



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 170

Tuesday, September 15, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clinton meets Jewish leaders

President Clinton met with American Jewish leaders at the White House on Sunday to express his commitment to the peace process.

Clinton dropped by unexpectedly at what was originally billed as a meeting with senior administration officials to mark the fifth anniversary of the Oslo accords.

The Jewish leaders told Clinton that the overwhelming majority of American Jews support the accords and continued U.S. involvement in the peace process.

Ross making no progress

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross made no progress in his efforts to break the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, an Israeli official said.

Ross met for a fourth time with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to brief him on his meetings with Palestinian officials.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat is not ready to clamp down on Islamic militants, a key Israeli demand, according to Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan.

U.S. officials mull peace process

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Secretary of Defense William Cohen and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff met at the White House on Sunday to discuss pressing foreign relations issues, including the Middle East peace process.

The group had met with President Clinton on Saturday.

No details of either meeting were released.

Rabin appears in Starr report

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's name appears in the unpublished part of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report to Congress.

Congressional sources did not know what role Rabin plays in the report, but they speculated that the slain Israeli leader is likely included in a detailed timeline of the charges against President Clinton.

Meanwhile, the published portion of the Starr report mentions that among the gifts that former White House intern Monica Lewinsky gave Clinton was a copy of "Oy Vey!: The Things They Say!: A Book of Jewish Wit."

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Russians move from isolation to activism in U.S. Jewish life

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — On a warm summer afternoon, guests gathered poolside at the country home of Semyon and Ludmila Kislin — sunglasses on and checkbooks out.

That day the group of about 100 members of the Russian Division of UJA-Federation of Philanthropies of New York raised \$15,000 for the federation's annual campaign.

"For us, it's a good sum for a pool party," said Ludmila Kislin, the division's co-chair and a federation board member.

And the party is just part of a bigger splash.

The Russian division has a mailing list of 7,000 and a growing roster of active members, including a young leadership wing. Its first campaign 10 years ago collected \$30,000 to help bring Jews out of the former Soviet Union. Last year's gala at a New York hotel raised \$1.4 million for the New York federation.

The exceptional fund-raising power of New York's emigre community may have much to do with its size: An estimated 20 to 25 percent of the city's 1 million Jews are native Russian speakers. The success also stems from the organizational efforts of a Russian-speaking leadership in the federation, who serve as a bridge between the Jewish establishment and the immigrant community.

Attracting such leaders is a challenge Jewish agencies across the United States are now facing as they turn their energies from refugee resettlement to membership cultivation.

More than 400,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union poured into the United States since the 1970s — most of them after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet empire — making Russian the language of a significant portion of America's Jewish population.

Almost without exception, these newcomers were helped along the way by a tag team of Jewish agencies. Now, as emigres have established themselves in American society — landing jobs, finding homes and raising families — many are seeking, in turn, a more proactive relationship with the organized Jewish community.

"It's a two-way street. We will help the federation and the federation will help us," said Ilya Tsenter, a telecommunications engineer who came from St. Petersburg in 1980 to California's Silicon Valley, where one of every four Jews hails from the former Soviet Union.

A board member of the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Resettlement, Tsenter will head the Emigre Leadership Institute, an initiative of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco that is scheduled to launch in January.

"The idea is to develop a core group of 15 to 20 emigre leaders who have proven leadership ability and are interested in developing participation of emigres in the broader Jewish community," said Pnina Levermore, the council's executive director.

During the course of four months, ELI will orient participants in navigating the organized Jewish community and will provide instruction in basic leadership skills, such as meeting management, public speaking and fiscal planning.

A similar institute run by the American Jewish Committee opened last year, offering 25 potential New York-area leaders workshops on leadership and religious pluralism, as well as a trip to Capitol Hill. Jewish groups in Atlanta and Chicago have expressed interest in adapting the curriculum for their communities.

"What is good here is the understanding that Jewish immigrants from the former

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel partially lifts closure

Israel partially lifted a closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, allowing Palestinian trucks into Israel. But tens of thousands of Palestinian workers remain unable to work in Israel.

The closure was imposed in the wake of Hamas threats to retaliate for last week's killings of two Hamas militants by Israeli troops.

Meanwhile, Israel said it would oversee the private burial of the two militants, fearing that a public funeral would be accompanied by violence.

Cabinet approves budget

Israel's Cabinet approved next year's approximately \$53 billion budget by a vote of 14-2.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the budget included the first real increase in defense spending in 10 years. He did not give additional details of the spending plan, which still requires parliamentary approval.

Premier writes to Primakov

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Russia's new prime minister to halt the transfer of missile technology to the Middle East.

Netanyahu's call, which came in a congratulatory letter to Yevgeny Primakov, came after the United States and Israel have been pressuring Russia for more than a year to stop supplying arms and technical assistance to states in the region, particularly Iran.

Arrow-2 tested

Israel's Arrow-2 missile destroyed a simulated target during the first comprehensive test of the missile's systems.

The Arrow project is intended to provide defense against ballistic missiles possessed by Iran and Iraq and other potential enemies such as Syria or Libya. The missile system, developed with American co-funding, is expected to be fully operational next year.

Soviet Union are not just the object of assistance and acculturation, but should also be actively involved in the life of the Jewish community at large," said Alexander Lakshin, a consultant at the New York-based Coalition for Soviet Jewry, who participated in the AJCommittee program.

In fact, requests from emigres themselves generated leadership training programs on both coasts. In San Francisco, where some 30,000 Russian-speaking immigrants compose about one-fifth of the Jewish population, the federation's executive director, Wayne Feinstein, met with the local representatives of several national organizations founded by immigrants, such as the American Association of Jews from the former Soviet Union and other groups representing Bukharans, Georgians, scientists and engineers, and World War II veterans.

"They said, 'We're no longer green. We'd like an opportunity to give back,'" recalled Feinstein.

One factor contributing to this desire is the area's employment base — 20 percent of the emigres work in high-tech industries — which creates a solidly middle-class constituency with the leisure and resources to devote to Jewish organizations.

Feinstein also credits a consistent 20-year effort by the federation to introduce immigrant families to Jewish communal life. Jewish agencies in other cities have struggled to perfect the outreach formula.

But even when the elements fall into place, often aided by Russian-speaking staff, Jewish agencies and emigre leaders recognize that "charity" and "volunteer" are foreign concepts to most former Soviets.

"Experience shows that for Russian emigres, the mentality is different. We are very reluctant to participate in something we are told," Tsenter of the Bay Area Council said.

Feliks Frenkel, a financial analyst living in New York, explained. "Like anything, there is a need for patience. You will not get up one morning and say, 'I'll give 30 percent of what I make to charity.'"

Frenkel came to the United States in 1977 from Kiev, where, he recalled, his family readily helped out friends and neighbors, but never extended tzedakah beyond the personal realm.

To foster a communal sense of responsibility, the AJCommittee's chapter in Chicago supports the Russian Community Forum, a consortium of grass-roots emigre organizations, business owners and representatives from the flourishing Russian-language media to address issues of welfare and citizenship, the threat of messianic missionaries and better integration into the American Jewish community.

"It's the first time in Chicago that Russian Jews came together and sat at the same table for any reason," said Mark Peysakhovich, a native of Moscow who now works as the assistant director of the AJCommittee's Chicago office.

Still, Peysakhovich says, "We have to learn to walk before we can run."

Like many of their American counterparts, most Russian-speaking emigres have yet to decipher Jewish organizational infrastructure.

"A lot of them don't know where the money came from that brought them to this country," said Peysakhovich.

Even the enthusiastic emigres in New York required some unorthodox orientation to institutional giving. Many were spurred to generosity by the federation's weekly page in the daily *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, which used to end with stories of emigres in need — along with postings of contributors to the campaign and their donations.

"Now people are requesting not to put their names" because they are so sought after as donors, said Lydia Vareljian, the federation's Russian Division coordinator. The page now runs reports on the division's special projects in Israel rather than individual contributions.

Frenkel was one of those anonymous benefactors for many years until the division began to plan and raise funds for a Russian Jewish community center, where the Russian-speaking community could come together for cultural and educational programs and religious services and celebrations.

"If you do things publicly, you attract attention and people may be willing to share some of their wealth," said Frenkel, who was honored at last spring's gala.

"When you receive, more often than not you feel indebted. When you give, you don't," Frenkel said. "I'd rather give than receive, as long as I can afford it." □



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

Russian immigrant groups adapt to methods of organized U.S. Jewry

By Julia Goldman

Joint hearings held

Members of the U.S. Congress and the Israeli Knesset held a joint hearing on Capitol Hill to discuss missile defense.

The first-ever hearing involving legislators from the United States and Israel comes as Republicans in Congress are seeking Israeli and American Jewish support in their quest to resurrect part of the "Star Wars" missile defense system first proposed by President Reagan.

Witnesses slated to appear at the hearing include the family of an Israeli killed in an Iraqi Scud attack during the 1991 Gulf War.

Far-right party misses hurdle

A German far-right party failed in state elections to meet a 5 percent threshold for representation in the local Parliament.

The failure of the Republican Party, which earned 3.6 percent of the vote in the Bavarian state elections, came less than two weeks before Germany's national elections.

Candidate opposes compensation

The opposition candidate in the race for German chancellor said he did not believe the country's federal government should help compensate Nazi-era slave laborers.

"Compensation is an issue for the companies that benefitted" from having such workers, Gerhard Schroeder said.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl said last month that German reparation coffers were closed, adding that the country had paid more than \$56 billion in compensation since the end of the war.

Poland planning Jewish museum

Poland will intensify efforts to build a museum dedicated to the history of Jewish life there, according to Polish officials.

Archaeological work has already begun on a possible site in central Warsaw and a design competition is expected to be announced in the next several months.

Dohany shul used as film set

British actor Ralph Fiennes was recently "married" in Budapest's famous Dohany Synagogue.

The ceremony was part of a film shoot for "The Taste of Sunshine."

Fiennes plays the triple role of a Jewish grandfather, father and son in the film.

The multigenerational saga follows the fate of a German family over the course of a century — from the glory days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the post-Holocaust era.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Russian-speaking emigres in America want it known: They are not the same people who stepped off the boat at the turn of the century.

While their population — some 400,000 — has grappled with the challenges of resettlement common to most newcomers to the United States, they also have access to the resources of the American Jewish social and political framework, itself established by immigrants attending to those very needs.

Now, nearly three decades since the first wave of newcomers from the former Soviet Union began to arrive, these immigrants are taking a page — and a cue — from American Jewish communal history, setting up their own infrastructure and finding their own, Russian-accented voice.

Across the country, grass-roots organizations have emerged, representing the diverse professional, ethnic, regional and social interests and backgrounds of the emigre population. The oldest such association is the American Association of World War II Veterans From the Former Soviet Union; one of the newest is the Russian Institute for New Americans. The institute will compile data on the immigrant population through public opinion polls and scientific surveys.

"According to our information, this is the first time in American history that the first generation of an immigrant group set up a research institute to study itself," Alexander Lakshin, a founding board member of RINA, said in a telephone interview.

The 20-person board is financing the project. Technical support is provided by the Advisory Committee of Emigres, a joint venture of the New York Association of New Americans and the UJA-Federation of Philanthropies of New York. The committee provides professional assistance to professionals from the former Soviet Union and fosters their involvement with the organized American Jewish community.

RINA hopes to produce its first results from telephone surveys by the end of the year. Although initial research will be limited to the New York area, the group also hopes to expand its research nationally.

Besides clarifying how it is seen, the Jewish emigre population is finding a way to make itself heard.

Last fall, the nine-year-old American Association of Jews From the Former Soviet Union, in consultation with the Council of Jewish Federations Washington Action Office, mobilized hundreds of its more than 3,000 members nationwide for a rally in Washington to demonstrate against welfare reform.

That very afternoon, senators struck down several articles in the legislation, making way for the reinstatement of some benefits to recent immigrants.

Beyond the legislative success, the rally ignited a new civic consciousness among many Russian-speaking emigres.

"They understood how to work in the frame of American democracy," Leonid Stonov, the association's president, said.

Stonov, a former refusenik, lives outside of Chicago, where he represents the association in the Russian Community Forum, a consortium of emigre organizations.

"This is not fund raising, not direct service," said Nina Genn, the manager of the Chicago federation's resettlement loan program.

Instead, she said, the forum, which receives technical support from the American Jewish Committee, is giving the Russian-speaking community an articulate voice.

Last fall, the forum hosted a debate, at which the audience of about 200 emigres probed congressional candidates for their views on Israel, welfare, immigration and world trade. The debate was "another manifestation of this group getting to be more important in the country," said Genn, who is an active leader in her emigre community.

This year, the forum began to focus its attention on the Russian-speaking community's position in the American Jewish scene.

"We don't want to be separate from American Jewishness, we want to be with them," said Stonov. "I think it's one of the most important ways to return to our Jewish roots." □

Volkswagen announces size of its fund for slave laborers

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Following up on an earlier pledge, Volkswagen has established an \$11.7 million fund to compensate Holocaust survivors who were forced to work as slave laborers during World War II.

Payments could begin as early as the end of this year, company officials said, and the amount of compensation given to applicants will be decided by a board of trustees the company said it will set up immediately.

Volkswagen confirmed that former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky have already agreed to serve on the board.

Last Friday's announcement came after Volkswagen pledged in July to set up a humanitarian fund "in recognition of its historical and moral obligations."

The company's decision is notable because it is the first time a major German firm has agreed to such compensation payments.

The decision — which came after two class-action lawsuits against Volkswagen and other German firms were filed in New York and New Jersey earlier this month — is expected to put pressure on other German firms to take similar action.

Volkswagen employed an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 forced laborers to maintain production during the war. About 1,500 of these workers were Jewish. The company says it does not know how many of the former workers are still alive.

Because of the firm's location in a sparsely populated region in northern Germany, and because many of its employees were drafted to into the German army, it relied heavily on forced labor.

In past years, Volkswagen has sponsored humanitarian projects in various European countries to help former slave laborers.

Despite the availability of information about the significant role of slave labor in maintaining the company's wartime profits, Volkswagen, like other German firms, refused to make compensation payments after the war.

German firms have until very recently repeated what has been their standard argument: The German government is responsible for such payments because it is the legal successor to the Nazi regime.

But growing international interest — sparked by the controversies in Switzerland about Nazi gold and the dormant bank accounts of Holocaust victims — has focused attention on other unresolved compensation issues.

A spokesman for the Association of German Industries, Dieter Rath, denied that leading German companies are on the verge of establishing a joint foundation to settle the claims of former slave laborers. In recent weeks, firms like BMW and Siemens indicated interest in such a solution.

But at a recent meeting of 15 firms, company representatives were unable to agree on a joint strategy. Instead, according to Rath, the companies continue to favor individual solutions.

Meanwhile, Ed Fagan, a New York lawyer who represents former slave laborers in one of the class action lawsuits, told German television that Volkswagen's decision to set up a private foundation for compensation claims will not stop the lawsuit. □

Rabbis urge Senate to uphold veto of late-term abortion ban

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — More than 700 rabbis are urging U.S. senators to sustain President Clinton's veto of the so-called partial-birth abortion ban.

The rabbis, representing all streams of Judaism, sent a letter last week to lawmakers expressing opposition to efforts to outlaw the late-term procedure to end pregnancy, calling it a deeply personal and moral issue "best left to religious communities, not politicians."

The letter, drafted by the National Council of Jewish Women, comes as the Senate prepares a vote to override the president's veto before adjourning.

Congress passed a ban on partial-birth abortions last year, but Clinton vetoed it because he said it did not go far enough to protect a woman's health. The bill would make it illegal for doctors to perform the procedure unless the mother's life was in danger.

The House of Representatives passed the legislation by the necessary two-thirds margin needed to override the president's veto, but the Senate came up three votes short, passing it 64-43.

The rabbis' appeal was prompted in part by a letter sent earlier this year to senators that was signed by some 70 rabbis from across the country. That letter urged lawmakers to override Clinton's veto, stating that Jewish law prohibits the procedure because "once the head of the baby emerges, or the majority of the baby's body emerges, the child is considered a person equal to the mother and cannot be aborted, even to save the mother's life."

Rabbi Seymour Essrog, president of the conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, took issue with that reading, saying, "We have widely differing religious traditions on this."

Indeed, in the new letter, the more than 700 rabbis, many of whom hold conflicting views, recognize that Judaism "has different interpretations of these laws and teachings, and we respect and welcome debate on these issues.

"However, this debate should remain among those who practice our faith, not on the floor of Congress."

The rabbis also said they were concerned about what they called "vague, non-medical language" in the bill itself. They said the language makes it "very difficult for anyone, whether clergy or physician, to be certain about which medical procedures would be banned" and makes it "difficult to engage in a theological debate on this matter."

One signatory to the letter, Rabbi Donald Weber of Morganville, N.J., said the traumatic experience he and his wife went through many years ago prompted him to speak out.

When his wife, who is also a rabbi, was 4 ½ months pregnant, they learned that their child had no brain and was developing with its internal organs outside the body.

"My wife's health was not technically in danger, but according to the" proposed ban, "my wife would have been required to go to the full term, knowing that the baby inside her would die the moment it was born."

He added, "It took us nearly a year to recover physically and have the courage to try again. We now have three beautiful boys. If we had had to go through the rest of that pregnancy, I don't know if we would have ever had the courage to try again." □