



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A U.S. federal judge stripped a Detroit-area man of his U.S. citizenship because he concealed his Nazi past from officials when he applied to become a naturalized American. Ferdinand Hammer, 74, served as a Nazi SS guard at the Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen concentration camps during World War II.

■ Yuli Vorontsov, Russia's ambassador to the United States, suggested that the Jewish Agency for Israel's license to operate in Russia was suspended because the agency had originally applied to operate only one office in Moscow and now has dozens more offices across the country. He made his remarks to an American Jewish Committee group in Washington.

■ Neal Sher, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, announced that he is leaving the pro-Israel lobbying group next month. Sher, who came to AIPAC less than two years ago, will be working on behalf of Jewish organizations seeking restitution for Holocaust victims and their heirs, including those whose assets are in Swiss banks.

■ The Israeli army banned Palestinians from working in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip until the Israeli elections. In an effort to prevent possible terrorist attacks, the Israel Defense Force will impose a total closure on the territories three days before the May 29 polling date.

■ Israelis may have to wait up to four days after the May 29 election to find out who the next prime minister will be, according to a spokeswoman for the Central Elections Committee. She said the race might depend on 105,000 absentee ballots cast by Israel's diplomats and emissaries abroad.

■ The jailed spiritual leader of the fundamentalist Islamic group Hamas reportedly agreed to issue an appeal to followers not to attack Israel before the elections. Sheik Ahmed Yassin has been in an Israeli prison since an Israeli military court convicted him in connection with the kidnapping and killing of two Israeli soldiers.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish settlers see elections as fundamental to their future

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Jewish residents of the West Bank and Gaza have as much at stake in next week's elections as any segment of the Israeli population.

Whether they will be allowed to stay in their homes or be forced to move and whether they will live under Israeli or Palestinian sovereignty are among the critical questions that will most likely be decided by the government elected to power when Israelis go to the polls May 29.

Numbering an estimated 134,000, with less than half of them eligible to vote, the settlers in the territories constitute just a fraction of the electorate, with less voting power than such groups as Russian immigrants and Israeli Arabs. Nonetheless, they receive a great deal of media attention, in part because of their uncertain status.

Although far from monolithic, the settlers who live in communities such as Efrat, Beit El and Kiryat Arba overwhelmingly would like to see the Labor Party removed from power, experts say.

Although no specific polls have been done on this population, Jewish settlers are expected to throw their support to Likud and parties to the right of Likud, including the National Religious Party and Moledet, a secular party that has advocated the transfer of Arabs, said Shmuel Sandler, a professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University.

Of Israel's many minority groups, the settlers are arguably the least understood from a demographic standpoint, said Efraim Inbar, director of Bar-Ilan University's Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.

"The perception is that we have a very religious, very ideological group here. But the statistics don't bear this out," he said.

Although the vast majority of settlers are right wing politically, Inbar said, "the majority do not define themselves as religious."

About 45 percent are Orthodox or fervently Orthodox, 20 percent are traditional and 34 percent are secular, he said.

And despite the perception that a large percentage of the settlers come from English-speaking countries, "the percentage is surprisingly low," he said.

Only 5.3 percent are from the United States or Canada; 4.3 percent are Western European; 5.5 percent are Russian immigrants; and the rest are native Israelis, he said.

As a group, he said, "one-quarter to one-third of the settlers can be considered ideologically motivated."

"The others, while naturally concerned about their homes, moved to the territories for the lower price of housing, the quality of life and the convenience," he said.

'Settlers do not vote as one bloc'

Given this diversity, Inbar said, "the settlers do not vote as one bloc. While the tendency is to favor right-wing parties, Labor also received votes in the past."

However, most of those votes came from the estimated 15,000 residents of the Golan Heights, who are sometimes included in broader figures related to settlers. Whether uncertainty over the fate of the settlements will erode Labor's following among former supporters "is still unknown," said Dov Orian, a Labor Party media liaison.

One sign that Labor considers the settler vote vital was last week's surprise announcement that Yossi Beilin, a minister in the Labor government, and Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a settler activist, had drafted an agreement stating that no settlements would be evacuated under any permanent-status agreement with the Palestinians.

The Yesha Council (the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza), which has endorsed Benjamin Netanyahu in the race for prime minister, condemned both Bin Nun's meeting with Beilin, Israel's most outspoken dove, and the agreement.

"Bin Nun represents only himself," the council said.

Nor is Bin Nun the only settler leader to break ranks with Yesha and

its policy against "unofficial" dialogue with either Israeli government officials or Palestinian representatives.

Last year, Yisrael Harel and Uri Elizur, two of Yesha's leading activists, held several meetings with Palestinian officials to voice their opinions and to try to foster cooperation.

Then, as now, the council denounced the meetings, which were held under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee.

Those meetings indicated that even though the majority of settlers are expected to vote against the current government, there are differing views on how to approach relations with the Palestinians.

While some reject all talk of accommodation and compromise, others have taken steps toward cooperation.

"We are neighbors. They live here, we live here. We are two communities," said Harel, the chairman of the Yesha Council.

"We don't intend to drive them out and they need to know that we are here to stay," he said, adding, "We are determined to stick to our ideals and ideology."

Harel said the meetings were halted when they were leaked to the media and his organization voted against such contacts.

But he holds out hope that dialogue could continue.

"We must find a way to end the dialogue of stones and start something more rational and humane," he said.

Although Yesha claims otherwise, it appears that a significant minority of settlers might be prepared to relocate from their homes if they were given financial compensation.

According to a December 1995 opinion poll published by Bar-Ilan's BESA Center, about 30 percent of the settlers, mainly young, secular families that have lived in the territories less than five years, expressed a willingness to consider leaving their homes in exchange for "appropriate compensation" from the Israeli government.

However, of those asked whether they would "consider staying on the settlement as an Israeli citizen under Palestinian sovereignty" if a Palestinian state should rise in five to 10 years, 71 percent said no.

Exhausted from terror attacks

Despite their diversity and lack of unity on many issues, the one thing all settlers fear is a further deterioration of security.

"I would rather be thrown out of here than have to deal with the reality of living under Palestinian autonomy," said a secular mother of four who spoke on condition of anonymity.

For Sara Fieldler, a resident of Nahliel, a religious settlement northwest of Ramallah, "the issue of personal safety is my main concern and I will be voting for those people who at least are not talking about giving up land."

"What they will do when push comes to shove is another issue," she said, noting that she intends to vote for Moledet.

While the future of their communities is certainly the central issue for settlers as the campaign season winds down, Yesha spokeswoman Yehudit Tayar said, "One of the most important concerns for Yesha members is the personal safety of the people of Israel."

Israelis, she says, "are exhausted from the terrorist attacks, the war in Lebanon. People don't know whether their husbands or wives will be blown up on a bus. We share these concerns."

Although some Israelis see the settlers as a separate, isolated group, she said, "we ourselves don't dissociate ourselves from other Israeli citizens."

"Our concerns are their concerns," she said. "We feel part and parcel of the Israeli people." □

Turkish premier criticizes military accord with Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Concerns about Israeli-Turkish relations were raised this week by reports that Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz called for a re-evaluation of the military pact the two countries signed in February.

Yilmaz was quoted Wednesday in the Turkish media as telling a closed meeting of his Motherland Party, "The harm of this accord has outweighed its advantages. We are working on it. This has to be corrected."

Anger over the accord prompted an Islamic militant to make an assassination attempt Saturday on Turkish President Suleyman Demirel.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres told reporters Wednesday that he was willing to examine any Turkish proposals for amending the pact.

Yilmaz made the reported statement a day after the leader of the pro-Islamic Welfare Movement, the party with the most seats in the Turkish Parliament, attacked the governing coalition for signing a pact with "Jews who bomb our Muslim brothers" in Lebanon.

The government leaders "go and form alliance with the Jews. They open Turkey to their planes," Welfare leader Necmettin Erbakan said at a rally Tuesday, referring to a portion of the accord granting Israeli pilots the right to train in Turkish airspace.

"Given these truths, if you give a vote to anyone outside [the Welfare Movement], you will give a vote to the Jews. Martyrs and saints will strike down such people," Erbakan said.

Word of the accord leaked out in April. Details of the pact remain officially secret, but according to a copy of the agreement leaked this week, the pact calls for the two countries to expand military cooperation by land and sea for a five-year period.

On Thursday, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the pact had no clauses specifying that the two countries would participate in joint maneuvers. Earlier this week, the Turkish media reported that the two were planning joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean next month.

Egypt, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, has been among the most vocal opponents of the accord in the Arab world, expressing reservations about whether it would disturb the regional balance of power.

Syria and Iran have also denounced the accord. □

Military censorship law eased

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A new censorship agreement allows editors — for the first time — to go to the High Court of Justice to appeal military blackouts on news.

The agreement, which was signed this week and which no longer gives the Israel Defense Force chief of staff the final word on censorship decisions, also calls for the formation of a committee with representatives from the military and the media to handle problems as they arise.

It replaces a 30-year-old agreement that was last amended in 1989.

Yair Stern, head of the state-run Israel Television, said censorship policy had in general been relaxed in recent years, adding that the immediacy of electronic media sometimes pre-empted the censor's decision.

"In the last operation in Lebanon, we were broadcasting live, and Katyusha rockets were falling right through the broadcasts," Stern said. "We try to be as cautious as possible, but the censor cannot block the direct flow of news as it did in the past." □

Chabad enlists Ukrainians to halt missionary festival

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Hear O Israel Ministries has been a big hit in the former Soviet Union.

Each year, it holds several extravaganzas of Messianic Jewish song and dance in the biggest stadiums in the biggest cities — from Moscow to Odessa, from St. Petersburg to Minsk.

Since he began running the festivals three years ago, Hear O Israel's leader, an American Jew-turned-evangelical Christian named Jonathan Bernis, claims to have converted 20,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union to believe in Jesus.

And no one from the former Soviet Union's organized Jewish communities has been able to stop him.

Until now.

In Kharkov, Ukraine, a lone Lubavitch rabbi named Moshe Moskowitz, with the help of Ukrainian officials and the American Jewish anti-missionary group Jews for Judaism, this month managed to halt Bernis' plans to hold a three-day festival.

Of Kharkov's approximately 2 million people, 50,000 are Jews.

The festivals have extravagant stage shows. A videotape of the one held in Moscow's Olympic Stadium in May 1994 shows 13,000 people in the arena sitting in rapt attention as Bernis says, "We're here to share with you in music and dance and word the joy you can feel through a personal relationship with God and his Messiah."

After getting the crowd into the spirit with a couple of hours of Messianic Jewish performances and group singing, he asks everyone in attendance to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Each attendee gets a Russian-language copy of the Christian Bible written specifically for a Jewish audience, that is, with the Hebrew word for savior, Yehoshua, instead of Jesus.

The Jews of the former Soviet Union, many of whom know little about Judaism other than the fact that they are Jewish, do not know Messianic Judaism for what it truly is: evangelical Christianity adorned with Jewish symbols, said Mark Powers, national director of Jews for Judaism.

In early May, Bernis and a group from his Rochester, N.Y.-based ministry, Hear O Israel, set up shop in Kharkov with an office and a publicity blitz, Rabbi Levi Raices, Kharkov's other Lubavitch emissary, said in an interview from Los Angeles, where he and his wife had gone to give birth to their third child.

'Lost Sheep of Israel'

The ministry spends more than \$300,000 on each festival, according to Powers. The money is raised from Messianic Jewish congregations in the United States.

The ministry brings over between 100 and 300 volunteer missionaries from North America, each of whom pays more than \$1,500 to Hear O Israel to come to the former Soviet Union to evangelize "the Lost Sheep of Israel," says a letter from Bernis to interested volunteers.

Hear O Israel had rented out Kharkov's largest venue, the Stadium Metalist, which seats 30,000 people, and planned to fill it with different people each of the festival's three nights. The city was abuzz in anticipation of the festival, Raices said.

Hear O Israel put up posters featuring a large Star of David and the words "Free Festival with Jewish Song and Dance" on the biggest billboards in town and in every subway car, the rabbi said.

They had placed ads on local television and radio stations, and in each of the city's five main newspapers.

"Of course the whole city was talking about it," said Raices, adding, "Many Jews in Kharkov didn't really comprehend the difference between them and us, and thought that we [at Chabad] were doing it."

Alarmed at tactics that he feared would deceive many of Kharkov's Jews, Chabad's Moskowitz began writing to every city government official he could find, and gave them documentation about Hear O Israel's true nature. That information was supplied by Jews for Judaism.

The government agreed that Hear O Israel was not really Jewish, and ordered it to stop its activities because it was not registered as an officially recognized religion.

At a Hear O Israel news conference 10 days before the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, when the festival was scheduled to be held, a government official informed the ministry of its decision.

Moskowitz had slipped in to the news conference and, since the local reporters knew him, they asked him what he thought of the situation. When he told them that Hear O Israel is not Jewish at all, ministry officials angrily ordered him to leave the premises and had someone show him the door, according to Raices.

"This was being filmed, so on every TV station they were talking about it — that they threw out the rabbi," Raices said. "A day or two later one of the papers wrote about it and asked how could they claim to be a Jewish organization if they threw out the rabbi."

"That's the best [public relations] we could have hoped for," he said.

Even so, it does not seem as though the Jewish community will be able to stop Bernis for long.

"These are clearly the largest missionizing attempts by any group in the former Soviet Union," said Jews for Judaism's Powers. "In terms of sheer one-shot manpower, they're larger than what the Jewish community has mustered."

No one at the ministry's Rochester office would answer questions about its activities. □

Failed merger effort leads to closure of 2 newspapers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two Israeli newspapers closed this week after attempts to save them through a merger failed.

Davar Rishon folded Tuesday, saying that it was unable to attract investors who would keep it in operation.

The Histadrut labor federation founded the paper some 70 years ago as Davar to advance the cause of Zionism. Facing a suspension of operations last year, the paper re-emerged in a new format under the name Davar Rishon, with journalist Ron Ben-Yishai serving as editor.

The paper announced its own demise Tuesday in a front-page column by Ben-Yishai titled "We Tried."

Davar Rishon had tried unsuccessfully to merge with the Israeli daily business newspaper Telegraph, which closed Monday after sustaining losses of some \$16 million during three years of operation.

Observers attributed the Telegraph's closure to its failure to draw advertisers, especially with the advent of commercial television in Israel, as well as the publication's inability to carve out a niche in a market already dominated by the other Israeli business paper, Globes.

The two papers decided to close after negotiations with an investor group broke down.

During the past three years, two other newspapers closed: Hadashot, a tabloid, and Al Hamishmar, published by the kibbutz movement. □

Protesters criticize university for honoring Palestinian leader*By A. Engler Anderson
Jewish Exponent*

PHILADELPHIA (JTA) — Amid an outburst of heckling, the Palestinian Authority's planning minister, Nabil Sha'ath, received an honorary doctor of law degree from the University of Pennsylvania at the school's commencement this week.

The university referred to Sha'ath, an alumnus, as a "peacemaker" and an architect of the peace accords.

But a group of about 35 Jewish protesters, led by Zionist Organization of America President Morton Klein and activist Rabbi Avi Weiss, charged that Sha'ath had supported terrorism and is undeserving of the honor.

"I think this is a terrible affront to the Jewish community," Weiss said.

"Could you imagine if the university decided to honor an apartheid leader with an honorary degree?" he said outside the commencement.

"When you grant an honorary degree to a man like Sha'ath, who has human blood dripping from his hands, you are sending a message that encourages and emboldens terrorism around the world."

Weiss is president of the Riverdale, N.Y.-based Coalition for Jewish Concerns-AMCHA. His group handed out pamphlets and bore placards outside Franklin Field, site of Tuesday's commencement ceremonies.

Penn freshman David Crystal, 18, of New York, said he came to the commencement to register his protest. "I have a lot of pride in being Jewish," said Crystal, explaining why he carried aloft an anti-Sha'ath sign.

During Sha'ath's introduction by university President Judith Rodin, small pockets of hecklers broke out with cries condemning Sha'ath. "Sha'ath is a terrorist," screamed some, while others shouted, "Shame on Penn — Sha'ath advocates terrorism."

Sha'ath did not speak at the program, but the university students, including several thousand degree recipients, faculty and parents erupted into loud applause after the honorary degree citation was read.

"It wasn't the place or time" for heckling, said one graduating senior.

The university insists that Sha'ath is a moderate who advocates peace.

The citation, read aloud by Rodin, praises the Palestinian leader as "an architect of the Middle East peace accords" who "continues to wage the fight for peace in the Middle East with words, not weapons."

Minister for 'Palestine'

A week earlier, the ZOA took Penn to task for having called Sha'ath a planning minister for "Palestine." The university, through its spokesperson and its president, later said the reference to Palestine was a mistake.

While the citation read at commencement omitted the word "Palestine," the printed program and the university's site on the Internet's World Wide Web used the phrase. The program and the site were prepared in advance and could not be readily corrected.

Barbara Stevens, the university's vice president and secretary, wrote in a letter to Klein that "our error was in referring to Dr. Sha'ath as 'the minister of planning and economic cooperation of Palestine.' You are right. There is no such country as 'Palestine.' The university regrets its error and will immediately make the necessary correction."

Stevens' letter, and another from Rodin, argued that Sha'ath, who holds a master's and a doctorate from the Wharton business school, has been a prime mover in the Mideast peace process.

Brandishing articles from The Jerusalem Post, Klein and others maintained that Sha'ath has threatened armed conflict with Israel if Jerusalem does not agree to his demands and has expressed solidarity with the militant Hamas movement.

Sha'ath could not be reached for comment. □

U.S. documents indicate family of Raoul Wallenberg's aided Nazis*By Heather Camlot*

NEW YORK (JTA) — While Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg was saving the lives of Jews in Hungary during World War II, some of his relatives were collaborating with the Nazis, according to the World Jewish Congress.

"While Raoul was a saint, he was performing superhero feats to save the Jews in Budapest, the U.S. government knew that the Wallenberg bank, controlled by his uncles, was cooperating wholly with the Nazis," said Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director.

The WJC reported this week that it discovered the activities of the Wallenberg-owned bank while searching recently declassified U.S. intelligence files for information concerning the whereabouts of assets of Holocaust victims that are believed to be in Swiss bank accounts.

The Wallenberg documents shed light on "Sweden's involvement with and collaboration with the Nazis during the war," Steinberg said. "Sweden is clearly emerging as one of the places where the Nazis moved assets."

According to the documents, The Enskilda Bank, owned by Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg, Raoul's uncles, dealt in large black market operations, money laundering and concealing German investments in the United States.

The documents contain evidence disproving the belief by some that Marcus Wallenberg was on the side of the Allies. He traveled to the United States in 1940 on behalf of German interests to buy back a block of German securities being held by America, the documents show.

The disclosed information about the collaboration between the Nazi regime and Marcus and Jacob Wallenberg suggests a reason for the feeble attempt to find their nephew. "It's long been out there that the Wallenberg family in Stockholm apparently did very little to locate Raoul after his disappearance into the Soviet gulag in January 1945," Steinberg said.

Stationed in Budapest, Raoul Wallenberg helped to save some 20,000 Jews from deportation to Nazi death camps. He was arrested by Soviet occupation forces in January 1945. The Soviet authorities maintained that Raoul Wallenberg died in prison in 1947, but others have claimed that he was alive as late as the 1980s. U.S. News & World Report reported earlier this month that newly unearthed documents showed that Raoul Wallenberg spied for an agency that was a predecessor of the CIA. □

Israel to establish hospital in Baku*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has 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, where the two attended a meeting of the World Health Organization.

The initiative to establish the hospital follows Sneh's visit to Azerbaijan last year, when the two countries signed a medical cooperation agreement. Sheba Hospital in Israel will be responsible for the instruction and information given to local medical teams in Azerbaijan. □