will do more good in the long run."

This is not to say that Israelis have totally forgotten all other issues.

Says Kanto, who just completed her army service and who plans to enter college this fall: "I think the government should provide more support to young couples just starting out in life, and there should be more universities to ensure that everyone can get an education."

Half hour of ads

Although Israelis do not need any encouragement when it comes to worrying about their personal safety, both Labor and Likud are stressing the issue in a big way.

Cognizant that many Israelis view Peres as a diplomat, not a soldier, the Labor Party has draped the country with "I Feel Secure With Peres" posters.

Likud, meanwhile, is promising "Peace With Jerusalem" and "Peace With Security."

Israeli households are tuning into the half hour of televised campaign commercials that follow the 8 p.m. news broadcasts.

These spots, which are partly sponsored by a government campaign fund, are the high point — some say the low point — of what many consider to be a lackluster campaign.

Likud's televised ads feature Netanyahu as serious and prime ministerial, standing against a backdrop of wood-paneled walls and the Israeli flag. They also show

Peres as something of a partner in crime with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

In the Labor spots, Peres is seen kissing attractive teen-age girls (read: he is youthful), shaking hands with important foreign dignitaries (he is diplomatic) and visiting the troops on the front (he is Mr. Security).

Unlike Likud's spots, which feature graphic footage of terrorist bus bombings, Labor's ads show photogenic Israelis driving sexy convertibles (read: Israel's economy is benefiting from the peace process).

Are Israelis taking these televised messages seriously?

Yosef Lapid, an editorial writer at the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, thinks not.

"People are watching the commercials as a curiosity item, as if they were watching a sports event to see whose horse is winning."

Noting that Israeli law prohibits the country's electronic media from interviewing political candidates during the three weeks leading up to the elections, Lapid says, "The silly thing is that if an Israeli politician is on CNN, he can be seen by the two-thirds of Israelis with cable TV. Only the people without cable can't see the politicians."

Lapid, who once headed Israel Television, adds, "The law was established three or four decades ago to prevent the government from disseminating propaganda through news clips shown at movie theaters. The opposition was opposed to clips showing government ministers cutting ribbons right before elections."

"Nobody had even thought about television as a medium back then. TV wasn't introduced to Israel until 1967."

Despite these ads and the presence of campaign posters in every conceivable nook and cranny of the country, Lapid calls this year's campaign "surprisingly low key."

"It's not that people aren't interested," he says, "but the fact that there is no real difference between the parties on economic issues, religious issues. Both parties are giving in to [the demands] of the religious parties."

"The one major difference was the Palestinian issue, but now that Netanyahu has agreed to uphold what has already been agreed on in the peace process, even this is just a question of emphasis."

"Everyone knows that terror will exist, regardless of who heads the government. It existed before, it will exist after."

'Peace is the only issue'

Gabriela Asubel, an immigrant from Argentina, agrees that "almost all the parties have the economic strategy, but as far as I'm concerned, peace is the only issue."

The manager of a store so close to the March 3 suicide bombing of the No. 18 bus in Jerusalem that its windows were cracked by the explosion, Asubel says, "I'm afraid of the Arabs, and it's hard to live in Israel for this reason."

"In my opinion, the only solution is for us and the Palestinians to have our own countries and that way we'll be safe. I'll be voting for Peres for prime minister, and for Meretz or Labor, I don't know which."

But Sari Diskin, a waitress whose restaurant was also shaken by the March 3 bombing, will not be voting on security issues alone.

Pointing to an Arab co-worker, she says, "He's an Arab and we're good friends. Sure, sometimes I'm worried about terrorism, but in day-to-day life I don't think about the security situation. I work with Arabs and we have a great relationship." □