



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Russia denied an entry visa to David Harris, the executive director of the American Jewish Committee, who was planning to attend a Jewish conference in St. Petersburg. The denial came amid renewed Jewish concerns on the eve of Russia's presidential runoff. [Page 3]**

■ **More than 60 graves in Warsaw's Jewish cemetery were reportedly destroyed, police said. Poland's chief rabbi urged authorities to take strict measures to prevent such incidents in the future because they perpetuated the stereotype of Poles as anti-Semites.**

■ **Hundreds of thousands of Israeli public workers staged a one-hour strike to protest a planned sell-off of government assets and drastic budget cuts. Israel Radio ceased broadcasts, ports were closed and banks opened late.**

■ **Israel's Labor Party re-elected Raanan Cohen as faction leader, which is an influential position now that Labor is in the opposition. Cohen defeated Yossi Beilin in a 17-15 vote.**

■ **An Israeli cadet in officer's training was electrocuted when the antenna of his communications equipment hit a high-tension wire. The incident occurred near Ben Shemen. [Page 4]**

■ **Israel launched another road safety campaign in the wake of rising casualties from traffic accidents. During a special Knesset debate on the subject, Transportation and Energy Minister Yitzhak Levy promised that a special task force formed to deal with the issue would come up with proposals within a month. [Page 4]**

■ **Three Israeli soldiers who crossed the border this week to share a neighborly cup of coffee with their Jordanian counterparts returned to find their commanders less than pleased. The army ordered the arrest of the men and promised harsh discipline. [Page 4]**

■ **Palestinian activists reportedly urged Hebron residents to throw stones and firebombs at Israeli troops and settlers to protest their presence in the West Bank city.**

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish Agency looks to future amid fiscal and identity crises

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Jewish Agency for Israel is in the throes of a struggle for its survival.

It is seeking to reform itself in order to retain a meaningful role in Israel and remain attractive to donors in the Diaspora, who increasingly are bypassing its campaign in favor of other channels of philanthropy to Israel.

Many of the 400 delegates to the agency's annual assembly last week left Jerusalem saying that they were frustrated that little of substance was achieved at a time when the agency is experiencing both fiscal and identity crises.

In an effort to ease a crushing cash-flow crisis, the United Jewish Appeal and the federations agreed to an emergency transfer of about \$20 million.

The agency, the primary recipient in Israel of funds from this joint campaign, faces a cumulative debt of \$76 million.

Many delegates complained that the agency's governance remains bogged down by the political and ideological differences between the assembly partners from Israel and the Diaspora.

The historical governance structure of the Jewish Agency and its partner, the World Zionist Organization, has drawn fire for its irrelevancy and waste.

That, combined with dwindling campaign dollars and a changing relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, has prompted long-range plans by Chairman Avraham Burg and others for the agency's radical downsizing, reorganization and redefinition of its mission.

In addition to the broad issues addressed by the assembly delegates, the agency:

- passed a resolution concerning religious freedom in Israel
- tabled a resolution on the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education
- appointed a new director general.

When pressed to defend and explain the agency's purpose, delegates invariably point to the success of the continuing aliyah from the former Soviet Union.

The agency has overseen the immigration of about 65,000 annually and nearly 700,000 during the past six years.

But many, including Burg, who sought but failed to win approval of the establishment of a strategic planning unit, are looking ahead to other roles that the agency can play as a unique instrument of world Jewry.

"While focusing on this sacred mission" of aliyah, Burg said in an interview, "we have to prepare the ground for the post-rescue era."

Although many welcome the reform plans as long overdue, for now, "the agency is in a tailspin," as one North American delegate put it.

Indeed, a sense of flux and uncertainty seemed pervasive.

'Grass roots doesn't understand'

Marlene Post, national president of Hadassah, which is represented in the WZO, told one forum, "The Jewish Agency has had a long and glorious history," but "it is faced with critical decisions about where it is headed."

In the Diaspora, she said, "it is not particularly relevant."

The grass roots "doesn't understand it and it doesn't make a difference in their lives."

In spite of its troubles, it was clear that many Diaspora delegates do celebrate the agency's role in rescue and resettlement and want to maintain it as a vehicle for Jewish peoplehood, education and Israel-Diaspora partnership.

For many of the North American delegates, the highlight of the assembly and the best showcase for the agency's expression of a Jewish voice was a resolution unanimously adopted in support of Jewish unity and calling on the Israeli government to preserve Jewish religious freedom as it now exists in Israel.

The highly charged resolution was fashioned in direct response to

agreements made between the new Likud government and the Orthodox parties in the Knesset, which aim to reverse legal gains recently made by the Reform and Conservative movements through Israel's Supreme Court.

The assembly adopted the resolution after vigorous debate and after approving a series of compromises.

Although the word "pluralism" was deleted from the original draft of the resolution in deference to the modern Orthodox members of the assembly, its passage nonetheless was construed as a victory by supporters of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism.

Originally proposed by the UJA, the United Israel Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, the final resolution called on the government not to enact or amend legislation that would change the "current situation" related to religious matters.

"This is a historic moment," Shoshana Cardin, UJA chair, said before the vote.

Afterward, she said, "We came together to preserve the unity of klal Yisrael. I don't recall such a show of unanimity."

The assembly also approved a resolution proposed by Burg to form a commission of representatives from the Orthodox, Reform and Conservative movements for ongoing consultations with the government on religious matters.

But the spirit of compromise, many here said, also was driven by an implicit understanding that not endorsing religious pluralism would threaten the fund-raising campaign and the agency by alienating non-Orthodox donors.

Philip Meltzer, president of the Association of Reform Zionists of America, who was instrumental in crafting the compromise, wants to see follow-up by the fund-raising establishment and the agency commission.

"We expect all these organizations will join us in protesting any 'changes in the current situation,' and we will hold them to it publicly," Meltzer said. "In no way would we want to stop money going to the federations from Reform Jews."

But, he added, Reform Jews will "have to be more actively supporting progressive institutions in Israel, and we're going to urge them to do so."

Since the mid-1980s, the Jewish Agency has been funding the Israeli institutions of the three major streams of Judaism, currently funneling roughly \$1 million to each.

'Reform, re-energize, reawaken'

Meanwhile, the agency's economic situation remains dire. The agency has undertaken a plan to cut \$500 million over five years to cover deficits caused in part by flagging fund-raising campaigns by the UJA and federations, which funnel about \$220 million annually to the agency through the United Israel Appeal.

Richard Wexler, the new president of the UJA, told the assembly that the UJA is poised to "reform, re-energize and reawaken" the campaigns.

Next year's budget, proposed at \$387 million and slated to be finalized in October, is down from this year's \$450 million budget.

The sharp decline is a result of the transfer to the government of the agency's Youth Aliyah program, a network of villages for needy and immigrant youth.

Roughly half of the total budget is allocated toward immigration, mostly from the former Soviet Union, and initial immigrant absorption.

Another large portion, about \$44 million, goes to the Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, whose status as an independent self-governing body remains a source of frustration to many of the Diaspora fund-raisers. They question the effectiveness of some of its work in the United States.

Officials of the Joint Authority, however, ardently defend their work, whose hallmark has been promoting Jewish and Zionist identity, with a strong emphasis on Israel Experience programs.

A resolution requiring more accountability of the Joint Authority was tabled because opponents charged that the resolution violated its bylaws.

But the initiative clearly reflected the unhappiness by some of the fund-raisers with the system and "the cultural differences between the two bodies," one source said, referring to the Jewish Agency and the WZO, which share governance of the Joint Authority.

Meanwhile, the agency is working toward a reorganization into three authorities dealing with immigration, Jewish education and the development of Israel in cooperation with the Diaspora, exemplified by the program Partnership 2000.

That program pairs U.S. cities with Israeli regions for joint projects.

In Burg's vision, the WZO would be combined with the agency, which he would like to see called "Bayit," the Hebrew word for home and an acronym for "Israel-Diaspora covenant."

It would integrate the Zionist content of the WZO's activities into the Jewish Agency's work and eliminate the duplication created by the two separate bureaucracies.

The two entities have begun restructuring negotiations, with the aim of concluding by next June. But the timetable and the results are uncertain.

So far, the WZO, which will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Zionist movement next year, has opted to remain independent but dramatically streamline its operations and focus primarily on Zionist youth activity and encouragement of aliyah.

The WZO's \$30 million budget is funded by the agency.

Under the terms of current proposals being negotiated, the agency would continue funding it, albeit at lower levels, for a period of three years, after which the WZO has reserved the right to raise funds independently if it does not wish to join the agency.

On a separate but also politically sensitive matter, there was little public talk at the assembly about the agency's ongoing bureaucratic tangles in Russia that are expected to be resolved in the coming weeks.

Russian authorities suspended the agency's operating license earlier this year and curtailed its activities in several Russian cities.

The agency is working to submit a new application for accreditation.

In other business, the Board of Governors approved the appointment of Shimshon Shoshani as the new director general of the agency. He now serves as director general of the Education Ministry. □

New chief for Israeli air force

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Maj. Gen. Eitan Ben-Eliahu took over Monday as the new commander of the Israel Air Force, replacing Maj. Gen. Herzl Bodinger, who is retiring from the service.

Ben-Eliahu, 52, born and educated in Jerusalem, is a veteran combat pilot.

Until recently, Ben-Eliahu served as assistant director of the Israel Defense Force General Staff Operations Branch.

Ben-Eliahu takes over at a time when the acquisition of long-range missiles by Iran and several Arab countries may pose a threat to the Israeli air force's strategic superiority in the region. □

Yeltsin aide's remarks, denial of visa to U.S. Jew cause alarm

By Lev Krichevsky

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (JTA) — Public remarks by the Kremlin's new security chief and the denial of a visa to an American Jewish leader are raising new concerns on the eve of the decisive round of Russia's presidential race.

Alexander Lebed omitted Judaism when listing Russia's faith groups in a speech last week.

President Boris Yeltsin appointed Lebed his national security adviser after the retired general placed third in the inconclusive June 16 presidential elections.

Yeltsin faces Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov in Wednesday's runoff.

Western religious sects represent "a direct threat to Russia's security," Lebed said in his address to supporters that was aimed at building support for Yeltsin.

"We have established traditional religions — Russian Orthodoxy, Islam and Buddhism," Lebed said, adding that these religions should be allowed to develop and flourish.

On Monday, the American Jewish Committee revealed that its executive director, David Harris, was denied a Russian visa, preventing him from attending a conference here this week on Jews in the former Soviet Union. AJCommittee is co-sponsoring the conference.

"Much as I would like to believe that this experience was nothing more than a bureaucratic snafu, I cannot," Harris said.

"Were it a snafu, the Russian authorities had ample time to correct their mistake. They did not despite the best efforts of the U.S. government."

Harris, an activist on behalf of Soviet Jewry in the 1970s and 1980s, was thrown out of the Soviet Union in 1974 while teaching there. But he returned in 1990 as part of an AJCommittee delegation.

Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said he was surprised about Harris' visa problem. Levin said there had not been another case of an American Jewish leader being denied a visa since the collapse of the Soviet Union five years ago.

Three other AJCommittee officials attending the conference received visas.

Meanwhile, several Russian Jewish leaders attending the conference expressed concern about Lebed's comments.

Was it omitted intentionally?

Zinovi Kogan, leader of Russia's largest Reform congregation, Moscow's Hineini, said Lebed had intentionally omitted Judaism from his speech in order to please the nationalist audience he was addressing.

"He might have also been mistaken thinking that the faiths he did mention were more traditional for Russia than Judaism," Kogan said. "Lebed should have been informed that Jews, like other minorities, lived in Russia many centuries ago."

Some Jewish activists cautiously attributed the retired general's comments to his lack of experience as a politician.

"Lebed expressed his personal opinion that shouldn't influence in any way the general political situation" in Russia, said Vladimir Raskin of the Moscow Research Center for Human Rights. "Lebed was saying things that contradict the Russian Constitution, which guaranteed freedom of religion and equality for all faiths."

Julie Brooks, of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said Lebed's remarks reflect "his lack of sophistication."

Raskin said it was too early to judge whether such remarks from the mouth of the nation's top-ranked defense official could lead to harmful consequences for Russian Jews.

"We'll see it after the elections," he said.

Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress and a former member of the Russian Parliament, described Lebed as a man sharing popular anti-Semitic prejudices. But he did not see such views underlying Lebed's remarks.

Some Jewish leaders believe that Lebed's comments are foreboding of a shift in governmental policy, even if Yeltsin wins the election.

"I think we'll hear more of such careless or deliberate statements in the near future," said Tankred Golenpolsky, a Moscow Jewish activist.

Lebed's remarks and the Harris visa controversy came amid an ongoing dispute between the Jewish Agency for Israel and Russian authorities over the agency's accreditation.

The agency recently applied for renewal of its license to operate in Russia, after Russian authorities suspended the accreditation in April and subsequently curtailed agency activities in several cities.

Russian authorities have refused to renew the agency's license, claiming that technical problems remain in the agency's registration documents. The agency has said it would resubmit its application, probably after this week's presidential runoff. □

Israeli Arabs meet with Netanyahu

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met this week with Arab Knesset members, who urged his government to resume negotiations with the Palestinians.

Abdel Wahab Darawshe, of the United Arab List, later told Israel Radio that in their discussion, he stressed the importance for a meeting between the Israeli prime minister and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat if the peace process is to continue.

Netanyahu has said he would meet with Arafat if it was necessary for Israel's security.

Meanwhile, he has authorized lower-level representatives to meet with Arafat and other Palestinian Authority officials.

Also in their meeting, Darawshe called on Netanyahu to fulfill all the commitments Israel had made in its agreements with the Palestinians, including the Israeli troop redeployment in Hebron, Army Radio reported.

According to Darawshe, Netanyahu responded that he was still studying the issue. □

Netanyahu to raise MIA issue

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said this week that he would raise the issue of Israeli MIAs with President Clinton.

Netanyahu is scheduled to meet with Clinton on July 9 at the White House.

The prime minister met Sunday with members of the Ron Arad family.

He promised to continue efforts to free the airman, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1986.

Netanyahu said the matter of missing Israeli servicemen unified all governments.

The prime minister said he discussed the matter last week in his talks here with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. □

Palestinians may offer civil weddings for Israelis

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Palestinian Reno?

A group of businessmen has proposed making it possible for Israelis to have civil weddings in the Palestinian autonomous areas.

Civil marriages are not performed in the Jewish state.

Until now, Jewish citizens who did not want to marry through the Orthodox rabbinate have often flown to Cyprus for a civil ceremony.

Now, they would have to drive no farther than Gaza or Jericho.

A group of Israeli and Palestinian entrepreneurs recently raised the marriage matter with Freij Abu Medein, who is the Palestinian Authority official in charge of legal issues, it was reported in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot.

Abu Medein apparently was not adverse to the idea.

"An office has been opened in Jericho where Israelis will soon be able to marry," he was quoted as saying.

Israeli Interior Minister Eli Suissa has put his foot down, saying that the new government has to find an overall solution to the problem.

But there is another hitch to getting hitched in this way.

The Palestinian self-rule areas do not represent a sovereign state, which could complicate government recognition of civil marriages performed there. □

A sabra in Connecticut slam-dunks to the NBA

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli sports took a leap forward as Connecticut College basketball star Doron Sheffer became the first sabra to be drafted by the National Basketball Association.

The 24-year-old Ramat HaSharon native was picked in the second round by the Los Angeles Clippers.

Observers noted that the match seemed a good one — on the court and off.

Los Angeles' climate is not too different from Israel's, and the City of Angels has a significant Jewish and Israeli population. □

Coffee break causes trouble

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Three Israeli soldiers who crossed the border this week to share a neighborly cup of coffee with their Jordanian counterparts returned to find their commanders less than pleased.

The Israelis crossed the border Sunday night to meet soldiers at a Jordanian army post, an action that violates regulations, an army statement said.

The three soldiers returned to the Jewish state hours later.

The army ordered their arrest of the men and promised harsh discipline.

Israel and Jordan signed a formal peace treaty in 1994. □

3 nations create high-tech fund

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel, Jordan and the United States have established a trilateral fund to encour-

age research and development of high-tech projects in the region.

Each of the participating countries contributed \$1 million to the fund.

The \$1 million will be used for half the financing for various projects, Israel Radio reported. □

Mad cows threaten kosher trade

By Simon Rocker

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON (JTA) — The mad-cow scare has plunged the kosher trade into crisis, with job cuts looming as a result of a drastic fall in beef-eating.

The London Board for Shechitah, which is the city's main supplier of kosher meat, said last week that it had been losing several thousands of dollars a week since April.

"We're sustaining a financial hemorrhage which has to be stopped," said Charles Oster, president of the board.

In March, the government of Britain had announced a possible link between mad-cow disease and the incidence of the deadly Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease in young people.

A 45 percent drop in sales indicates that efforts to persuade the British public that kosher beef is safe have failed.

The board is discussing plans to lay off some employees.

It also wants to withdraw the annual grants it provides for services rendered by rabbis. □

Zeus figurine a 'fishy' finding

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fishermen off Ashkelon netted an ancient bronze figurine of Zeus, the Greek king of the gods.

The catch was turned over to Antiquities Authority officials.

They speculated that the 2,000-year-old statuette had sunk with a ship that had once sailed the region's waters. □

Cadet accidentally electrocuted

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A cadet in the officer's training course was electrocuted when the antenna of his communications equipment hit a high-tension wire.

The incident occurred during an exercise in the Ben Shemen area.

The cadet was buried Monday.

In recent years, three separate electrocution accidents have resulted in the deaths of three Israeli soldiers. □

New road safety effort under way

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel launched another road safety campaign in the wake of rising casualties from traffic accidents.

During a special Knesset debate on the subject, Yitzhak Levy, Israel's new transportation and energy minister, promised that a special task force formed to deal with the issue would come up with proposals within a month.

He said that a total of more than 1,000 people died on Israel's roads in 1994 and 1995. □