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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Jews remain in Kosovo

More than a hundred Jews from Belgrade, Novi Sad and elsewhere in Yugoslavia have made their way to Budapest in recent days and are being cared for by the Budapest Jewish community, according to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Jews in Kosovo have declined offers to help them leave, according to Jewish aid workers who have been active in the former Yugoslavia.

The workers said the 67 Jews believed to still be in the Kosovar capital of Pristina as NATO carried out air strikes against Serbian military targets are considered to be "relatively safe," but plans have reportedly been drawn up to extract the remaining Jews if necessary.

Israeli Arab to run for Knesset

An Arab member of the Knesset announced he is running for prime minister in Israel's elections, scheduled for May 17.

Knesset member Azmi Beshara explained his decision Thursday by saying he wanted to ensure that Arab affairs were given the attention they deserved in the Jewish state.

Terrorist extraditions sought

Relatives of U.S. citizens killed by Palestinian terrorists in Israel and the Gaza Strip in 1995 and 1996 called on the U.S. government to more actively seek the extradition to the United States of those responsible for the acts.

The request, also voiced by a survivor of a terrorist attack, came at a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on the matter.

The Palestinian Authority has at least seven suspects in custody in attacks that killed most of the 12 American citizens who have died in terrorist attacks since 1993.

Report defends Swiss banks

Switzerland's central bank failed to halt purchases of Nazi gold in the latter stages of World War II despite warnings from the Allies that it was buying looted gold, according to a new study conducted by the Swiss National Bank.

But the report defended the bank's overall wartime practices of buying gold as necessary for the country's economy.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

The decline in Jewish immigration forces dramatic shift in communities

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Since the gates of the Soviet Union opened up a decade ago, more than 1,000 Jews have traveled halfway around the globe to settle in the shadow of Arizona's desert.

But now few Jews are coming, and the Tucson, Ariz., Jewish community has embarked on a radical experiment — opening its doors to non-Jews fleeing persecution.

It's not only the right thing to do, community activists say, it's the only way to keep the program strong enough to provide a full range of services for those Jews who have arrived in recent years. But for all the good intentions to embrace non-Jews, there was a last-minute surprise: When the Knezevic family arrived from Bosnia, they asked to go to synagogue.

Unbeknownst to the U.S. government and Jewish agencies who had arranged for them to flee their war-torn region, the Knezevics are Jewish.

"We all kind of looked at each other and were inspired," said Wendy Asher, director of refugee resettlement for the Tucson Jewish community.

"When you do the right thing, the right thing happens."

Earlier this month, Tucson once again opened its doors to a family of refugees fleeing persecution. This time there were no surprises, and the local community is now involved in resettling a non-Jewish family of two parents and seven children fleeing from Ethiopia.

It has been 10 years since the Soviet Union answered cries of "Let my people go," unleashing a huge wave of Jewish emigration. Since that time, Israel has absorbed the vast majority of these immigrants — 750,000.

And the United States — in partnership with local American Jewish communities — opened its doors to the largest number of Jewish refugees since the aftermath of World War II.

Through a combination of U.S. government grants and communal funding, the American Jewish community has helped to resettle more than 250,000 Jews since 1989 by providing a battery of services, including language classes, vocational training and child care. The resettlement effort is widely respected as one of the greatest accomplishments of American Jewry. But now the number of Jews arriving in America from the former Soviet Union is way down.

In 1992, the peak year of resettlement, 47,000 Jewish refugees were resettled in communities around the country. This year, in contrast, 5,000 to 7,000 refugees are expected.

Largely as a matter of economics, this dramatic shift is forcing local Jewish communities to confront difficult questions:

- Should they stop supporting new arrivals altogether or continue resettling a trickle of family members?
- Should small communities shut down their programs completely and let the big cities shoulder the responsibility?
- Has the time come to retool the Jewish organizational bureaucracy that has ballooned with the growth in programming?
- Or should local communities, following Tucson's example, add non-Jews to their rolls of clients?

On the national level, too, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the pre-eminent

MIDEAST FOCUS

Maximum urged for Shas leader

Israeli prosecutors asked a Jerusalem court to give the maximum possible sentence to Shas leader Aryeh Deri, who was convicted last week of bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

During the Thursday hearing, prosecutor Yehoshua Reznick presented the court with previous rulings in which civil servants were sentenced from three to five years for such offenses as bribery and fraud.

Meanwhile, the eight character witnesses before the court to testify on behalf of their client included former army chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and former Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat.

Jerusalem boundaries expanded

Israel's Cabinet approved an expansion of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

At a special session this week held at Jerusalem's City Hall, the Cabinet approved a plan to expand the city's jurisdiction westward to enable the construction of some 120,000 housing units by the year 2020. Mayor Ehud Olmert said the expansion would increase the city by one-third.

Lebanon sentences collaborators

A Lebanese military court last week sentenced six Lebanese to death on charges they collaborated with Israel, according to a Lebanese media report.

The court also sentenced 15 others to lesser sentences for similar charges.

Police monitor election crime

Israeli police are investigating charges that criminal groups may try to help finance the campaigns of political parties in hopes of gaining favors and influence following the May 17 elections, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. Police officials were quoted as saying that legal loopholes are making it difficult to monitor the parties' funding sources.



Daily News Bulletin

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Jewish organization involved in resettling Jewish refugees, has been forced to re-examine its program and make significant changes.

Concerned about sustaining the level of services for new immigrants, for example, HIAS recently announced plans to provide up to \$1 million from its endowment to help local communities.

The questions for local communities loom even as a new wave of anti-Semitism spreads across Russia in the wake of an economic crisis. Just last week, the federation in Stamford, Conn., decided to end its resettlement program.

Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of HIAS, said that given the current situation in Russia, it is "particularly difficult" for communities to make the kind of decision Stamford just made. Still, despite the resurgence of anti-Semitism, Jews in the former Soviet Union are not preparing for another mass exodus.

The diminishing number of potential immigrants has been predicted for some time.

"The refugee service system has always been an accordion," said Joel Carp, senior vice president of community services and government relations at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, whose community resettles the largest number of Jews from the former Soviet Union after New York and San Francisco.

Jewish refugees receive the bulk of services from Jewish communities, and these communities, small and large, are being forced to make changes.

The changes, in large measure, are due to the simple math involved in resettling new immigrants.

Under legislation negotiated by Jewish activists that dates back to the 1980s, the U.S. government and the Jewish community share the costs of resettling new refugees under a matching grant program.

"The money flows on a per capita basis: the fewer people, the fewer dollars," said Mark Handelman, executive vice president of NYANA, the New York Association for New Americans.

In 1994, \$46 million in federal funds helped pay for the resettlement of 33,000 refugees in 136 cities. In 1998 about \$14 million was provided for some 8,000 refugees in more than 100 cities. While the government has put in its millions, the Jewish community, depending on locations and services offered, has spent more than double, if not triple, that amount of money, officials said.

While NYANA is in a unique situation because of its size — it resettles almost half of the Jews from the former Soviet Union — and its national funding from the United Jewish Appeal, it has been forced to cut back, reducing its staff by about 80 percent, Handelman said. NYANA has slashed its budget from \$70 million in the early 1990s, when it resettled some 25,000 individuals a year, to \$12 million this year, with only 2,700 projected arrivals.

Given the fewer resources, the agency is shifting its focus from resettling newcomers to sustaining services for immigrants who already have been here a few years. HIAS, the national resettlement agency, is facing its own dramatic changes. Budgets have been slashed and staff laid off.

"For the most part, the services we provide are the same no matter what the number of refugees," said Glickman, whose agency has cut its staff by almost half since 1994.

HIAS hopes that through the \$1 million in grants it is providing to local communities, "we can ensure that the refugees who arrive this year receive the same quality of service as those of prior years," said HIAS President Neil Greenbaum.

Communities that came to rely on federal funds based on the number of refugees they took in are now grappling with new realities.

With increasing needs and competing priorities for Jewish dollars, many local Jewish communal officials fear their resettlement programs will be cut even further.

Although nearly everyone agrees that "services should not be tied to arrival numbers," the budgets have been, said Ruth Paley, the Jewish community's resettlement coordinator in Minneapolis. Working in a community that once resettled more than 400 refugees in one year and is now serving fewer than 50, Paley echoed the views of many officials in the trenches who said the key to a successful program is scrambling for grants and new sources of funding.

"It takes a lot of creative budgeting," Paley said, especially because the reality today is that "resettlement is not a burning issue in the Jewish community." □

JEWISH WORLD

Russian extremists hold meeting

Russia's largest far-right extremist group staged meetings in a dozen Russian towns over the weekend, according to Russian press reports.

The meetings of the Russian National Unity group attracted 30 people in St. Petersburg and some 300 uniformed participants in the southern Russian city of Stavropol, where the organization is believed to have its stronghold.

The group, which distinguishes itself with military-styled black uniforms, swastika-like symbols and stiff-armed salutes, created a scandal last year when it tried to hold a national convention in Moscow.

Survivors protest IG Farben

Former Nazi slave laborers protested outside a shareholders meeting of the German chemical company that produced the Zyklon B gas used in concentration camps during World War II.

The survivors were demanding compensation from IG Farben, which was dissolved after the war, but still exists as a trust to handle claims.

The survivors were joined by human rights workers and leftists at the meeting in Frankfurt, some shouting "Jew murderers."

The company is one of a dozen German firms currently trying to establish a compensation fund for slave laborers.

'Life Is Beautiful' to be dubbed

The Italian Holocaust tragicomedy that won three Academy Awards earlier this week will now be dubbed into English in an attempt to help the film reach a wider audience.

In the dubbed version of "Life Is Beautiful," actor-director Roberto Benigni and his co-star, Benigni's real-life wife, Nicoletta Braschi, will voice their own characters.

"Life Is Beautiful" won Oscars for best actor, best foreign film and best dramatic score.

French Resistance leader dies

A former leader of the French Resistance died last week at the age of 93 in Paris.

During World War II, Jean Pierre-Bloch, whose father was a Jewish industrialist, organized parachute drops into Vichy France and held several posts in Charles De Gaulle's anti-Vichy army.

Pierre-Bloch later became a human rights advocate.

In 1981, Pierre-Bloch sat on a panel that ruled in favor of Maurice Papon's claim that he had worked for the Resistance during the war.

But last year he reversed himself and testified at the former Vichy official's trial that Papon was not a member of the Resistance.

Reasons for decline are many; 'alarming' INS refusal rate is one

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — There is no question that Jewish immigration to the United States has slowed dramatically in recent years.

Jewish organizational officials expect between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews to arrive this year from the former Soviet Union, down from a record 47,000 only seven years ago.

There are many reasons for this sharp downturn:

- Fewer Jews are seeking to leave.
- Fewer Jews are eligible for the refugee program, which is based on family reunification.
- Jews seeking refugee status are being denied entry in record numbers.
- The costs of emigration, including travel to Moscow for interviews with officials from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, are high.

The number of Russian Jews seeking to immigrate to Israel has risen in the past few months amid an atmosphere of economic decline and resurgence of anti-Semitism in the largest of the former Soviet republics.

But even if more wanted to immigrate to the United States, the rules dictating immigration make it unlikely that more would be able to come.

Under legislation passed in the early 1980s, the U.S. government and the Jewish community share in the costs of resettling Jews from that region. They enter the country as refugees and are entitled to a host of social service benefits, including cash assistance and intensive counseling.

But the Jewish refugee program, like most U.S. immigration programs, is based on family reunification and is subject to federal quotas.

With few exceptions, the only Jews from the former Soviet Union allowed to come to the United States already have relatives in the country.

These refugees, who come into the United States under a special status, enacted under the Lautenberg Amendment, are assumed to be have a "well-founded fear of persecution."

The American Jewish community has helped to resettle more than 250,000 Jews since 1989, when the Soviet Union first opened its doors to mass emigration after years of denying freedom of movement. Since that time, more than 80 percent of those applying for refugee status received approval.

But denial rates by the Immigration and Naturalization Service have reached record levels. By last summer, the INS was denying two out of every three applicants, a rate Jewish officials called "alarming."

The first two months of 1999 have shown a promising turnaround with two out of every three applicants now receiving approval. But, said Leonard Glickman, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, that rate is "still unacceptable."

Jewish officials recently traveled to the region to investigate the denial problem, but came back with few answers. No one knows for sure why the rates suddenly skyrocketed.

If applicants are rejected they can still apply to come to the United States under parole status. But this status bars them from all government assistance programs until they become citizens, which takes a minimum of 5 years. □

Israeli officer denied promotion

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Supreme Court barred the army from promoting a brigadier general, ruling he had exploited his position by having an illicit affair with a soldier who served under him.

The promotion of Brig. Gen. Nir Galili had been held up for two years because of the intimate relationship, which occurred three years ago when Galili was commander of an army base.

Women's rights advocates, who had closely followed the case, hailed Thursday's decision as a breakthrough in recognizing sexual harassment in the army. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Mixing up politics and religion
in wake of Shas leader conviction***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The combustible mix of politics and religion has once again exploded in Israel in the wake of last week's conviction on bribery charges of one of Israel's most powerful political leaders.

Aryeh Deri was convicted, among other things, of pocketing some \$155,000 during a period of five years in the late 1980s, when he served in a variety of positions — including minister — at the Interior Ministry.

Deri propelled the fervently Orthodox Shas Party to become a major force in Israeli political life.

With its predominantly Sephardi backing, the party has 10 seats in the outgoing Knesset — ranking third behind the Likud and Labor parties — and its supporters hope to clinch more in the May elections.

Barely 15 years old, the party has managed to cross the political divide on peace-related issues, serving in the governing coalition of the current Likud government as well as in the previous Labor administration.

But the religious divide is harder to bridge. And with the future of the party at stake, Shas leaders are seeking to capitalize on the religious component.

Party officials are calling on their followers — many of whom believe that the court's decision was part of an ongoing effort by the Ashkenazi establishment to subjugate the Sephardi cause — to reaffirm their faith in Deri.

As part of this effort, the party's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, declared within hours after the verdict was delivered in the Jerusalem District Court on March 17 that "Deri is innocent" under halachah, or Jewish religious law.

Indeed, Shas has already reproduced this assertion on thousands of posters, placards and bumper stickers.

But the assertion — precisely because it bases its disagreement with the court ruling on religious law — troubles many in Israeli society.

As Shas leaders plan a series of "Support Aryeh Deri" meetings across the country and as the battle cry goes forth to win 18 seats in the next Knesset, the Deri verdict and its stormy aftermath threaten to ratchet up Israel's religious-secular cultural war yet again.

However one interprets Yosef's reaction to the ruling, the outlook for cohesion and harmony in Israeli public life looks bleak.

If "Deri is innocent" means that after a trial lasting four-and-a-half years the court was wrong in its determination of the facts, then this represents a wholesale expression of no-confidence in the Israeli judicial system.

The judges heard dozens of witnesses, read tens of thousands of pages of court records — and concluded that not only was Deri guilty as charged, but that he had attempted a huge and grotesque perversion of the judicial process.

Nevertheless, at least until the Supreme Court has ruled on an appeal, any criticism of the court's factual findings is within the bounds of legitimacy in a democratic society.

But the deeper meaning of "Deri is innocent" is not that it

challenges the facts as determined by the court, but rather that it questions the legal and ethical inferences made by the court from those facts.

That is what Yosef seems to have implied when he declared Deri's innocence "under the halachah."

In exchange for the bribes, according to the conviction, Deri siphoned off state money for institutions linked to Shas.

Under the Shas definition of halachah, Deri's "innocence" means that an official or minister who lobbies for state funds to be channeled to a yeshiva and is rewarded by that yeshiva with a portion of those funds has committed no crime.

Such an interpretation opens an unbridgeable chasm between the system of morality on which the state's law is founded and the religious stance of a rapidly growing sector of Israeli society.

Party members are already insisting that even if Deri is jailed — a court session to hear pleas before sentencing was slated for the end of the week — he will continue to lead the party faithful from his cell.

During a party meeting Monday night, Shas legislator Nissim Dahan observed that even after they are imprisoned, Hamas leaders continue to exercise unquestioned command and control from their jail cells.

To be sure, Dahan made a point of distinguishing Shas and Hamas on all other points — but just the same, an Israeli leader calling the shots from his cell would undoubtedly introduce a new dimension to the nation's political life.

Despite the public claims of support for Deri, there are nagging doubts about the party's future that are privately whispered even among the most die-hard party activists.

Will Deri's conviction, and the statements made by party leaders in the wake of the decision, truly persuade Sephardim who have previously supported other parties to cast their votes for Shas?

This is a crucial question, because without attracting new adherents, Shas cannot hope to increase its Knesset representation.

In convicting Deri, the three-judge bench highlighted in its 917-page judgment that Deri constructed an "edifice of deception" during the nine years he was under police investigation and his subsequent trial in order to pressure and intimidate witnesses and to create an alternate account of how he received the money.

The court dismissed that alternate account as a tissue of lies. Moreover, the court's own detailed account of Deri's attempts to thwart the judicial process drew a picture of a politician with Mafia-like power threatening the very essence of the rule of law.

Some observers find it hard to believe that Israel's Sephardi population — those who are not hard-core Shas adherents — would dismiss this kind of behavior.

These analysts predict that Shas, far from benefitting from Deri's blistering condemnation by the court, will lose ground in the May elections.

Others say that even if Shas does succeed in reaping immediate electoral advantage from the wave of resentment among Sephardim that was triggered by the verdict, in the longer term there is bound to be a backlash that will, in time, weaken and possibly even destroy Shas.

The only way that Shas can save itself, they say, is for Yosef to dump Deri and install another, cleaner politician as party leader.

While this seems far-fetched now, it would be rash to discount the will to survive that underpins every political movement, including Shas. □