

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Thousands of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union who have been in the United States more than five years, and who are not yet citizens, would lose access to Medicaid and Aid to Families With Dependent Children, according to a provision added to welfare reform legislation being debated by the House. Two Jewish activists, in separate letters that were hand-delivered to President Clinton, protested the measure, which also calls for legal immigrants who are on welfare to lose access to four key support programs.**

■ **Moscow granted accreditation to the Jewish Agency for Israel, after triggering alarm by canceling it in April. The renewal came on the heels of the visit by Vice President Al Gore, who took up the issue with Russian officials.**

■ **Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu hosted Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Kabari in Tel Aviv in what was his first meeting with an Arab leader since winning the national elections in May. The surprise meeting came on the eve of Netanyahu's scheduled visit to Cairo, where he will discuss the peace process with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. [Page 3]**

■ **The Shi'ite Hezbollah movement confirmed that it was discussing with German mediators a deal to return to Israel the bodies of two Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon 10 years ago. In exchange, some 200 Shi'ite Muslim prisoners held by the Jewish state would be released. [Page 2]**

■ **Paul Touvier of France, jailed for life for crimes against humanity in World War II, died in a prison hospital outside Paris. Touvier, 81, was convicted in 1994 of ordering the execution of Jewish hostages by German forces in Rileux-la-Pape near Lyon during the Nazi occupation.**

■ **Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) sent a letter to Russian President Boris Yeltsin to protest Russia's recent decision not to issue a visa to David Harris, American Jewish Committee executive director. More than 40 other U.S. representatives also signed the letter.**

UJA, CJF now considering 'partnership,' not merger*By Cynthia Mann*

NEW YORK (JTA) — A new proposal has surfaced to join the United Jewish Appeal with the Council of Jewish Federations through a common board and executive committee, while maintaining separate staffs and chief executives.

The draft "partnership" plan, which emerged from a meeting last week in Chicago, is expected to garner more support than a more far-reaching and controversial plan to merge the CJF and UJA with the United Israel Appeal.

That plan essentially was shelved after opposition reached a peak at the May CJF quarterly meetings in Washington. Critics charged that the initiative was too radical and fast-paced and did not reflect broad communal consultation. They also feared that allocations to Israel and other overseas Jewish communities would be placed at risk.

The effort to restructure the American Jewish community's central fund-raising entities was undertaken about two years ago to invigorate flagging annual fund-raising campaigns and render the fund-raising apparatus more efficient and effective.

These campaigns, which yield about \$720 million annually, already are run jointly by federations and the UJA. Federations decide how much money to keep at home for local programs and funnel the overseas allocation to the UJA for distribution. But some of the fund-raising functions have been blurred in recent years, with the CJF getting into venues historically in the purview of the UJA, such as development, planned giving and endowment. This, some say, has led to duplication, waste and confusion.

A key provision in the latest proposal aims to remedy this by assigning the UJA the responsibility for "all fund-raising activities," and the CJF, the umbrella body for local federations, responsibility for serving federations and communities through domestic programs.

It is clear that the strategy and sensitivity surrounding the latest proposal reflects the lessons learned in the collapse of its predecessor. Its authors stress that it is a "concept," rather than a "plan," for a "working partnership," rather than a "merger" or even a "consolidation."

And, in an evident effort to avoid charges that players are being steamrolled or shut out of the planning process, the authors of the "concept" are aggressively seeking input from a cross section of representatives from both the UJA and federation world. Also, the proposal focuses conspicuously on the single modest change in governance and steers clear of any reference to an incremental approach toward a more far-reaching restructuring plan.

The current lay structures of the UJA and the CJF would continue to exist and would jointly appoint the new "superboard" and executive committee of the "partnership." One of the thorniest challenges of the earlier plan was how to ensure that a sufficient level of overseas allocations would be maintained by federations, which are struggling to meet intensifying local needs with scarcer dollars.

Joint lay 'superboard'

Federations, which prize their autonomy in making allocations decisions, balked at various efforts to win specific overseas funding commitments from them. The new proposal does not take this on directly. Rather, it calls for the two chief executives to report to a joint lay "superboard" of directors and a joint executive committee, each of which would be made up equally of federation representatives and representatives of the UJA.

That balance of power is expected to help reassure advocates of overseas allocations that they will have a fair platform, said Joel Tauber, co-chair of the committee charged with the restructuring task.

"UJA felt secure that it had 50 percent representation for overseas needs," said Tauber, who added, "We will rely on the good intentions of federations to maintain or increase their allocations overseas as the campaign increases."

"We are hoping that a united effort will do more to increase allocations overall," he said.

The money raised for overseas programs by the "partnership" would

still be distributed to the United Israel Appeal and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The UIA provides funding to the Jewish Agency for Israel, while the JDC provides humanitarian aid to Jewish communities around the globe. Winning the confidence of these two agencies that overseas needs will get their fair share may be critical to the plan's success.

Because the two bodies are technically the owners of the UJA, they ostensibly would have to sign off on whatever legal partnership is entered into by the UJA and the CJF.

Shoshana Cardin, who chairs the UIA, has already welcomed the plan as a "logical, positive move."

"It is sort of like a trial marriage," where "nobody loses," she said.

"It is an excellent way to develop close working relationships, combine areas that have been duplicative and save money on administrative operations."

Cardin, an ardent advocate for Israel, said it would be the responsibility for the system as a whole to meet its overseas obligations.

"It will be incumbent on everyone — both 50 percents — to advocate for overseas needs. The federations will have to recognize that the donors to the campaigns believe 50 percent is going to Israel and overseas needs anyway, and we have the data" to prove it, she said.

The architects of the new proposal also believe that it will be more popular than its predecessor, because there will be fewer parties to the agreement and all the fine-print details will be worked out later by the new executive committee and board, Tauber said.

A group of about 50 to 60 UJA officers and past chairmen discussed the draft plan in Chicago shortly after it was first aired, he said.

And plans call for consultations with presidents and executives of the federations and the CJF executive committee before the next CJF quarterly meetings in September, when the full restructuring committee will meet again.

"What we learn will be taken back to the full restructuring committee" and later incorporated into a final plan, said Tauber.

The CJF executive committee is slated to discuss the proposal at its regularly scheduled meeting next week in Chicago. □

Hezbollah, Israel may be near deal on return of dead soldiers

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Expectations heightened this week that an exchange would soon take place of two Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon 10 years ago for the release of Lebanese prisoners held by Israel.

The Shi'ite Hezbollah movement confirmed this week that it was discussing the exchange with German mediators.

On Wednesday, reports surfaced that a team of six German officials, including a coroner and forensic expert who had Israeli army dental charts and other records of the missing men, arrived in Beirut to examine the remains prior to their return.

Initial reports said the bodies would be returned Wednesday.

But Hezbollah radio reported from Beirut that the exchange was postponed because Lebanese sources had leaked details of the agreement.

Bernd Schmidbauer, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's intelligence adviser, arrived this week in Damascus to finalize details of the agreement, according to Lebanese sources.

They added that if the terms of the exchange were finalized, it could take place before the end of the week.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said, "There's certainly room for more optimism," though similar situations had developed in the past that ended in disappointment.

It was generally assumed that the remains of the two Israeli soldiers were those of American-born Yosef Fink and Rachamim Alsheikh, who were both killed in a February 1986 terrorist ambush of a convoy in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah has long admitted that it has the remains of the two soldiers and would be willing to exchange them for the release of some 200 Lebanese prisoners held by Israel and by its ally, the South Lebanon Army.

It was also reported that under the deal, Israel would hand over the remains of terrorists killed in the southern Lebanon security zone who are buried in northern Israel.

Channel Two Television reported that graves were being dug up in that area.

Israel said it would not free two Hezbollah leaders, Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani, unless it received information about the fate of Ron Arad, an air force navigator shot down over Lebanon in 1986.

Obeid was abducted from his home in Lebanon by Israeli commandos in 1988; Dirani was abducted in a similar operation in 1994.

Israel says Arad is being held by Iran, which supports Hezbollah.

The families of Alsheikh and Fink were cautious about the latest developments.

"I won't believe anyone until I am convinced that this is my son's body," said Alsheikh's father, Shlomo.

"The media is taking this seriously, and we do feel that something is happening. But the end is still far off. I am still afraid that Hezbollah will change its mind at the last minute."

He said he had not yet received any official word from the Israel Defense Force regarding the return of his son's remains.

"We want it to come to some sort of end and get on with our lives," said Fink's mother, Hadas.

"We want our son's body brought here to be buried."

In addition to Arad, Fink and Alsheikh, three other Israeli servicemen are missing in Lebanon.

Zechariah Baumel, Avi Feldman and Yehuda Katz disappeared June 11, 1982, in the battle of Sultan Yakoub at the beginning of Operation Peace for Galilee. □

Israelis develop new sweetener

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Having a sweet tooth need no longer be fattening.

Israeli scientists say they have developed a calorie-free sweetener 300 times sweeter than natural sugar.

The sweetener, stevioside, was presented at an international conference on sweeteners this week in Jerusalem.

It was described as a possible replacement for such sweeteners as saccharine and aspartame in foods and beverages.

The sweetening element is extracted and purified from a plant, *stevia rebaudiana*, in a process developed by researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Although the plant grows along the border of Paraguay and Uruguay, it has been successfully cultivated in the Negev.

The plant was recently approved as a dietary supplement by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. □

Netanyahu, Arab leaders meet on next steps of peace process

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu talked this week with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Kabariti in what was his first meeting with an Arab leader since winning the Jewish state's general elections in May.

The surprise meeting in Tel Aviv took place Wednesday, after Kabariti met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa also was at the Cairo meeting, at which the leaders discussed the course of the peace process.

Netanyahu is himself scheduled to meet Thursday in Cairo with Mubarak, who is expected to play a prominent mediation role in talks Israel holds with the Palestinians and Syria.

Mubarak's role as a regional leader was bolstered by an Arab summit held last month in Cairo at which 21 members of the Arab League met to coordinate strategy in the wake of Netanyahu's victory.

Netanyahu acknowledged this role when he told a joint news conference after meeting with Kabariti, "We both recognize the central importance of Egypt as the cornerstone for the Arab-Israeli peace."

The Jordanian prime minister stressed that Arab states would wait to hear from Netanyahu directly, rather than judge him based on public remarks he had already made. Kabariti also said after meeting with Netanyahu that Israel and Jordan shared the common interest of seeing the peace process move forward, but added that "there is concern" among Arab leaders about the positions Netanyahu will adopt regarding the peace process.

Netanyahu's victory in the May 29 elections over Labor Party incumbent Shimon Peres prompted concern — and anger — among Arab states that the Likud leader would abandon the land-for-peace principle that has been the basis of negotiations over the past several years.

Only a few hours

Netanyahu said at the joint news conference that he was interested in expanding Israel's ties with the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Foreign Minister David Levy said Wednesday that he expected to meet Arafat in coming days, but gave no further details. His announcement came the same day that Arafat refused to hold a meeting with Netanyahu's political adviser, Dore Gold. Palestinian sources said Arafat snubbed Gold because of Netanyahu's refusal to hold a face-to-face meeting with Arafat.

Gold traveled Wednesday to Cairo to prepare for the prime minister's trip.

Netanyahu is scheduled to be in Egypt for only a few hours. He is set to travel to Amman, Jordan, for talks later this month.

Egypt's ambassador to Israel was clear in remarks he made on the eve of Netanyahu's visit that there was only one message Arab states were interested in hearing.

Netanyahu "must understand that without the land-for-peace principle, peace with security is incomprehensible and even impossible," Mohammed Basiouny said Wednesday at a Tel Aviv symposium on the peace process.

The Prime Minister's Office said Netanyahu's talks with Mubarak were intended to let the two get acquainted.

But Basiouny said Mubarak would push Netanyahu to act quickly to meet Israel's obligations in its agreements with the Palestinians. These include carrying out the Israeli troop redeployment from most of the West Bank town of Hebron and lifting the nearly five-month closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"We shall judge the actions of his government," Basiouny said. "We don't want to put him in a corner."

Netanyahu's office announced Wednesday that Israel would soon lift the closure, but provided no details of when the move would be implemented or whether it would be tied to actions carried out by the Palestinians.

The Egyptian ambassador stressed that the Israeli leader's actions with regard to the Palestinians would also be a test of faith in negotiations with other Arab states.

Turning to the Syrian track, Basiouny said Israel could not reach a peace agreement with Syria unless it returned the Golan Heights.

The U.S. ambassador to Israel, who also addressed the symposium, said he believed that Syria was willing to normalize relations along the lines of those Israel has with Egypt and Jordan.

But he stressed that this was possible only with the return of the Golan Heights. "Syria is prepared to normalize its relations with Israel — open borders, free flow of people and goods, and embassies," Martin Indyk said. "They just want a high price in return."

The previous Labor-led government had avowed its willingness to give up the Golan in return for a full peace with Syria, but little progress was achieved at the time in Israeli-Syrian talks.

Netanyahu wants to negotiate peace with Syria, but has pledged to not yield territory on the Golan. □

U.S. moves toward penalization of firms investing in Iran, Libya

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States has moved one step closer to imposing broad economic sanctions against foreign firms that invest in Iran and Libya.

In a voice vote Tuesday night, the Senate approved a measure that would impose sanctions on overseas businesses that contract with Libya's and Iran's lucrative energy industries or assist the outcast states in building up their chemical or nuclear weapons programs.

The House of Representatives unanimously passed a similar measure last month.

House and Senate negotiators will now meet to hammer out differences in each version of the bill. The Senate opted to include tougher sanctions against Libya. President Clinton is known to favor the House version and has said he would sign a compromise bill.

"The bill sends a message that the United States is not willing to stand by as rogue regimes threaten U.S. interests and those of its allies," said an American Israel Public Affairs Committee official.

The bill would force foreign firms to choose between doing business with Iran and Libya or the United States. Under the threat of the legislation, at least four European companies have backed away from planned deals with Iran worth more than a total of \$10 billion.

By cutting off money to Iran's energy industry, supporters of the bill hope that the cash squeeze will curtail the militant Islamic regime's support for terrorism.

Both the House and Senate versions require the president to impose at least two of six possible sanctions on a company that violates U.N. embargoes or that invests more than \$40 million in developing oil and gas resources, chemical weapons or nuclear weapons. The leveling of such sanctions would amount to a de facto boycott.

The sanctions include denying the firm U.S. government loans and credits, banning the company from bidding for U.S. government contracts, preventing the firm from receiving export licenses to ship goods to the United States and blocking loans from U.S. banks. □

Diaspora envoy: Poland holds special place in Jewish memory

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW (JTA) — One year ago, in an attempt to improve often-troubled relations between Poland and the world's Jewish community, the Polish government named Krzysztof Sliwinski to the unprecedented post of roving ambassador to the Jewish Diaspora.

The initiative came largely from Poland's then-Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, himself an Auschwitz survivor who has been honored by Israel as a Righteous Among the Nations.

Sliwinski's appointment, announced in August 1995, came in the wake of continuing crises in Polish-Jewish relations. These included the controversial commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, accusations that then-President Lech Walesa condoned anti-Semitism and concern among Jewish organizations about delays in the restitution of property confiscated during the Holocaust.

Sliwinski's first year in his post has been marked by further crises, including an ongoing controversy about construction of a shopping mall at Auschwitz and accusations by right-wing Poles that Poland's new president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, is too accommodating to Jews.

In an interview, Sliwinski characterized the past year as a learning experience, but said his role and the scope of his job were not fully clear.

"I still have to build this office, to give it meaning, a more precise goal," he said, "because it is coming from no anterior experience. There is no parallel institution in the world. It is still a period of formation." He added that he hopes to create a "better atmosphere."

Sliwinski said he spent much of the past year traveling, meeting people, networking and getting a feel for what he had to do. "I have discovered a good list of important Jewish leaders who I'm sure have a genuine commitment to improve relations, to build bridges. Serious people, who include important personalities and leaders as well as non-public figures."

"An enormous contribution is made by Israeli officials," he said. "Wherever I am, dealing with the Diaspora, I have the support of the Israeli ambassador. Israeli-Polish relations are developing well, and this is extremely important. The Israeli ambassador in Warsaw is of enormous help."

Sliwinski said he had been "warmly and well-received" by Jewish groups and also had received important support from organizations of Polish Jews within Poland and in the Diaspora.

'Jewish point of view'

Given his ambassadorial role, Sliwinski said, his leading duty is "to meet with people and discuss problems that arise, and to communicate" to Warsaw the "Jewish point of view."

In Warsaw, he has access to the highest levels of government. He added that he also maintains contacts with local officials, the Roman Catholic Church, the local Polish Jewish community and the Polish media.

"My problem is that I get [many] proposals from [foreign] non-government organizations about fighting anti-Semitism, xenophobia," he said. "But here in Poland, non-governmental organizations are few and weak. It is hard to find partners to undertake these initiatives."

Sliwinski, 56, was active in dissident movements during the Communist era. He also worked in journalism and served as Polish ambassador to Morocco from 1990 to 1994. His interest in Jewish affairs dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when, as a member of the liberal

Catholic Intellectuals Club, he helped organize activities such as restoration work at Warsaw's Jewish cemetery as well as annual Jewish culture weeks.

Sliwinski sees a commitment to bettering Polish-Jewish relations as part of Poland's evolution into a true modern democracy.

Poland's leaders are aware that if their country really wants "to become a full member of the family of democracies," it has to "transform its political system and economy" in addition to the "sphere of minority rights," which is not as developed, he said. He added that Polish-Diaspora relations and Polish-Jewish relations as a whole are important in that respect.

"With so many Jews having direct roots to Poland and at least a moral right to say a word about the Jewish cultural heritage [here], it is a very special thing," he said.

"It is symbolic that present-day Poland recognizes its bonds with a good part of the Jews in the world, though that is not to say that I am only concerned with Jews with Polish roots. Thanks to the Holocaust and history, Poland occupies a special place in Jewish memory regardless of roots."

He noted that the Polish government's attempt to incorporate itself in the broader world community, a thrust that includes its current effort to become a part of NATO, has presented a special challenge to the Polish people.

He said, "It is a very important exercise to respect memories. It is very important for the future."

"Poles were used to living in a homogeneous society," he said. "They now have to learn to live in a pluralistic world."

Sliwinski also said he viewed some of the recent controversial events as clouding Polish-Jewish relations in that light.

In April, for instance, skinheads demonstrated at Auschwitz. "It was seen in the skinhead demonstration that Auschwitz, as it is painful, is being [manipulated] for other political, ideological goals on the part of people who are against Poland in a pluralistic world," he said. "They are afraid of Europe, of the West, of capitalism."

He said, "Sometimes anti-Semitism is used by these people to draw more attention. If you have a demonstration at Auschwitz, it gets worldwide publicity. If 80 skinheads demonstrate in an ordinary public square, no one pays attention." □

Workers across Israel protest cuts

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Hundreds of thousands of workers in Israel went on strike Wednesday to protest planned cuts in government spending.

The 10-hour strike, called by the Histadrut labor federation, disrupted the operation of hospitals, postal services, banks, state media and the stock market.

It came in response to the government's decision to cut some \$1.6 billion from the national budget. The strikers said the slashes, which will result in cuts in welfare programs, would unfairly target the working class.

Thousands of labor union members protested Wednesday outside the Knesset. Addressing the crowd, Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz said the strike was only a "rumbling of protest," but that it could continue if the government adopted measures harmful to workers. Peretz, a Labor Knesset member, rejected accusations that the strike was politically motivated.

Foreign Minister David Levy, who abstained in the government decision to make the massive budget cuts, said the strike unnecessarily caused damage to the economy. He called instead for ongoing dialogue between the government and labor federation. □