



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The U.S. ambassador to Russia, Thomas Pickering, met with Moscow's chief rabbi to express solidarity with Russia's Jews amid a continuing dispute over the status of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The meeting came as Russian authorities demanded the closure of the agency's office in Pyatigorsk.

■ The office of Israeli Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu hinted that the new government would halt all Palestinian Authority activities in Jerusalem. The statement came after a meeting of foreign consuls at Orient House, the Palestinian headquarters in eastern Jerusalem. [Page 4]

■ Israeli Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu put off a planned trip to the United States until mid-July because he wants more time in Israel after he sets up the new government. The announcement came as his efforts to conclude coalition negotiations hit a snag. [Page 4]

■ Robert Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, asked Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) to release \$10 million of U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority that he has held up for more than six months. Gilman, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, did not respond to the request.

■ Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians signed a cooperation agreement in Oslo to use water resources efficiently. The accord did not take up the dispute over water ownership and rights.

■ Kurt Waldheim, former president of Austria and U.N. secretary-general, reportedly admits for the first time in his just-published autobiography that he erred in concealing his service for the Nazis. But he remains unrepentant about his actions and reproaches the World Jewish Congress and the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations for their harsh criticism.

■ Former SS Maj. Karl Hass, hurt after trying to escape testifying in the trial of Nazi Capt. Erich Priebke, reportedly testified from the hospital that he took part in Italy's worst wartime atrocity.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Years after Washington march, fear for Russian Jewry revived

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — In 1987, 250,000 American Jews marched on Washington, calling on then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to open the gates of the Soviet Union to Jewish emigration.

That dramatic expression of solidarity climaxed decades of American Jewish public concern over the fate of Soviet Jews.

But that concern receded as glasnost gave way to the collapse of communism and Soviet authorities relaxed emigration restrictions, allowing the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Now, as Russia's presidential elections slated for Sunday prove to be a critical test for the future of reform in the region, longtime Jewish experts and activists are tensely watching and waiting for the results.

Russian census figures put the number of Jews and their families at roughly 600,000, but the census is unreliable and the numbers are estimated by some to be much higher.

About 300,000 Russian Jews hold "invitations" from Israel as "an insurance policy," according to a highly placed Israeli official monitoring the situation closely.

Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, which is coordinating the U.S. Jewish watch over the elections, said there is serious concern over the prospect of Communist control of the Russian government.

Everything party officials have said "about which way the country should be moving makes us anxious about what the future might hold for the Jewish population," he said.

The worst-case scenario is a win by Communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov and an implementation of his militant anti-Western policy, a massive nationalization of private property and a crackdown on minority rights and emigration. But even the re-election of the favored candidate, President Boris Yeltsin, could lead to petty harassment of international groups as a concession to pressures by ultranationalists, experts say.

As it is, Russian officials recently suspended the credentials of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which encourages and oversees immigration to Israel.

While new papers of accreditation are due to be issued by Saturday, the day before the presidential contest, the suspension has been interpreted by some as a nationalist show of force to shore up Yeltsin's campaign.

This week, Russian authorities demanded the closure of the agency's office in Pyatigorsk within 72 hours, heightening concern.

'Preparing for the worst'

While the outside monitors of the fate of Russian Jews acknowledge that the stakes in the elections are high, most are afraid of sending the wrong signal by publicly expressing alarm.

Privately, some experts, many of whom are reluctant to use their names, say they are "preparing for the worst."

But they dismiss the bleakest projections as unlikely. They do not anticipate a flood of emigration or a crackdown on those wishing to leave.

Said the Israeli official: "It looks to us that, at least for the foreseeable future," the liberal emigration policy that has been in place for several years will not change.

Another organizational leader who declined to be identified said a win by Zyuganov would probably lead to a slight increase in Jews wanting to emigrate, "but not an avalanche."

Some 36,000 Jews have been emigrating annually from Russia in the past few years.

"We're most concerned about what would happen to the organizations" working with the Jewish community, the official said.

These organizations include the Jewish Agency, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society as well as several religious, cultural and human rights groups.

"The situation is worrisome, but not panic-inducing," said another

insider who travels monthly to the region and who insisted on anonymity.

"Most Jews are looking for a Yeltsin win, and people are basically holding their breath."

At the same time, everyone working in Jewish organizations in Russia "is being very careful not be seen as meddling and to conform to local legislation," the official continued. "They're trying to lay low."

Ten candidates are on the ballot. But the top contenders are Yeltsin, the incumbent who was elected as a candidate of democratic and economic reforms, and Zyuganov, a longtime Communist Party bureaucrat who is antagonistic toward the West and has close ultranationalist and anti-Semitic associates.

Yeltsin has been a vocal advocate of human rights and minority rights in Russia and issued a number of strong public statements in cooperation with the United States decrying discrimination, including anti-Semitism.

But he has disappointed many Russians who blame him for the country's economic woes.

In response to his sagging popularity and to pressure from nationalist and Communist members of Parliament, Yeltsin recently has shifted rightward.

The most critical sign was the replacement of his more liberal foreign minister with Yevgeny Primakov, "an old-style Soviet apparatchik with strong ties to the Arab world and little deference" to the West, according to a report issued by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Anti-Defamation League.

In an interview from Moscow, Martin Wenick, executive vice president of HIAS, said he found Jews in Russia nervous about Yeltsin's "zigs and zags."

But a win by Zyuganov clearly poses more of a threat to the Jews.

According to the National Conference report, Zyuganov is deeply troubled by what he perceives as the Jewish influence over a West that is hostile to Russia.

"The Western world's culture, ideology and worldview are increasingly influenced by the Jewish Diaspora," he has written. "Its influence grows literally by the hour, not just the day."

Had Stalin lived longer, he continued, "he would have restored Russia and saved it from the Cosmopolitans."

"'Cosmopolitan' is the Communist code word for Jew," the report states.

Recent polls show Yeltsin in the lead but experts caution Russian polls are unreliable. Most observers believe that no candidate will get the 50 percent needed to win and that there will be a runoff in July.

Less overt anti-Semitism than anticipated

It is in the runoff where the most troubling candidate of all — Vladimir Zhirinovskiy — could play an important role.

This man, head of the incongruously named Liberal Democratic Party, has won headlines as a rabid nationalist and anti-Semite, despite the fact that his father was Jewish.

He is now running fifth in the presidential polls, but his popularity has been underestimated in previous elections.

Wenick, who was in Russia this week trying to gauge sentiment and conditions prior to the elections, said there was less overt anti-Semitism in the campaign than Russian Jews had anticipated.

Instead, there was a lot of nationalism in which "all minorities get lumped together as the 'other.'"

Wenick's organization, HIAS, in this fiscal year is slated to bring 25,000 Jews from all the republics of the former Soviet Union to the United States as refugees.

Marina Belotserkovsky, the assistant director of

Russian communications for HIAS, said Jews in Russia today face a different kind of anti-Semitism.

"There used to be state anti-Semitism," said Belotserkovsky, who emigrated from Leningrad, now known as St. Petersburg, in 1989. "We couldn't get certain jobs or be accepted to certain universities. But, we were safe on the streets."

"Now it's moved from high governmental authority to the streets," she said. "People now are really not safe."

"There's a very mixed feeling" about emigration, Belotserkovsky added. "On the one hand, they don't want people to leave who are talented and smart."

"On the other, the scapegoats are leaving so who is there to blame if things go wrong? There is a very twisted mentality."

Belotserkovsky's reports from contacts in Russia differ from those of some experts who say that while there are incidents of anti-Semitism, the rising fear comes from widespread anarchy and crime that is not targeted at Jews.

For his part, Wenick cautioned against painting dire scenarios. "One needs to recognize there are some strictures in place to make it hard to entirely turn the clock back to the period of repression."

For Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the United Israel Appeal and head of the Jewish Agency's committee on the former Soviet Union, the uncertainty vindicates her longheld position that the Jewish world's work in the region remains unfinished. "We've been stating for five years that the issue of aliyah from the former Soviet Union is far from over," she said.

"People think it has ended and there is no further challenge," she said. "The scale is smaller, but the challenge remains." □

Argentina to pay fine to Iran for canceling nuclear contract

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentina will pay Iran a \$5.5 million fine for the cancellation of a \$48 million nuclear technology contract that featured the construction in Iran of a reactor with uranium-refining capabilities, official sources have said.

Argentina reportedly settled the case out of court after negotiations that were "hard and unfriendly," sources said last week.

In early February 1992, the Argentine government stopped the shipment of the small nuclear reactor to Tehran under pressure from the United States and Israel.

The Argentine-built reactor was part of a bilateral contract, which included other provisions, such as lowering the levels of enriched uranium at the core of the Tehran University research reactor. These other tasks were carried out by Argentine technicians without American objections.

The contract for the provision of the reactor had been signed between Argentina's INVAP, a state-owned atomic materials manufacturer, and Iran's Nuclear Energy Organization. INVAP is now building a nuclear facility in Egypt and bidding for a contract in Thailand.

Earlier this year, Tehran told the Argentine government that it would seek \$90 million in damages.

Also earlier, Reza Amrollah, head of the Iranian nuclear organization, said the reactor was needed "to train engineers and manufacture medical equipment, not to wage war."

Argentina and Iran recalled their ambassadors after the Argentine government accused the Iranians of involvement in the July 18, 1994, bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center that left 86 dead and at least 300 wounded. □

NJCRAC adopts strategic plan after averting Orthodox exit

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish community's national public affairs body has averted a walkout by the Orthodox Union after meeting the group's demands on dissent from collective policy positions on religious issues.

That paved the way for the approval of what has been a controversial strategic plan to strengthen the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

The plan, whose highlights include a new presence for NJCRAC in the nation's capital, was passed overwhelmingly by a special plenary session after the adoption of an O.U. amendment on the right of religious dissent within the organization.

The discussion leading up to the vote on the O.U. proposal was impassioned and sometimes poignant.

Much of it focused on the technical question of whether and when NJCRAC letterhead would be used to issue statements that religious movements felt that they could not endorse.

But the underlying challenge clearly was how to balance the need to keep all three religious movements — Orthodox, Conservative and Reform — in the NJCRAC fold to maintain its integrity and the need to preserve NJCRAC's ability to make an impact with its public statements.

After undergoing significant revisions before Monday's vote, the strategic plan had been heralded as a compromise that would keep NJCRAC intact as an umbrella body of 117 local community relations councils and 13 national agencies, including the O.U.

The new plan, for instance, abolished the veto enjoyed by each of the national agencies.

The veto, when exercised, effectively blocked NJCRAC from adopting public policy statements. This had been a thorn in the sides of community members who felt that their voices were being squelched in an anti-democratic fashion.

But the O.U. had strongly protested any plan to eliminate the veto, making it clear that it could not remain in NJCRAC without the ability to distance itself from positions that violated its fundamental religious convictions.

The O.U. has exercised the veto only twice in 14 years, both times in the 1980s.

One was over the endorsement of a Shabbat march for housing, and the other was over a resolution regarding Rabbi Meir Kahane when he was a member of the Israeli Knesset.

'No one will understand difference'

As a compromise, the new plan retained a special provision for a "religious conviction exception" to be available exclusively for religious bodies. The provision was widely seen as an attempt to placate the O.U. and keep it in the "family."

Still, under the new plan, such policy statements, if supported by a majority of NJCRAC members, would have been issued in the name of a "community caucus" under NJCRAC's official letterhead.

At Monday's session, O.U. representatives who had worked out the compromise announced that their own board had deemed it unacceptable.

The O.U. board instead proposed that statements subject to the "religious exception" provision be issued only in the name of a "community caucus" without NJCRAC's imprimatur.

"Our board said no one in the world will understand the difference" between a position issued by a community caucus on NJCRAC letterhead that has been

vetoed by the O.U. and a position endorsed by a majority of NJCRAC members, said Richard Stone, one of the O.U. representatives.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism staunchly allied itself with the O.U.'s position.

Religious denominations should have the right not to be identified "even by misperception" by a decision of the collective, said the United Synagogue's Menachem Rosensaft.

"This was not an unreasonable ultimatum by one group" and was not "an issue of how to keep the O.U. in" NJCRAC, said Rosensaft.

"This was about strengthening the Jewish community collectively to express its point of view as effectively as possible," he said.

"You can't have such a voice without including the religious movements."

NJCRAC is "the one vehicle in which the secular communities and all three major religious denominations are able to sit and debate and discuss" issues of public policy, he added.

The Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations also voiced support for the O.U. amendment, as did the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League.

"I think it is imperative to retain them in the agency," Phil Baum, AJCongress executive director, said of the O.U.

But the vote clearly was a blow to some of the plan's authors and a setback to the plan's efforts to strengthen NJCRAC's collective clout.

"NJCRAC tried to be accommodating, spending more time with [the O.U.] than any other agency," Lynn Lyss, chair of the strategic planning committee, said before the vote.

Indeed, a vote for the O.U. proposal "would render us invisible and our communal voice moot," Lyss said to the plenary.

"No single agency should be able to arrest the expression of a national public affairs consensus," she added.

"We urge you to vote no."

Elaine Wishner, a vice chair of NJCRAC, said in a quavering voice: "I want peace in the house and peace in this tent where we all dwell."

"But somehow I feel a loss in not being able to use my name," she said, referring to the decision on the use of the NJCRAC name.

Afterward, Lawrence Rubin, NJCRAC executive vice chairman, praised the "thoughtful quality" of the discussion, saying that "everyone was motivated by a sense of 'klal' (community) and maintaining the system."

As a result of the vote, there will be "progress toward collective expression, though not as much as we would like," he said.

Still, "it was necessary to keep the O.U. in the system and we can live with it," he added. □

Suspected bomber's detention extended

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Jerusalem court has extended by 15 days the detention of a 26-year-old Hebron man who was arrested earlier this month on suspicion of planning to carry out a suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

Rassan Ahmaro, a member of Hamas, was recently arrested near Jerusalem with a stolen identity card in his possession.

The Jerusalem Magistrates Court extended his detention for a second time Tuesday, after his name was discovered on a list of wanted Hamas fugitives. □

**Facing coalition difficulties,
Netanyahu postpones U.S. trip***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu's chances of forming a coalition before a self-imposed deadline waned, his office announced that he would not travel to the United States until mid-July.

Netanyahu had been tentatively scheduled to go to Washington at the end of this month.

The June trip was scheduled on the assumption that he would put together his new government by June 17, the first day of the Knesset session.

Netanyahu's office said he wanted more time to prepare for the trip.

Israel Radio reported that in light of the delay, his office had requested that U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher come to Israel beforehand.

Netanyahu's coalition talks with religious and secular centrist parties were still in full swing this week, and Cabinet appointments still had to be sorted out.

The effort was further complicated by the attorney general's announcement that two potential ministers in the Netanyahu government were under investigation.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert could face possible fraud charges in connection with a financial scandal from 1988.

Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair decided this week to prosecute Olmert for suspected involvement in creating false receipts as well as other misdeeds during the Likud Party's election campaign eight years ago, when he was party treasurer.

Olmert, a close ally of Netanyahu's, now has immunity as a member of the Knesset, a position he still holds.

He has denied any wrongdoing and has said he was sure that the mistake would become clear.

Meanwhile, Tsomet member Rafael Eitan, who joined the Likud bloc in the current elections, allegedly obtained and misused classified army documents.

Eitan, who acknowledged that he had seen the documents but said he did not know there was any wrongdoing involved, met with the attorney general Wednesday.

Ben-Yair said Eitan could be appointed to the Cabinet — but not to any posts that have access to sensitive material.

This would rule out the public security portfolio, a new post Eitan was expected to be given.

The Tsomet leader met later Wednesday with Netanyahu. He said Ben-Yair had assured him that the police investigation into the matter would likely be completed within a week. Eitan asked that the incoming premier wait to make any offers.

Deri in hospital

Meanwhile, another Knesset member whose political party is involved in coalition negotiations with the Likud remained in the hospital Wednesday.

Aryeh Deri of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party was admitted Monday night after suffering a minor stroke that party members blamed on what they called "media hounding" of their leader over the corruption trial he is now facing.

Those close to him said he was upset by an interview he had given earlier in the day to Israel Radio.

Deri's parliamentary immunity was lifted during his tenure as interior minister under the Rabin government. He was forced to resign from the post to face trial.

Doctors at Hadassah Hospital in the Ein Kerem section of Jerusalem said Deri was in satisfactory condition. □

**Netanyahu's office hints
at shutting down Orient House***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu's office has hinted that it will take steps to halt activities at Orient House, the de facto Palestinian headquarters in eastern Jerusalem.

A statement issued this week by Netanyahu's office said the incoming government would adopt a less tolerant policy than the outgoing leadership on attempts by the Palestinian Authority to operate in Jerusalem.

Wednesday's statement also stressed that only the members of the Netanyahu government were authorized to speak for Israel in meetings with Arab and other foreign leaders.

The remarks were made after the senior Palestinian official in Jerusalem, Faisal Hussein, held separate meetings earlier this week with a senior Likud official and with a group of foreign consular officials.

On Tuesday, Hussein met at Tel Aviv's city hall with Mayor Ronnie Milo for what were the first discussions between a senior Palestinian official and a Likud member since Netanyahu was elected late last month.

Milo stressed that he was not acting on behalf of Netanyahu, though he had consulted with the incoming prime minister's leading foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, before agreeing to Hussein's request to meet.

Milo, a Likud moderate, said after the meeting that he felt that the discussion would give Palestinians dismayed by the election of a right-wing government "a sign that doors and opportunities are still open."

Milo went one step further, voicing the opinion that a meeting between Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would take place "sooner or later."

Netanyahu said in the months before the May 29 national elections that he would consider meeting Arafat only if it would be good for national security.

But since his election, he has limited official contact with the Palestinians to phone calls between Gold and Arafat's second-in-command, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu-Mazen.

Angry response

In the statement issued Wednesday, Netanyahu's office called on foreign diplomats to "demonstrate responsibility during the transition period before the new government takes power, and not to take steps liable to harm the peace process."

The statement came in the wake of another session Hussein held Tuesday, when he met with consular officials from 10 nations at Orient House.

Hussein told the foreign officials that he was concerned about the future of the self-rule negotiations, and in particular the future status of Jerusalem, after the defeat of Shimon Peres in the elections.

The statements issued by Netanyahu's office drew an angry response from Palestinian officials, who said meeting with foreign consular officials was a long-held practice at Orient House.

The Palestinian officials said they would react strongly to any Israeli effort to close Orient House or to curtail its operations.

In a separate development, the Palestinian legislative council canceled a meeting scheduled to take place this week in Nablus.

The meeting was called off in protest, after dozens of Palestinian Council members from the Gaza Strip were unable to travel to the meeting in the West Bank town because they refused to undergo Israeli security checks before leaving Gaza. □