



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The committee developing the Republican Party platform approved sections dealing with foreign policy issues, including several pro-Israel planks. For the first time, the platform, which will be approved at the Republican National Convention, is expected to include a specific endorsement of weapons systems being developed jointly by the United States and Israel.

■ The five-nation group created to monitor the cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah is scheduled to meet Thursday for the first time. The meeting is set to take place in southern Lebanon.

■ Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat met with King Hussein in the Jordanian capital of Amman to discuss the king's meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 4]

■ Israel's Rafael Defense Industries and U.S. aerospace giant Lockheed Martin Corp. signed a long-term agreement to jointly market Popeye air-to-ground missiles to the United States and other clients. The missiles will be manufactured in Israel and at Lockheed facilities in Alabama and Florida.

■ Costa Rica's ambassador to Israel, Manuel Lopez, met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in the country's first diplomatic contact with the Palestinian Authority. The meeting was seen as part of Costa Rica's continued effort to join the U.N. Security Council.

■ About 200 civil rights activists demonstrated outside the Israeli Education Ministry building in Jerusalem to protest the harassment of female employees by the fervently Orthodox residents of the nearby Mea She'arim neighborhood. Protesters said women had been spat on and physically assaulted and that their cars had been vandalized.

■ Ground was broken for a synagogue and community center in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan under the sponsorship of Lubavitch. Historical records indicate that the first known Jewish community in Kazakhstan was established some 110 years ago.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish refugees incredulous over loss of welfare benefits

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — Miriam Davidovich, 76, came to the United States in 1973 from Ukraine and suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure and a heart condition.

She has no family here except for a son sick with lymphoma, and she survives by the grace of government benefits, including Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, food stamps and subsidized housing.

Davidovich never became a citizen "because I never thought about it," she said last week from the Jewish Association Services for the Aged Shorefront Senior Center in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn, N.Y.

She goes there nearly every day to eat "a good, kosher lunch" for 75 cents, courtesy of a subsidy from the New York City Department for the Aged.

But unless she becomes a citizen, some, if not all of her benefits and those of countless others like her, will end within a year of enactment of the welfare reform bill that the president has pledged to sign.

"This is the only talk of Brighton Beach," Rolya Stepankaya, 71, said of the legislation's impact.

She came from Odessa 17 years ago, relies on the same package of benefits as Davidovich, does not speak any English and says she was never "ready" to apply for citizenship.

"People are worried, but they don't believe in the worst," she said in an interview through a translator.

"They don't believe the United States will throw them in the ocean just because they're not citizens."

The welfare overhaul has left the Jewish social service and religious establishments reeling.

The new latitude it gives to the states and the scarcity of data on Jewish poverty and welfare dependence nationwide make it difficult for them to measure the exact impact of the new legislation.

But they are protesting that it is harsh and unjust and that it will impose on them a crushing financial responsibility if they try to make up the losses.

Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federations in Washington, said, "The jury's out on how bad the burden will be. A lot depends on what the states decide to do."

But the cutoff to elderly immigrants of SSI alone is certain to cost the Jewish community "many millions," she said. SSI is federal cash assistance to the elderly and disabled.

Provisions will hit poor families and children hard

The measure mandates that welfare recipients work after two years and imposes five-year lifetime limits, with some exceptions in cases of hardship.

These provisions will hit poor families and children hard, including Jewish families now dependent on state-run general assistance.

But the cuts in benefits for legal immigrants and for refugees who are classified as immigrants after five years in this country will have the biggest impact on the Jewish world.

Even President Clinton last week singled out this section of the legislation as harsh and punitive. "It has nothing to do with welfare reform," he said. "It's a budget-saving measure."

Beba Bereshkovsky is a social worker at the Brighton Beach senior center who came from Riga, Latvia, 20 years ago and naturalized five years later, as soon as she qualified.

She was incredulous at the latest news, despite what she described as the saturation coverage it is getting in the Russian press.

"You let people in at an older age and you give them benefits," she said.

"You can't take this away. They came legally. They have a green card and they have a right to get benefits."

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society helped to bring in 350,000

Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union in the past 20 years, with the biggest concentrations resettling in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Denver, Atlanta and San Diego.

Refugees, categorized as such because they have demonstrated a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality or social or political ties, will be affected by the new law five years after their arrival. That is when their special, protected status expires.

That status enables them to receive eight months of government refugee assistance after their arrival and then to apply for a range of other benefits.

Under the new law, if the refugees do not opt for citizenship or fail to obtain it after five years, they will be barred from SSI and food stamps and other programs from which states may choose to bar legal immigrants.

HIAS professionals estimated that thousands of Jews could lose eligibility for these benefits.

In another provision being anticipated as a huge blow, the new bill also will give states the authority to deny immigrants Medicaid.

There are some exceptions, including immigrants who have worked for 10 years.

Joel Karp, senior vice president of Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, said the impact would be "devastating."

If only two people of the 240 in the local Jewish nursing home lose these benefits because they have not naturalized, Karp said, "that creates a \$100,000 problem" for the community.

No national data have been compiled on the population that came in as refugees, but communities report that the elderly make up between 15 percent and 30 percent and that only a small minority of them have opted for citizenship. Many of them are put off because of the language barrier.

High level of reliance on public assistance

While little information is available on the number of refugees who depend on government aid, a 1994 survey of 12 communities, conducted for the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, indicate a high level of reliance by newcomers on public assistance.

New restrictions on future legal immigrants who are not refugees, meanwhile, are expected to increasingly affect the Jewish community.

An increasing number of Jews are expected to enter the country from the former Soviet Union as immigrants rather than refugees as their family members here have naturalized and are able to sponsor them.

Under the new law, legal immigrants coming into the country after the measure's enactment will be barred from most benefits for the first five years.

Afterward, they will be subject to newly stringent eligibility requirements.

For their part, even if refugees apply for citizenship at the earliest opportunity, bureaucratic backlogs mean invariable gaps of between several months to a year and a half, say the professionals at HIAS, which is responsible for bringing 21,500 Jewish refugees this year from the former Soviet Union.

The backlog finds HIAS in the midst of an intensive campaign to prepare immigrants for citizenship — and the campaign is striking a chord.

The organization received more than 1,000 calls in the first three hours when a new audiobook on naturalization recently was made available, said Marina Belotserkovsky, assistant director of Russian communications at HIAS.

But some people are too frail or disabled to go

through the citizenship process or too old to learn the English and civics that are required.

Belotserkovsky's own grandmother came here four years ago and at 85, is slated to lose her benefits in another year because, without English, she is not equipped to take the citizenship test.

Some exceptions to the citizenship requirement are expected in hardship cases, while current laws permit exams in Russian for immigrants older than 60 who have been here for more than 15 years or those older than 55 here for more than 20 years.

"This is better than nothing," said Belotserkovsky. "But it doesn't apply to the majority of those who came during the last few years when the level of immigration was high, especially for our elderly." □

Quantifying Jews on welfare: An exceedingly difficult task

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — It is very difficult to quantify the number of Jews dependent on welfare, whether they are immigrants or native born.

A 1994 survey of 12 communities done for the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York shows a high level of reliance by newcomers on public assistance.

Federal guidelines say 60 percent of beneficiaries of refugee programs should be economically self-sufficient four months after their arrival, when initial resettlement grants expire.

But the survey of about 25,000 cases found that on average, only 10 percent were self-sufficient by that time.

The numbers range from a high of 94 percent in Denver to 4 percent in New York City.

After 7 months, it ranged from 100 percent in Denver to 5 percent in New York City.

The survey suggests a possible link between higher levels of self-sufficiency and less availability of state-run general assistance. It also suggests that the larger a particular community's resettlement program, the lower the rate of self-sufficiency.

Refugees are now eligible for four additional months of federal cash assistance, after which the only assistance available to them is Aid to Families With Dependent Children, for which few qualify, or general assistance.

While no definitive data were available on those refugees who continue to rely on public assistance after the eight-month period, survey responses from communities with a "significant" general assistance program suggest "that the proportion is quite high and that welfare dependency can last for significant periods of time."

Indeed, the numbers of Jewish poor overall are not insubstantial, said William Rapfogel, director of the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty.

In New York City alone, the 1990 census showed 145,000 Jews at or near the poverty level, and that was before more than 200,000 additional refugees arrived from the former Soviet Union, he said.

A large segment of these are long-term "working poor" families, while some are "newly poor" as a result of recession-induced downsizing.

Many are receiving government assistance, including food stamps and Medicaid, which will be much harder to obtain under the new law, causing serious hardship, said Rapfogel.

"People today fall through the cracks even with all the entitlements," he said. Now, "it's bound to get worse." □

Jewish groups welcome bill aimed at sponsors of terrorism

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton has enacted a law that Jewish groups have long championed as a means of denying Iran and Libya revenue that could be used to finance terrorism.

The legislation, signed this week, will impose sanctions against foreign companies that invest in oil and gas projects in Iran or Libya, presenting the international community with a simple directive: Choose between doing business with Iran and Libya or the United States.

Washington considers Iran and Libya to be leading sponsors of international terrorism, and proponents of the sanctions hope that the resulting cash squeeze will inhibit their ability to finance terrorism and develop weapons of mass destruction.

Under the threat of sanctions, at least four European companies have already backed away from planned deals with Iran worth about \$10 billion.

"Every advanced country is going to have to make up its mind whether it can do business with people by day who turn around and fuel attacks on their innocent civilians by night," Clinton said as he signed the bill Monday.

But the European Union protested the law, with some countries threatening action against it.

The law requires the president to impose at least two of six possible sanctions on a company that makes future investments of \$40 million or more in developing oil and gas resources in Iran or Libya. It also sanctions firms that violate existing United Nations sanctions against Libya.

Clinton said the move against Libya would intensify pressure on Tripoli to extradite the suspects in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee applauded Clinton and Congress for enacting the law, calling it "one of the most critical steps in arresting the nuclear and terrorism threats to the U.S. and its allies."

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations welcomed the move as a sign of "America's determination to wage war against terrorism and those who support it."

'Enemy of our generation'

After signing the legislation to further isolate the two outcast nations, Clinton delivered a major foreign policy address at George Washington University. He called terrorism the "enemy of our generation" and said that fighting such acts was a national security priority.

To that end, Clinton called for greater international cooperation against terrorism, stricter law enforcement measures and tighter security at airports.

He said he intends to submit new legislation on countering international crime when Congress returns after its August recess. The legislation would target money laundering, strengthen extradition powers and border controls, and increase the ability of American law enforcement to prosecute those who commit violent crimes against Americans abroad.

The Anti-Defamation League, a leading proponent of stiff anti-terrorism measures, welcomed Clinton's remarks.

In a letter to Clinton, ADL national chairman David Strassler and national director Abraham Foxman wrote, "We applaud your ongoing leadership and your action today to convey the seriousness with which the U.S. views the threat of terrorism and its readiness to urge our allies to join our efforts."

The ADL also joined Clinton in criticizing Con-

gress for failing to act swiftly to adopt new anti-terrorism measures in the wake of the bombing last month at Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park.

House Republicans last week reached an agreement on an anti-terrorism bill that falls short of what the Clinton administration and Jewish groups had sought. The House scrapped Clinton's proposals for expanded wiretapping authority for the FBI and a requirement that chemical markers be placed in explosive powders to make terrorist bombs easier to trace.

The Senate did not act on the bill before it recessed, so lawmakers are expected to take up the measure again when they return next month.

Meanwhile, Congress approved funding last week for the FBI to open offices in four cities, including Tel Aviv and Cairo. Clinton hailed the move as an important step that will aid in intelligence-sharing and cooperation against terrorism. □

Jewish Agency head hopeful about renewed status in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel is continuing to express hope that the status of agency operations in Russia will soon be settled.

"We are working on this, and I do hope that very soon" the question of the agency's accreditation in Russia "will be over," said Avraham Burg during a recent one-day trip to the Russian capital.

Despite the optimism, he said he could not estimate how long it would be before the agency's status here would be settled.

But the chairman did assure the Jewish community that the controversy about the agency's license does "not touch individual Jews in the big cities and on the periphery."

"Our offices are open, the information is available, the emissaries are working," he said.

During his visit, Burg met with agency emissaries from across the former Soviet Union and made a stopover at an agency youth camp in a Moscow suburb.

But he did not meet with Russian officials as originally planned. Burg said the agency had made a decision not to take any political steps until the question of its registration in Russia is resolved.

The agency is establishing a new organization, the Jewish Agency in the Russian Federation, which is intended to settle an ongoing dispute between the agency and Russian authorities about the agency's accreditation.

The agency's decision to create a new body comes in the wake of the Russian Justice Ministry's recent refusal to renew the accreditation, which was canceled in April.

By listing Russian nationals among the new body's founders, the agency appears to be trying to change how its activities are perceived by Russian authorities, who have been treating the agency as a foreign-based international organization founded by non-Russian citizens.

Some observers believe that the agency controversy was caused by tensions in Russian-Israeli relations.

"These relations are becoming cooler," said Eduard Kuznetsov, a member of the agency's board of governors who is also editor-in-chief of Vesty, a Russian-language newspaper in Israel. "Russia's hopes for becoming close friends with Israel did not come true. Now Russia is taking revenge on Israel for that" by withholding the agency's accreditation, said Kuznetsov.

The Jewish Agency expects 65,000 Jews to leave the former Soviet Union for Israel this year. Fifty percent of them are expected to emigrate from the Russian Federation. □

Assad rejects Netanyahu: Syria and Lebanon together

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Syrian President Hafez Assad has formally rejected an Israeli proposal to resume negotiations.

After meeting Wednesday with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Alexandria, Assad said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "Lebanon First" proposal could not serve as a basis for restarting talks.

The proposal, which calls for withdrawing Israeli troops from southern Lebanon and disarming Hezbollah militias there, was roundly criticized in the Syrian media a day earlier.

"No one who read the invitation sent by Netanyahu gets the feeling that it is the road to peace and that those who wrote it are committed to peace," Assad said at a joint news conference with Mubarak.

"Syrian and Lebanon first, at the same time, in the same steps," he said.

Netanyahu had presented the proposal via American intermediaries last Friday as a confidence-building measure prior to seeking a full-fledged peace with Damascus.

Assad told reporters that Syria remained committed to the principle of land for peace as the basis for resuming the Israeli-Syrian negotiations, which were suspended March 4 when Syria failed to condemn a series of Hamas suicide bombings in Israel.

Diplomatic contacts were the order of the day in the Red Sea port of Aqaba as well, where Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat flew to meet with Jordan's King Hussein.

The two did not speak to reporters after the talks. But Arafat said earlier that he planned to raise many issues, including what he considered the obstacles that Israel has put in the way of peace.

Ranking high among them was the Israeli Cabinet's decision last Friday to allow construction of settlement projects in the territories.

Arafat reacted to the decision with the strongest criticism of Israel since the Likud government came to power.

Calling settlement construction a "flagrant violation" of the self-rule accords, Arafat told the Palestinian legislative council Tuesday that "all means" must be used to resist "this demon that swallows up everything, including the peace process."

Settlement expansion, he added, "means tearing up agreements we have signed, and it means disregard of the Palestinian track" in regional peace moves.

On Wednesday, officials were quoted as saying that Arafat would seek Hussein's help in arranging a face-to-face meeting with Netanyahu.

Arafat has already met with Foreign Minister David Levy, and there are reports that he will soon meet with Israel's finance and defense ministers as well.

During his election campaign, Netanyahu said he would consider meeting Arafat only if it was necessary for Israel's security. □

Flap over Palestinian activity in Jerusalem nears compromise

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The latest battle over Palestinian activities in eastern Jerusalem has come closer to resolution with a compromise that would allow a Palestinian Council member to maintain an office in his home.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani ordered the office closed Sunday, saying that it violated the Interim Agreement.

The agreement bars any Palestinian political activities in areas not under its control.

But Hatem Abdel Kader ignored the closure order, saying that there was nothing illegal about receiving guests in his home.

He lives in the Beit Hanina neighborhood of eastern Jerusalem.

Kader, who was elected to the Palestinian legislative council in January to represent Palestinian residents of eastern Jerusalem, said he receives about 12 constituents per day to discuss such matters as building permits and confiscated identity cards.

But after an aide to Kahalani met Tuesday with Kader at the Hyatt Hotel in Jerusalem, the flap was apparently resolved.

The council member agreed to sign a statement that he was not representing the Palestinian legislative council when he held meetings at his home and that he would not engage in any political activities there.

The highly publicized incident had put the government in a difficult position, because it would have proved embarrassing to lock Kader and his family out of their home as part of enforcing the closure order.

Israel casts a wary eye on any Palestinian political activities in eastern Jerusalem.

It views the activities as an effort to gain a foothold in what the government maintains is the eternal, indivisible capital of the Jewish state. □

Netanyahu-Levy feud persists over control of foreign policy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy are at odds again.

The two long-standing political rivals, who put aside their differences long enough to win Israel's May 29 elections, are now feuding over who will steer the country's foreign policy.

Foreign Ministry officials made the feud public this week, telling the Israeli media that Netanyahu has been leaving Levy out of top-level diplomatic contacts and excluding him from foreign policy matters.

The latest insult came earlier this week, the officials said, when Netanyahu made his first visit to Jordan as prime minister without taking Levy or any other Foreign Ministry staff along.

A bristling Levy canceled his weekly meeting with the prime minister and accused him of breaking promises, they said.

The feud has underscored the deep rifts in the Likud leader's government, which includes hawks, relative moderates and representatives of Israel's fervently Orthodox community.

The first sign since the elections of tension in the Netanyahu-Levy relationship came in June, when Levy embarrassed Netanyahu before a battery of television cameras with the threat that he would leave the government if Netanyahu did not give Likud hard-liner Ariel Sharon a Cabinet position.

Sharon was responsible for bringing Levy into a pre-election alliance that by most accounts was crucial to Netanyahu's victory in May.

Netanyahu soon gave in to the demand, but observers said at the time that the prime minister had a long memory and would one day settle scores with his foreign minister. □