



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Start of final-status talks planned

Negotiations for a final Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement are scheduled to begin Nov. 7.

The two sides made the announcement after the chief negotiators met to prepare for a summit Tuesday in Oslo. All sides are downplaying expectations for a breakthrough in the Oslo meeting, which President Clinton will mediate. [Page 4]

### Lord Jakobovits dead at 78

Britain's former chief rabbi died of a brain hemorrhage Sunday at 78. Lord Jakobovits was leader of Britain's Jewish community from 1967 until 1991.

His successor, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, called him "the outstanding rabbinic figure of his generation." Jakobovits was born in Germany in 1921. His family fled to England when Hitler came to power, and he came to London at the age of 15.

### Five wounded in Hebron attack

Five Israelis were wounded in a shooting attack on a bus near the West Bank town of Hebron. Saturday night's ambush occurred near the safe-passage route Israel opened last week for Palestinians traveling between the Gaza Strip and a point near Hebron.

On Sunday, Jewish settlers angered by the shooting protested in Hebron against the opening of a section of road to Palestinian traffic. [Page 4]

### Bank Austria to alter settlement

Jewish groups and Bank Austria are about to end a bitter fight over a \$40 million settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

The World Jewish Congress and the Claims Conference have negotiated a new agreement in which the bank will increase the settlement if the number of claims is larger than expected. The agreement is expected to be presented before a federal judge in New York on Monday for approval.

### Clinton addresses ADL

Calling hate crimes "the biggest challenge" facing the nation and the world, President Clinton continued his call for hate crimes legislation in a speech to the Anti-Defamation League. The president spoke last Friday at the ADL's annual meeting in Atlanta. "We still can't form a society where no one hates anybody else because they're different," he said.

## Elderly Russians rediscover their Jewish roots through JDC centers

By Lev Krichevsky

YEKATERINBURG, Russia (JTA) — Lev Entin, a 90-year-old resident of St. Petersburg, has spent the past year relearning something he spent most of his life trying to forget: his Judaism.

Entin's father was a shochet, or ritual slaughterer, and until Entin was 12, he attended a cheder, or Jewish school. But after that, Entin, "a product of the Bolshevik Revolution," as he puts it, did not pay attention to his religion.

But in the past year, Entin has reintroduced himself to his tradition by reading books and brochures he receives from his local Hesed welfare center.

"Only this year did I become a Jew again," says Entin.

Roughly 175,000 Jewish elderly in Russia are now served by the 88 Heseds across the former Soviet Union. These centers, run by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, account for about one-half of all Jewish social and welfare organizations in the former Soviet Union.

### Ten Years After the Wall Part of a Series

They provide basic services, such as food and health care, to the large numbers of elderly who were impoverished both by the chaos of post-Communist Russia and by last August's economic collapse. But the Heseds also play a role

that is just as important in creating a Jewish community for the Russian elderly.

When the JDC began opening Heseds in the former Soviet Union earlier this decade, the organizers were afraid of two things: that the centers would be overwhelmed by requests from non-Jewish clients, and that the centers would lead to an anti-Semitic backlash. None of the fears has come true. Indeed, in some places Hesed centers serve as a model for similar state-run organizations. In St. Petersburg, for example, Hesed Avraham is among the most successful welfare organizations in a city of 4 million.

Last year, Hesed Avraham started a joint project with a local government-funded welfare organization, where one of the Hesed dining rooms is now feeding 100 non-Jewish needy elderly. It's also providing them with cultural events for Russian national holidays.

The success of the Hesed program has led to some problems. Indeed, in some cities, local authorities ignore the needs of Jewish clients because there are other organizations to take care of them.

"The state sometimes wants to place its responsibility on the Heseds. But Jews are citizens of this country just like non-Jews, and the state has certain obligations toward them," says Benjamin Haller, director of the JDC's William Rosenwald Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers in St. Petersburg, which trains Jewish social workers and conducts sociological research on the Jewish elderly in the former Soviet Union.

But there is one aspect of the Hesed activities that the state welfare system cannot help: reconnecting people to their Judaism.

"People are coming to Heseds not only to get a piece of bread. They come to taste the spirit which makes us unique, distinct from other similar organizations. This is the spirit of belonging to the Jewish people," said Haller.

The examples are legion. In the city of Tula, some 190 miles south of Moscow, about 50 elderly Jews gathered on a recent Friday night at the Hasdei Neshama center. A concert by a local youth klezmer band was followed by a Shabbat service and a meal conducted by a young Moscow rabbi who comes to the city every weekend. In St.

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Khatami vows fair trial for 13

Iran's relatively moderate president said 13 Iranian Jews jailed on spying charges will get fair trials and be able to see their families and lawyers.

Mohammad Khatami, in France on the first visit by an Iranian president since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, criticized the "Zionist lobby" for making "problems for our country."

Khatami also said Iran would not interfere in the Middle East peace process and again called for a dialogue with the West.

### Barak has kind words for Assad

Israel and Syria have negotiated through several intermediaries in recent months, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told Newsweek magazine.

In an interview published this week, Barak reiterated his praise for Syrian President Hafez Assad, calling him a "strong, reliable, responsible and impressive leader."

### Head of Palestinian group barred

The leader of a Palestinian terrorist group will not be allowed to enter Palestinian-controlled territory for now.

Reversing an earlier decision, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak last Friday suspended permission for Nayef Hawatmeh to enter because Hawatmeh told a news station that he supports "armed struggle" against Israel.

### Olmert joins Board of Governors

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert joined the Jewish Agency for Israel's 121-member Board of Governors.

The agency's board also approved a \$376 million budget for the year 2000.

Special funds were also approved for programs in impoverished neighborhoods as well as for rescue operations in the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Yugoslavia.



## Daily News Bulletin

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Petersburg, Hesed Avraham publishes Hesed Shalom, a bimonthly newspaper with a print run of 15,000.

Saul Safrai, a 92-year-old St. Petersburg pensioner, spends two hours riding a bus to get to and from the Hesed center. But he does not complain.

"I've got nowhere else to communicate," he says. "Here I can exchange a few words in tongues that are understood nowhere else," Safrai says, referring to the Yiddish and Hebrew he studied as a boy in his hometown of Herson, Ukraine.

This process of creating a community extends beyond the clients served by the Hesed centers to the volunteers who help serve their needs.

The center relies on the work of 685 volunteers who participate in every program — from meal deliveries to home repairs to medical consultations.

In 1998, more than 5,000 volunteers, professionals, paraprofessionals and lay leaders received training through the branches of the Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers located in St. Petersburg; Minsk, Belarus; Kishinev, Moldova; and Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine.

"Thanks to Heseds, the communal life in many cities of our region has received a new start," says Ilya Pestrikov, the Yekaterinburg-based JDC representative in the Ural region, the vast area that encompasses the junction of European Russia and Siberia.

In many places, Hesed activities became a focus for the entire local Jewish community. In some instances, welfare centers became a unifying factor for different groups within the community.

Indeed, a slogan on the wall at St. Petersburg's Hesed Avraham refers to the three principles of Hesed work, "Volunteers, Community, Yiddishkeit."

Last year, about 7,000 volunteers participated in the provision of welfare and other social services in the centers.

"We are different from any other welfare system in this country, both because of our target clients and because of the principles of our work," says Haller of the Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers.

"Any program we run involves people helping other people. Even a bedridden person can call another bedridden so that they will not feel lonely."

In most communities, youths and students of Jewish schools occasionally volunteer in some social programs.

But the average volunteer is recently retired and is in his or her early 60s.

These people deliver food to the homebound, do home repair or work once or twice a week as hairdressers, shoemakers or electricians. Medical doctors conduct regular free consultations for Jewish elderly in almost every Hesed center.

Despite all the good work they are doing, the future of the Heseds is not entirely rosy. With the ongoing economic crisis and the depreciation of pensions, money is becoming scarce, particularly to supply medicines.

The multimillion-dollar annual budget of the Heseds, operated by the JDC, comes from several sources.

Most Russian Heseds operate with the money channeled by JDC from funds raised by the joint campaign of the United Jewish Appeal and local federations in the United States. These funds go primarily to support the most fund-consuming part of the Hesed operations — food programs, including monthly and holiday food packages and distribution of hot meals through community dining rooms and meals-on-wheels programs. While the activities are operated by the JDC in conjunction with local groups, including the Russian Jewish Congress, a majority of the funds for the multimillion-dollar project are provided by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany — particularly in Ukraine and Belarus.

The programs appear to be successful for Sofia Shapiro, an 80-year-old retired engineer who receives several services from her local Hesed in Yekaterinburg. The homebound Shapiro and her bedridden blind sister, Vera Brook, have no relatives and a caretaker from Hesed visits them daily.

The center also gave Shapiro a walker made by some of the eight staff workers and 39 volunteers who assemble a total of 2,500 wheelchairs, walkers, walking canes and crutches a month at a plant in St. Petersburg.

"There is a sticker here," Shapiro says, pointing at the bottom part of the walker. "It says 'Live With Hope.' So I do." □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Group urges Clinton on MIAs

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations urged President Clinton to sign legislation directing the State Department to investigate the cases of three Israeli MIAs.

The bill, which passed the House last week and earlier passed the Senate, directs State Department officials to raise the issue of the missing soldiers with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.

### Resolution seeks to free Pollard

The New York City Council passed a resolution calling on President Clinton to grant clemency to Jonathan Pollard.

The former U.S. naval intelligence analyst is serving a life sentence for handing over thousands of top-secret documents to Israel in 1984 and 1985.

### Buchanan counters critics

Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan defended himself against charges that he is anti-Semitic, saying his critics should apologize for trying to stop him from expressing his views.

Appearing on PBS's "Newshour," Buchanan said he is unfairly attacked because, "I have succeeded and because I will speak up for my faith when it's attacked, and I will even criticize the Israeli lobby when others will not."

### Lawyer says no slur intended

Jewish lawyers should not represent a Christian family, said an attorney for a boy injured in the Columbine High School shootings earlier this year.

Denver lawyer Anthony Sturniolo sent a letter dated Oct. 14 to the family after they decided to hire Michigan lawyer Geoffrey Fieger and local co-counsel Howard Zucker. "I know that you are committed Christians, and I do not want you to be led astray to a position that might be a poor witness to our Lord." Sturniolo later told The Denver Post he did not intend the letter to be anti-Semitic.

### Austrian police foil plot

Austrian police uncovered a neo-Nazi group seeking to overthrow the nation's government.

The arrests come amid growing concern about a right-wing revival in Austria after the recent strong election showing of the anti-foreigner Freedom Party.

### Parents push for school closings

Parents in a Maryland county are pushing the local school board to close schools on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. If the board agrees to the request, which could be heard at a Nov. 10 board meeting, Carroll County would become the seventh Maryland county to close schools for the High Holidays.

## PROFILE

### Jewish soldier devotes retirement to dangerous work of rescuing lives

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — With limited official support and a small group of assistants, a retired Jewish major in the Russian army is attempting to fight the scourge of kidnappings that has descended upon the troubled region of Chechnya.

"Just several days ago, I received a videocassette in which they chopped off his finger. They are demanding a \$200,000 ransom," said Maj. Vyacheslav Izmailov regarding the fate of Oleg Yemelyantsev, 40, an Israeli citizen born in Russia who is currently being held hostage in the Russian semiautonomous region of Chechnya in the North Caucasus mountains.

A year and a half ago, shortly after Yemelyantsev came from Israel to sell his apartment in this southern Russian region, he was kidnapped and taken hostage.

Yemelyantsev is just one of more than 1,000 people, including several dozen Jews, being held hostage, "and these are only the officially registered cases. The real figures are far greater," Izmailov said.

Jews are singled out as victims of these kidnappings because they are few in number and because of the widespread belief that the international Jewish community and the State of Israel would never forsake fellow Jews.

Izmailov first became involved in the region during the 1995-96 war between Chechnya and Russia, when he worked to bring soldiers and POWs back to Russia. Since then, the region has become, in Izmailov's words, "an empire of the slave trade, a black hole of the whole region, sucking into itself hostages and slaves of all nationalities, ages and occupations: ethnic Chechens and Russians, children and grownups, soldiers and Orthodox priests."

Izmailov, 45, who was raised in the Muslim region of Dagestan, has become one of the key figures in the "unknown war" against the kidnappings, which has become a flourishing business in the region. Izmailov has managed to free almost 100 hostages.

Izmailov, who has sent his family to Israel for their safety, lives alone in his apartment in a Moscow suburb and shuttles between Moscow and the North Caucasus.

With Russian officials — including the Federal Security Service, the successor to the Soviet-era KGB — not particularly active in this fight, two independent groups led by retired army officers have taken on the task: one led by Izmailov, the other by nationalist Gen. Alexander Lebed.

Izmailov's group tries to pay for its hostages in "human currency," that is, using prisoner swaps.

Using his connections in the Ministry of Interior, he picks out an ethnic Chechen mobster being held by Russia and tries to trade him for a hostage being held in Chechnya.

It's delicate work that includes building a chain of connections between Interior Ministry officials, the relatives of the detained mobsters and the leaders of the gangs — who often number among them officials of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic.

Until recently, this scheme worked reasonably well, but earlier this year Izmailov's contacts in the Interior Ministry and in police headquarters became less effective, most likely because of personnel changes.

Since then, Izmailov's group has increasingly applied another, more dangerous, approach: helping the hostages escape.

Mikhail Brenner, a Jew from the city of Nalchik, and four of his colleagues were kidnapped a year ago from a town near the border with Chechnya where they were working at a construction site. When the captors did not receive the money they demanded, they murdered one of the hostages, Victor Zinchenko, an ethnic Ukrainian.

Earlier this month, his group, in cooperation with some of Lebed's henchmen, organized the escape of several hostages, including Brenner.

Of course, rescue efforts are not always successful. Lev Melikhov, 52, a Jew who was kidnapped March 31, was apparently murdered by his captors. □

## Oslo summit will not produce any breakthroughs, leaders say

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli officials are playing down expectations for this week's summit in Oslo between Prime Minister Ehud Barak, President Clinton and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The three were scheduled to meet Tuesday in Oslo to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. The former Israeli prime minister's breakthrough 1993 accord with the Palestinians came as a result of secret talks in the Norwegian capital.

"Barak is first of all going to honor Rabin's memory," a source in Barak's office was quoted as saying.

"There will be no decisions or declarations. They will discuss procedure and a timetable for final-status talks. They will not agree on the solution for the problem of Jerusalem, and it is doubtful they will present detailed positions."

Clinton also would not speculate on what may come out of the meeting. Last Friday, Clinton said Israel and the Palestinian Authority had set an "aggressive" timetable when they agreed to reach a framework agreement on final-status issues by February.

The heads of the Israeli and Palestinian teams negotiating the final-status agreement met last Friday to prepare for Tuesday's summit. They agreed to begin formal negotiations next Sunday.

The difficult security and political issues faced by Israel and the Palestinians were underscored by a shooting attack Saturday night on an Israeli bus near the West Bank town of Hebron.

Five people were injured in an ambush that security officials believe was carried out by an Islamic militant group. The attack occurred near the village of Tarkumiya, which is the final point of the safe-passage route Israel opened last week for Palestinians traveling between the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Israeli hard-liners have warned that the route would be used to carry out terrorist attacks.

Despite the shooting, Israel went ahead Sunday with the opening of a section of a major road in Hebron to Palestinian traffic. The opening of a portion of Shuhada Street, which runs past Jewish settlements in Hebron, was called for in a land-for-security agreement Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed September in Egypt.

Jewish settlers in Hebron, angered by the shooting, protested against the road's opening. □

### AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

## Reform center to be fulcrum of growing movement in Moscow

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — For Irina Yunyova, a new program to train Russian Jews to work in Reform congregations was a perfect fit.

"It has always been important to me and my family to keep our Jewish roots," said Yunyova, 19, who comes from a Yiddish-speaking family in Birobidzhan. "I'm especially happy that I can pursue my favorite occupation: teaching Jewish dance."

The program, Machon, is part of a recently dedicated Reform center that will serve as the fulcrum of the Reform movement in Moscow.

The dedication highlights the inroads being made by liberal Judaism in the former Soviet Union. Just a few years after the Reform movement began to operate in the region, there are 100 Reform congregations and 10,000 community members, according to Rabbi Zinovy Kogan, one of the leaders of Progressive Judaism in Russia, as Reform Judaism is known here.

The curriculum of Machon, which trains social workers and community leaders to work in Reform congregations, includes courses in Jewish history and tradition, sociology and psychology, as well as Hebrew classes. Substantial stipends are provided for the 22 first-year students who started classes this fall.

"We dedicate this wonderful place as a house of study and as a house of community. It represents not just the one congregation but also our belief in the future of the Jewish community in Russia and the FSU in general," said Rabbi Richard Block, president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Progressive Judaism is making its presence felt throughout the former Soviet Union, particularly in Russia and Ukraine. This fall a seminar on Jewish tradition organized near Moscow by the Progressive Judaism movement drew participants from 70 places throughout the former Soviet Union.

The students in the Machon program come from regions throughout Russia. Soon a Torah will be installed in a congregation in the Siberian city of Murmansk.

Shortly after the dedication of a synagogue in Moscow, Block visited Kiev to install Alexander Dukhovny as the rabbi for the Religious Union for Progressive Congregations in Ukraine. Dukhovny will serve the 22 Progressive congregations scattered throughout Ukraine.

In some places, the increased activity of the Reform movement has put them at odds with the Lubavitch movement, which is the other Jewish religious organization active in the former Soviet Union. In Ukraine, the Lubavitch chief rabbi and the Reform movement are at odds over the Reform movement's claim to Jewish communal property returned by the government.

But Albert Tyurin, 25, a math teacher from Yelets, a provincial town south of Moscow, appears to care little about these squabbles.

"I was brought up in a Jewish family, but knew literally nothing of Judaism and Jewish tradition. There was no Jewish community in the town. I could only dream of studying at such a place," he said. □

## Child survivor defends far rightist

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Jewish member of Austria's far-right Freedom Party has visited Israel in an effort to improve the image of the party's leader, Jorg Haider.

"Do you really think, honestly, that in the middle of modern Europe, 27 percent of the Austrian people would support a fascist leader who hates minorities?" Peter Sichrovsky asked during a speech last week.

The family of Sichrovsky, an Austrian member of the European Parliament, was murdered by the Nazis.

Sichrovsky had once been among Haider's critics.

But more recently, Sichrovsky said he believes that Haider had changed his views. □