



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli fighter planes rocketed suspected Hezbollah targets a day after the pro-Iranian group rained dozens of Katyushas on northern Israel. [Page 3]

■ U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright secured a promise from Syria's foreign minister that Damascus would try to stop Hezbollah from firing at Israel, according to a State Department spokesman. Albright called the minister at 2 a.m. Washington time Tuesday. [Page 3]

■ Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat told leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in "national unity" talks that he would not submit to Israeli demands that he crack down on terrorism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. [Page 3]

■ The Palestinian Authority is ignoring the rule of law in the self-rule areas, according to a Palestinian human rights group. The group faulted the authority for arbitrary arrests, disregard of court rulings and interference by security forces in the judicial process.

■ Jewish leaders failed to reach an agreement with the German government on reparations for survivors of the Holocaust living in Eastern Europe. The two sides established a commission to come up with solutions in three months. [Page 4]

■ A man accused of committing war crimes in Latvia during World War II arrived in Australia after being deported from Canada. Australian Jewish leaders expressed concern that Konrad Kalejs would not be tried. [Page 4]

■ The Anti-Defamation League opened its first European office. The Vienna-based branch of the organization, which is sponsored by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, will work to combat anti-Semitism and build tolerance.

■ Actor Billy Crystal and other Hollywood celebrities rejected an invitation to appear at a celebration of Israel's 50th anniversary in Los Angeles. They are upset about the status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel. [Page 2]

FOCUS ON ISSUES

As welfare law goes into effect, immigrants worry about the pinch

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Yevgeniya Kaster was bracing for the worst.

Time was running out on her only sources of income: \$484 a month in Supplemental Security Income and \$57 a month in food stamps.

Beginning this week, the welfare reform laws that were enacted a year ago would have ended all federal assistance for the 75-year-old Ukrainian immigrant who lives by herself in Chicago.

But like many Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Kaster, who arrived in 1992, refused to believe that the government would abandon her.

In the end, she was mostly right.

The balanced budget agreement passed earlier this month slightly altered the welfare reform law, sparing SSI's cash assistance for immigrants such as Kaster who were already receiving it when the welfare law was adopted.

But Kaster, like all legal immigrants who have not become U.S. citizens, can no longer collect food stamps beginning Friday, Aug. 22, the first anniversary of welfare reform.

Losing "food stamps will cut into my budget," Kaster said in an interview through an interpreter. But, she added, "at least I'll be able to pay my rent."

Across the United States, Friday is the day immigrants have come to dread. It is the day welfare reform — which for more than a year was vigorously debated, enacted and later altered — finally hits.

Last-minute changes in the law spared many from losing all federal assistance.

But people such as Kaster face an uncertain future as they lose more than 10 percent of their income.

At the same time, there is a question outstanding concerning the law's impact on housing for many elderly immigrants.

Jewish social service agencies in areas with large immigrant populations had expected a catastrophe as the deadline neared, fearing thousands of elderly immigrants would lose their only source of income.

But the balanced budget agreement eased some of the sting.

"Essentially I see a lot of this as a tremendous reprieve from what we had been expecting," said Tova Klein, program director of the Kensington Program in Brooklyn, N.Y., which is one of the self-help community services sponsored by the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

"I'm not hysterical anymore. We were completely crazed. It was undoable."

Relief coupled with concern

But the relief is coupled with deep concern for those who lose the assistance, including those who came after the bill was signed — as well as those who come in the future.

"Tragedies will accumulate one by one," said Gary Rubin, director of public policy at the New York Association for New Americans.

Klein agreed.

"I do not know how it will play out," she said. "This has turned into a case-by-case challenge rather than an onslaught."

Most Jewish immigrants affected by the law came to the United States as refugees, a special immigrant status for those who emigrated with a well-founded fear of persecution.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society helped to bring in more than 370,000 Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union in the past 20 years.

Refugees receive eight months of government assistance after their arrival and can then apply for a range of benefits that are available to U.S. citizens.

Refugees are not affected by the new welfare law until five years after their arrival. Some of the benefits continue for seven years. Under the

new laws, if the refugees do not obtain citizenship within five years, they are barred from food stamps. After seven years, they lose SSI if they are not disabled or if they came after the welfare reform law was enacted in 1996.

For many immigrants, the full effect of the law depends on where they live. While the federal government has ended all food stamp programs for legal immigrants, at least nine states have chosen to continue food stamps in one way or another.

In New York, for example, thousands of elderly, disabled and child immigrants will continue to receive food stamps through the state.

Nonetheless, Jewish social service agencies estimate that 5,000 Jews in New York between the ages of 18 and 60 will lose their eligibility for food stamps as of Friday.

The number of Jewish immigrants affected across the country is not known.

Kaster, the immigrant from Chicago, is not lucky enough to live in a state that will continue food stamps.

So the Chicago Jewish community hopes to fill at least some of the void.

In addition to a food pantry that supplies food staples once a month to those in need, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago plans to open the Uptown Cafe this fall. Needy residents will be able to eat kosher meals two nights a week and on Sunday mornings, according to federation officials.

Meanwhile, while the federal government has adopted many of the new rules and regulations for implementing welfare reform, it has yet to decide how to put one potentially devastating provision into practice.

Under the law, immigrants — including refugees after their first five years — must lose all “means-tested” benefits, defined as those based on income.

A behind-the-scenes battle is raging in Washington as federal agencies grapple with the question of whether to define low-income elderly housing as a means-tested benefit.

Tens of thousands of Jewish elderly immigrants live in Section 8 housing for low-income seniors.

“If Section 8 is banned, forget it,” said Klein of Brooklyn. “I won’t even talk about it.”

“Everything that was fixed will be unfixed,” she said, predicting widespread homelessness.

For immigrants affected by all these changes, the only guarantee for continued benefits is to become a U.S. citizen. So the push toward citizenship continues.

In cities across the country, immigrants have applied for citizenship in record numbers. Kaster has applied, but because of the current backlog of applicants, the wait in Chicago is more than two years.

She is more than ready.

“I want to take part in the life of this country,” she said. □

Billy Crystal rejects role in gala for Israel amid religious tensions

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Actor Billy Crystal and a number of other Hollywood celebrities have, for the time being, declined to appear at a gala celebration of Israel’s 50th anniversary.

The reluctance of the popular comedian and others to lend their talents to next year’s event reflects the growing strains between large segments of the American Jewish community and Israel, sown by the status of non-Orthodox Jews in the Jewish state.

These strains became the focus last week of a small

meeting between four Jewish VIPs and an Israeli diplomat, which was originally called to discuss local plans to mark Israel’s upcoming anniversary.

The meeting at the posh Hillcrest Country Club was held the same day that a large group of Conservative and Reform men and women, praying together at the Western Wall plaza on Tisha B’Av, were heckled by fervently Orthodox individuals and then evicted by police.

In short order, the meeting’s agenda shifted. Participants pointed to growing anger among American Jews, prompted by a conversion bill pending in the Knesset as well as other violence and perceived discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews in Israel.

The conversion bill would codify the Orthodox monopoly over conversions performed in Israel. The bill is seen by many American Jews as an attack on the legitimacy of Reform and Conservative Judaism.

Following the meeting, Yoram Ben-Ze’ev, Israel’s consul general in Los Angeles, filed what he considered a routine report on the discussion with the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem. He also indicated that the strong feelings expressed at the meeting were symptomatic of a shifting relationship between Israel and American Jewry.

Somewhat to his surprise, Ben-Ze’ev’s dispatch was released by the Foreign Ministry to the Israeli media, where the story was widely reported.

Four of the most influential Jews in Los Angeles attended the meeting with the consul general.

They were Lew Wasserman, chairman emeritus of Universal Studios and one of Hollywood’s heaviest power hitters; Bram Goldsmith, chairman and CEO of City National Corp. and a former president of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles; and the federation’s current president, Herbert Gelfand, and executive vice president, John Fishel.

‘An insult to every Jew’

The outspoken Goldsmith said he expressed his belief that the conversion bill and the incidents at the Western Wall were “an insult to every Jew,” with an already noticeable impact on contributions by large donors to the United Jewish Fund, the campaign of the local federation. Goldsmith acknowledged that he himself was thinking of reducing his pledge.

Meanwhile, one of the participants cited the reluctance by Crystal and three other unnamed Hollywood stars, to appear at the 50th anniversary celebration.

No additional information on this was available. Crystal is away filming on location, Wasserman declined to comment and Gelfand is in Israel.

Ben-Ze’ev said in an interview that he was surprised, but not altogether displeased, by the ministry’s release of his report. “The Israeli media, preoccupied with more pressing matters, has paid little attention to these issues so far, so some good may come of it,” he said.

He noted that the Hillcrest meeting was by no means an isolated incident. He said he had encountered stronger reactions in every city he had visited in the eight Western states under his jurisdiction.

“The matter goes beyond the current controversy,” he said. “I think both Israel and world Jewry are on a genuine quest for a new identity. We need to redefine ourselves and find a broad common denominator to hold all Jews together.”

The federation’s Fishel said that while there is a certain alienation from Israel among some Los Angeles Jews, part of this is due to misunderstandings of the situation in Israel.

The gala celebration of Israel’s independence is slated for April 15 and is expected to be the highlight in Los Angeles of the year’s anniversary events. □

Israeli airplanes attack Bekaa as strikes in Lebanon continue*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli fighter planes have struck several targets in Lebanon in a move the Israeli army termed a “warning” to Hezbollah militants and the Lebanese government not to launching attacks on Israel.

Wednesday’s air strikes came a day after Hezbollah fired dozens of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, causing property damage and lightly injuring three civilians.

“We will continue to take the necessary action to ensure quiet,” Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told reporters. “Anyone who tries to disrupt it should know we have all the strength and justification to take action.”

Reports from Lebanon said four people were injured in the Israeli missile and bomb attacks. All Israeli planes returned safely to base.

According to the Israel Defense Force and reports from Lebanon, Israeli planes hit Hezbollah positions in the Bekaa Valley; a location near a Lebanese army position in southern Lebanon; and a power line near the city of Sidon, cutting off electricity to the port.

The Israeli army said the planes deliberately missed the Lebanese army position in order to avoid casualties.

But the IDF added that while it did not consider the Lebanese army an enemy force, it wanted to send a signal that it would not act with restraint if Lebanese troops cooperated with Hezbollah.

Lebanese army troops reportedly took part Monday in the shelling by Hezbollah of positions of the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army after six civilians were killed and dozens wounded in the earlier SLA shelling of Sidon.

In a rare public criticism of the SLA, Israeli officials said Israel could not sanction “indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas.”

At the same time, it warned Hezbollah against escalating the violence by targeting Israeli settlements.

In a sign of the rapidly intensifying violence in the region, Hezbollah responded to the shelling of Sidon by launching Tuesday’s Katyusha strikes against Israel.

Albright phones Syrian foreign minister

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, responding to a call from Mordechai, called Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa early Tuesday to ask him to try to stop Hezbollah from firing at Israel.

Sharaa reportedly promised Albright that Syria would do its best to stop the violence from escalating.

After Tuesday’s Katyusha attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited damaged homes in the northern town of Kiryat Shmona.

He announced at the time that Israel was not seeking an escalation of tensions.

The Israeli daily Ma’ariv reported Wednesday that during consultations on how to respond to the Katyusha assault, hawkish National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon had called for strikes against strategic targets in Lebanon.

Senior IDF officials, along with Mordechai and Foreign Minister David Levy, dissuaded Netanyahu from taking that line, the paper said.

Interviewed later on Israel Radio, Sharon refused to comment on what he had said during the discussions, but he sharply criticized the leak to the media.

In a related development, Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan called on Israel to increase the 9-mile wide security zone it maintains in southern Lebanon, saying the zone’s current depth was not sufficient to prevent rockets from reaching Israel.

Both Mordechai and Levy voiced their opposition to the idea.

“This is not the time to start raising ideas and proposals,” Levy told reporters. □

Arafat assures Islamic militants he will not act against terrorists*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat threw down the gauntlet to Israel this week, telling Islamic militant leaders that he would not submit to Israeli demands that he crack down on terrorism.

During a meeting Wednesday in the Gaza Strip that the Palestinian Authority described as “national unity talks,” Arafat hugged and kissed leaders of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements.

In a reference to the 1987 to 1993 Palestinian uprising, or intifada, he said that “all options are open to the Palestinian people,” including a renewal of the revolt.

Israelis “think we will submit to their conditions,” Arafat said. “I say to them, the Palestinian people are tough [and] don’t submit except to their own wishes.”

In the wake of last month’s twin suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there would be no resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations unless Arafat carried out mass arrests of suspected terrorists.

Arafat has so far refused to do so, saying he will not accept “Israeli dictates.”

His stance marks a sharp departure from the arrests he sanctioned after previous terrorist strikes against Israeli targets.

Wednesday’s meeting in Gaza drew criticism from Israeli officials, who accused Arafat of trying to appease terrorists.

The United States stopped short of criticizing Arafat’s meetings with the militants.

“We don’t see the role of Hamas or Islamic Jihad in the peace process,” U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin told reporters. “They are the enemies of peace, and they don’t belong in any serious discussion of peace.”

But, he added, American officials would judge Arafat in terms of “deeds,” which he described as the “coin of the realm when it comes to fighting terrorism.”

Israel imposed a closure on the West Bank and Gaza after the July 30 suicide attack and has continued to withhold a large portion of the tax revenues it owes the Palestinian Authority.

The militant leaders met with Arafat to form a united front against Israeli policy, according to the Palestinian communications minister, Imad Falouji.

“The purpose of the meeting is to integrate the Hamas and other opposition groups into a patriotic front in order to address the challenges facing the Palestinian Authority,” Falouji said.

“The only way to stand against Israel’s hard-line positions is to do some internal housecleaning and unify the ranks.”

Islamic Jihad and Hamas members stayed away from a similar dialogue that Arafat convened in April in the West Bank town of Nablus.

At that time, the militant leaders were protesting the arrests that Arafat had ordered following a wave of suicide bombings in Israel last year.

The Hamas leader in Damascus, Abu Mohammed Mustafa, called on Arafat this week to join the opposition struggle against Israel — or step down.

Arafat was slated to hold a second national unity meeting Thursday in the West Bank town of Ramallah. □

Reparations talks with Germany fail to produce quick agreement

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Jewish negotiators have failed in their effort to reach a quick agreement with Germany on reparations to Holocaust survivors living in Eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, the German government and a delegation of Holocaust survivors and Jewish officials of the Conference on Material Claims Against Germany meeting in Bonn this week announced the establishment of a joint commission to recommend solutions in three months.

Friedrich Bohl, the chancellery minister representing the German government in the negotiations, said at a news conference that he believed a solution could be found.

Israel Singer, the secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, who led negotiations for the Claims Conference, said the commission was an important development in the long-running effort to seek justice for the so-called "double victims" of World War II.

"They were twice victims — once of Nazism and the second time of Communism," Singer said Wednesday of the Eastern European survivors who never received reparations.

"We saw to it today," he said, that "that they will not be a third time victimized."

But Singer did not divulge further details of what was discussed.

Parliamentary members of the opposition Green Party, who have long urged the government to pay survivors in Eastern Europe reparations similar to those received by survivors who live in Western countries, said it was unacceptable to further postpone the decision when survivors are dying every day.

The two sides, meanwhile, also agreed Wednesday to set up another commission to examine the criteria under which Holocaust survivors outside Eastern Europe are considered eligible to receive reparations.

About 27,000 survivors in Israel, the United States, Canada and other Western countries currently receive monthly reparations of about \$275.

Jewish organizations estimate that between 20,000 and 100,000 other victims receive no pensions because of restrictive criteria.

In order to receive payments today, an individual must have spent at least six months in a concentration camp or 18 months in a ghetto and have an annual income of less than \$14,000. □

(JTA correspondent Daniel Kurtzman in Washington contributed to this report.)

Australia unlikely to prosecute deported alleged war criminal

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — An accused war criminal who was deported this week from Canada may never stand trial in Australia.

Konrad Kalejs, 84, arrived in Australia on Wednesday, a day after the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board ordered his expulsion.

Kalejs is alleged to have been a member of the notorious Latvian Arajis Kommando squad that worked with the German SS during the war.

Kalejs claims he was a university student at the time.

He is also alleged to have used his position in the Australian Immigration Department, where he worked in

the 1950s, to help fellow squad members settle here. He was deported from the United States in 1994.

As an Australian citizen, authorities here did not have the power to prevent Kalejs from returning.

Unless Australian citizenship law is changed, he cannot be stripped of his residency rights.

He is also unlikely to be prosecuted under Australian war crimes legislation — the evidence presented in the United States and Canada has been assessed by the Australian Federal Police to be insufficient for a conviction in Australia.

Diane Shteinman, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, said her group has been calling for legislative changes that could effectively deal with Kalejs' case for more than a decade.

"It is appalling that a person deported from the U.S. and Canada is accorded all the privileges associated with Australian citizenship because he evaded exposure at the time he adopted this country," she said.

"Our council is aghast that he could come back to Australia with impunity, and the fault is with our laws," she said.

The Australian attorney general has promised to review the case.

Kalejs moved to Australia after the war and later relocated to the United States.

After he was deported from the United States, he lived in a retirement home in Melbourne, Australia, until he was tracked down by Australian Jewish journalists.

He subsequently fled to Canada.

Of more than 800 people investigated by the Australian government since 1989 for participation in Nazi war crimes, only three have faced charges.

None of the prosecutions has been successful, although government officials estimate that at least 500 participants in crimes against humanity came to Australia after the war. □

(JTA correspondent Bill Gladstone in Toronto contributed to this report.)

Pro-Hess demonstrators arrested

NEW YORK (JTA) — Police arrested about 400 people in Germany and approximately 50 people in Denmark over the weekend on the 10th anniversary of the death of Rudolf Hess.

Hess, Adolf Hitler's deputy, has become a cult figure among right-wing extremists since he hanged himself in Berlin's Spandau prison.

Many of the arrests in Germany were made on Saturday as right-wing extremists headed for rallies. German courts had banned pro-Hess demonstrations in much of the country.

Other arrests were prompted by clashes between neo-Nazis and leftists.

In Denmark, approximately 150 neo-Nazis marched in a town outside of Copenhagen, shouting "Sieg Heil" and waving flags with swastikas.

Several hundred anti-Nazi protesters clashed with police when a pro-Hess demonstration failed to materialize in another town outside of the Danish capital.

Denmark's liberal free speech laws have made it a haven for neo-Nazis in recent years.

Hess flew to Britain on a secret mission in 1941, where he was arrested.

At the Nuremberg trials after the end of World War II, he was sentenced to life in prison.

For 20 years, he was the lone inmate at the Spandau prison, which was torn down after his death to prevent it from becoming a rallying point for neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremists. □