



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **The Union of American Hebrew Congregations refused to act on a resolution that would have urged the Reform movement's rabbinic arm to rescind its position on officiating at interfaith marriages.** The decision came at the UAHC's biennial meeting in Dallas. [Page 1]

■ **The Palestinian Authority and Israel disagree about the agenda of this week's talks in Washington.** The Palestinians are demanding that only substantive issues of further redeployments and a "timeout" on settlement building be addressed. Israel wants other issues discussed as well. [Page 3]

■ **Pope John Paul II blamed Catholic anti-Semitism for the passivity of many of the church's followers during the Holocaust.** The pope, who made the remarks at a conference on anti-Semitism held over the weekend at the Vatican, did not criticize the church itself or Pius XII, who was pope during World War II.

■ **A leading U.S. historian of Vichy France testified that the regime eagerly helped the Nazis during World War II.** Robert Paxton made his remarks at the trial of Maurice Papon, who is accused of ordering the arrest of 1,560 Jews while an official in the Vichy government. The trial has led to a public scrutiny of France's actions during the Holocaust.

■ **The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the Australian government to take action against 64 suspected Latvian war criminals the center believes are living in Australia.** Of the more than 800 people investigated by the Australian government since 1989 for participation in Nazi war crimes, only three have faced charges. [Page 3]

■ **Two Israeli parliamentarians are attempting to cancel a visit to Israel next month by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman.** Tudjman played down Croatia's responsibility during the Holocaust in the Croatian-language version of his book "Wastelands of History." Tudjman expressed an interest in visiting Israel so he could apologize for the actions of his people during World War II and visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. [Page 4]

Reform movement laity backs rabbis on interfaith weddings

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

DALLAS (JTA) — David Belin has long been trying to convince the Reform movement to sanction rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, but his colleagues are not interested.

The 4,500 Reform Jews attending the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' biennial, which ended Sunday, backed the movement's rabbinic arm by refusing to even consider Belin's resolution urging Reform rabbis to officiate at interfaith marriages.

On another controversial marriage issue, the Reform laity also followed the lead of the rabbinic arm in passing a resolution supporting civil marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

During the five-day conference, the dominant issues on the agenda related to spiritual revival and social action.

For the first time in years, matters related to intermarriage were not on the program, though they continue to be central in the life of Reform congregations.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform movement's rabbinic organization, discourages interfaith marriages, but leaves the decision to officiate up to each rabbi.

Nearly half of all Reform rabbis officiate at interfaith unions, according to a 1996 survey by Reform Rabbi Irwin Fishbein.

For most Reform rabbis, though, it is a serious and painful issue.

Belin, a Des Moines, Iowa, attorney who is a lifetime member of the UAHC board of trustees, has been frustrated that the movement discourages such officiation.

His resolution would have pressed the CCAR to rescind its longstanding opposition to its rabbis officiating at interfaith marriages, which its members overwhelmingly upheld at their conference earlier this year.

But Belin's view was unpopular.

Hundreds of people booed when the resolution was called up for debate, and Belin was roundly hissed when he rose to defend his position.

"More than 75 percent of Reform Jews favor rabbinic officiation at intermarriages," said Belin, citing research conducted by the Jewish Outreach Institute.

'It's up to the rabbis'

But a majority of delegates voted not to allow Belin's resolution to be brought to a vote.

"It's not for us to decide. It's up to the rabbis," said Harold Bobroff, a delegate from Temple Sinai in Lawrence, N.Y., whose two children both married non-Jews.

The resolution supporting civil marriage for gay and lesbian couples also encouraged Reform congregations "to honor" monogamous domestic relationships formed by gay men or lesbians.

The CCAR has not yet weighed in with a position on religious "commitment ceremonies" for gay and lesbian couples, but does support civil marriage for them.

While the resolution passed by a margin of about 2-1, a member of Temple Emanu-El, in Dallas, spoke against it.

The leadership of the Reform movement "is emphasizing Torah law, and we all know what Torah says on this," he said.

The movement "would rather see a marriage of two men or two women than between people of different faiths."

The issue of religious pluralism in Israel surfaced repeatedly during the convention, and a resolution was adopted calling on all American Jewish organizations to urge the Israeli government "to extend equal recognition and support to all streams of Judaism."

Among other resolutions adopted was one that would require a small fraction of the UAHC endowment — 1.8 percent — to be used for community development in impoverished areas.

A resolution was unanimously approved to launch a campaign to help fund congregations in the former Soviet Union affiliated with the Reform movement. The biennial also approved a change in the schedule of dues most

Reform congregations pay to the UAHC and the movement's seminary, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Dues obligations were reduced from 11 percent of a Reform temple's expenses to 8 percent.

Congregational representatives had been trying to lower that sum to 7 percent.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, the head of the seminary, reacted angrily to the cuts.

"Remember next time you need an educator that you are cutting your contribution, and don't talk to me about cutting the budget" of the seminary, he said. "You can't have it both ways."

The seminary, which has four campuses — in New York, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and Jerusalem — and trains rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators, is cutting its \$22 million budget next year by \$1 million, he said. □

Local officials in Russia refuse to register Reform synagogue

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Less than two months after President Boris Yeltsin signed a controversial law limiting religious freedom in Russia, the law has been applied against a Jewish congregation.

Provincial officials cited the law last week when they withheld registration from a Jewish congregation in Bryansk, a city about 200 miles southwest of Moscow.

A provincial official was quoted as saying that his agency had "not refused to register" the Jewish body, but had simply requested more documentation before making a decision.

But according to Vladimir Boroditsky, chairman of the Bryansk congregation, local officials did not make such a request.

Instead, said Boroditsky, the letter his congregation received from the authorities said only that they are "disregarding the congregation's application for registration."

Boroditsky said the congregation applied for registration about two months ago, shortly before Yeltsin approved the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association, which places restrictions on religions which cannot prove that they have existed officially in Russia for at least 15 years.

The law's preamble grants Judaism — along with the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam and Buddhism — the status of traditional religions.

But human-rights watchers said the preamble is a non-binding declaration.

The denial of registration to the Bryansk congregation elicited a swift condemnation from the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

"What is happening in Bryansk is exactly what we predicted would take place in Russia's provinces under the auspices of the religion bill," the organization's national director, Micah Naftalin, said in a statement.

"This law is in effect a hunting license, designed to intimidate and persecute Jews and Western-oriented Christians, despite all the assurances to the contrary.

"The Western media was duped into believing that Jews were exempted from the new restrictions."

The Bryansk congregation is a member of the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations, or KEROOR, an umbrella group representing some 50 Orthodox and Reform synagogues in Russia.

Sergei Weinstein, a KEROOR official, said that since his group is already registered as a centralized religious organization, all of its local affiliates should be able to obtain registration without difficulty.

"There is nothing unusual about" the Bryansk congregation, he added.

Boroditsky attributed the situation to a bureaucratic mistake.

"It seems that officials do not know yet how to apply the new law," he said in a phone interview from Bryansk.

But at least one member of the Bryansk congregation attributed the denial of registration to anti-Semitism.

Tatyana Khenkina said there is strong anti-Semitism in Bryansk, and local officials would be glad to find an excuse not to register the congregation.

Meanwhile, KEROOR officials have sent a letter to the Bryansk authorities asking them to explain their denial of the synagogue's registration.

"We are not in a state of panic," said Zinoviy Kogan, the group's executive director. "We are calling on the authorities to apply the law in a liberal and civilized way."

Many Russian Jewish leaders, including the KEROOR leadership, had previously backed Yeltsin's signing of the law, saying it would not hurt any Jewish religious groups operating here.

The three-year-old Bryansk congregation does not have a permanent building and conducts its services and activities in various locations.

It was first organized in the early 1990s by a Reform Jew who later emigrated to Israel and took most of its official documents with him. The congregation is now seeking new registration under Boroditsky's leadership.

According to Boroditsky, who described the synagogue as having a non-Orthodox orientation, some 70 people take part in its activities. Bryansk, which has a population of 500,000, including 3,000 Jews, has a second synagogue run by the Lubavitch movement.

Some human-rights activists said the controversy in Bryansk is just one of a series of similar events taking place across Russia since the law's passage.

The Moscow office of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki issued a statement citing four more such cases, all involving Protestant churches, which experts say are especially at risk since the law took effect. □

Mossad agents suspected of coordinating testimony

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's attorney general has confirmed reports that Mossad members are suspected of coordinating their testimony for a commission probing the agency's recent failed assassination attempt in Jordan.

Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein confirmed over the weekend that Yosef Chekhanover, the head of the commission probing the botched Sept. 25 attack on Khaled Mashaal, a Hamas leader in Jordan, had approached him two weeks ago and asked what he should do if he suspected that those appearing before the panel were coordinating their testimony, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

"I gave him advice on what to do in this situation," Rubinstein was quoted as saying, without going into details.

Mossad head Danny Yatom issued a sharp denial of the report: "There was no coordination of testimony, and I instructed all Mossad officials to fully cooperate."

Another denial of the report came from attorney Dov Weisglass, who is advising a number of Mossad officials who were called to appear before the committee.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who came under intense criticism for the failed Mossad operation, created the committee in October "to clarify the events that happened in Jordan." □

Israel, Palestinians disagree over Washington talks agenda

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — On the eve of talks in Washington aimed at getting the peace process back on track, Israel and the Palestinians were still at odds over the talks' agenda.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has repeatedly stated that he thought this week's meetings would be a "waste of time."

Palestinian officials were pressing to discuss issues such as the further Israeli redeployments in the West Bank and an Israeli halt to settlement construction.

Israeli officials have expressed a willingness to address these matters under certain conditions.

But they also have called for a second track of discussions on outstanding aspects of the 1995 Interim Agreement, such as the opening of an airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip and the creation of a Palestinian safe passage route between Gaza and the West Bank.

The disagreement over the talks' agenda was evident in the makeup of the two sides' delegations.

While the Palestinians decided to send only their top negotiators — Abu Mazen, Saeb Erekat and Nabil Sha'ath — Israel sent some of the heads of the interim committees as well as Foreign Minister David Levy.

In addition to the agenda, the two sides also differ on substantive issues. Erekat said last week that the Palestinians would like a decision on the further redeployments, as well as discussions about the "timeout in settlement building that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called for in September when she met with Levy and Abu Mazen in New York.

But Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky, a member of the Inner Security Cabinet, said last week that Israel would be ready to consider a "timeout" only if the Palestinians agreed to forego the further redeployments and consider accelerated permanent-status negotiations.

U.S. officials said over the weekend that they expected progress from the talks and wanted to see a target date set for the second further redeployment.

Israel decided on the extent of the first redeployment last spring. But the Palestinians rejected the move as too limited, and it was never carried out.

Arab states are closely awaiting the results of the meetings to decide whether they will attend a regional economic summit Nov. 16 to 18 in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar. Martin Indyk, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, has been traveling through the Middle East in an effort to get Arab states to attend.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said he is awaiting an "encouraging" sign from Israel before considering Cairo's position on the meeting. □

Wiesenthal Center urges Latvia, Australia to indict war criminals

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Simon Wiesenthal Center believes that 64 suspected Latvian war criminals are living in Australia and has called on the Australian government to take action against them.

The center's Israel director, Efraim Zuroff, gave the Australian ambassador to Israel the list of names and urged Australia to investigate the cases quickly.

Zuroff called on Australia to immediately begin proceedings against one suspect, Karlis Ozols, according to a statement released by the center.

Zuroff charged that Ozols, now living in a suburb of Melbourne, was an officer in the mobile-killing squad

known as the Arajs Kommando, or Latvian Auxiliary Security Police, which collaborated with the Nazi SS during World War II.

About 75,000 Jews, or more than 90 percent of Latvia's prewar Jewish community, were murdered by the Nazis — with help from local residents.

Zuroff called on Australia to deport war-crimes suspects for immigration violations in those cases where criminal prosecution under Australian law is "problematic" — an indirect criticism of Australia's record of inaction against alleged war criminals.

Of the 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 have been successful, although Australian government officials estimate that at least 500 people who participated in crimes against humanity came to Australia after the war.

"Under the current circumstances, Australia is an ideal haven for Nazi war criminals, and this will continue to be the case until the Australian government makes a concerted effort to take legal action against Holocaust perpetrators residing all over the country," the Wiesenthal Center's Zuroff said.

Zuroff also urged the Latvian authorities to cooperate with Australia in the investigation of alleged war criminals.

Latvian officials are meanwhile continuing their investigation of one suspected Nazi war criminal living in Australia.

Konrad Kalejs, 84, is also alleged to have been a member of the Arajs Kommando and stands accused of having participated in the killing of 20,000 Jews in Latvia.

Kalejs, who had been deported from the United States in 1994, was deported by Canada to Australia in August.

Australian officials have said it is unlikely that he would be prosecuted there.

The Latvian Parliament recently reaffirmed the need to investigate Kalejs, saying the controversy surrounding him was tarnishing the Baltic nation's image.

But the person in charge of the Kalejs investigation in Latvia — prosecutor Uldis Strelis — is himself the target of controversy.

In September, Strelis said his investigative team had found no evidence to support any of the allegations against Kalejs.

After issuing his findings, Strelis made a number of anti-Semitic comments that prompted Latvian Jewish leaders to call for his dismissal.

The Latvian Prosecutor General's Office rebuked Strelis, saying it was "categorically disassociating" itself from Strelis' anti-Semitic statements, and called for the probe to continue.

Despite the criticism, Strelis remains in charge of the investigation. □

No free lunch for Israeli legislators

NEW YORK (JTA) — There really ain't no such thing as a free lunch anymore — at least not in the Israeli Knesset.

In an effort to put an end to unpaid bills, the Knesset's cafeteria has decided to issue magnetic cards to legislators.

The cost of the food will be directly deducted from their salaries.

The Israeli daily newspaper Yediot Achronot reported that during the summer session that ended in July, Knesset members ran up a cumulative bill of more than \$28,000. □

German prosecutors probing right-wing extremism in army

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — The German federal prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into the production by army members of racist and anti-Semitic videos amid reports that neo-Nazi propaganda is readily available in German barracks.

Eight people, including two army officers, are under scrutiny for their role in producing the videos.

The videos, which were taped between 1993 and 1995, contain scenes propagating right-wing extremism, according to a high-ranking Defense Ministry official.

Scenes include a Hitler salute, a simulated interview about the extermination of the Jews and a fake battle scene between Serbs and Croats. The deputy chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Michel Friedman, called on the government to take legal and disciplinary action against those involved in producing the videos.

One of the alleged producers of the videos, a former German army soldier, told the Berlin newspaper Berliner Zeitung that the sale of banned right-wing materials is openly tolerated in some German army barracks.

He claimed that illegal materials, including flags with swastikas and books containing Nazi ideology, are easily obtainable at army bases, sometimes with the knowledge of officers.

A spokesman for the Defense Ministry said these allegations would be investigated.

Earlier this year, a video produced by army soldiers simulating violence created a controversy about the degree of right-wing extremism in the German army, known as the Bundeswehr.

Defense Minister Volker Ruehe demanded at the time that laws be enacted to allow the army to check the backgrounds of recruits for possible neo-Nazi activities.

But the Justice Ministry turned down the request, arguing that criminal records do not indicate possible political motivations for crimes.

After details about the latest discovery of right-wing videos were revealed recently, Ruehe asked the army's chief of staff to suggest measures to counter right-wing tendencies in the Bundeswehr.

The number of right-wing extremist incidents involving Bundeswehr members has been rising steadily, with 120 such acts reported so far this year.

Politicians from opposition parties in Germany have accused government officials of downplaying the problem. □

Lithuania delays action on law to facilitate war criminal trial

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Lithuania's Parliament has delayed action on an amendment that would facilitate the prosecution of alleged World War II criminals.

The move has the biggest impact on the unfinished case of Aleksandras Lileikis, 90, who is accused of having handed Jews over to death squads in Vilnius during World War II when he was head of the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police, known as the Saugumas, from 1941 to 1944.

Legal proceedings against Lileikis were postponed in July after medical experts determined that he was not fit to stand trial. Under Lithuanian law, suspects cannot be brought to trial if medical experts rule that they are too ill.

An amendment was introduced in September to change that law.

Jewish activists fear that the Parliament may never vote on the measure.

"They are waiting for Lileikis to die," said Simonas Davidavicius, chairman of the Jewish community of Kaunas, the Baltic nation's second-largest city.

During a discussion of the measure, some Parliament members said passing the amendment would be tantamount to caving into pressure from Jewish groups.

Lileikis, who immigrated to the United States in 1955, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in May. He returned to Lithuania a month later, proclaiming that he was innocent. He is one of several Lithuanians targeted by Nazi hunters for their alleged role in the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 240,000.

In a separate development, the Lithuanian Parliament two weeks ago began debating amendments to legislation that would criminalize public behavior aimed at promoting racial hatred. It was not clear whether the legislation would be passed, and if so, whether it would actively be implemented.

The debate took place in mid-October, at about the same time that the Assembly of Jewish Communities of the Baltic States — a group known as the Baltic Knesset — issued a statement during its three-day annual session calling on regional authorities and world Jewish organizations to pay more attention to growing anti-Semitism in the Baltics.

Much of the assembly's discussion focused on Lithuania. □

Knesset members objecting to Croatian president's visit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two Israeli lawmakers are trying to block a planned visit by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, saying he is an anti-Semite who has aligned himself with Holocaust deniers.

Yossi Beilin of the Labor Party and Yossi Sarid of the Meretz Party have submitted urgent motions in the Knesset to cancel the trip.

Tudjman informed the Foreign Ministry that he intended to visit Israel next month, Israel Radio reported Sunday. The report said Tudjman had expressed an interest in apologizing for the actions of his people during World War II and in visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. Foreign Ministry officials would not comment on the report.

Beilin and Sarid responded to the report by submitting the Knesset motions.

Beilin said in a statement that the Croatian president's plans to apologize for the crimes of his people did not exonerate him from calling the Holocaust a "Jewish invention." Sarid said Tudjman was an anti-Semite and that his presence in the Jewish state would be painful for many Israelis.

Israel and Croatia established diplomatic ties in September, a move that drew criticism from some Jewish organizations and Israeli political figures, including Beilin.

Tudjman's nationalist policies are viewed by many as an attempt to rehabilitate the fascist Ustashe regime that ruled Croatia as a Nazi puppet state during World War II.

He drew particular fire last year by declaring that he wanted to rebury the bones of Croatian fascists at a Yugoslav-built memorial to the thousands of Jews and Serbs slaughtered at the Ustashe's Jasenovac concentration camp.

Croatia had 25,000 Jews before World War II, most of them prosperous and largely assimilated. Some 20,000 were killed by the Nazis or the Ustashe regime. □