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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

'Iran 13' advocates watch warily

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Iranian President Mohammad Khatami "has a mandate now, and the way they handle the 13 is a test of his intent and of the kind of rule of law that they will implement," said the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Malcolm Hoenlein. [Page 1]

Russian communities face ban

Russian officials may ban a Jewish community because it failed to register by a deadline set forward in the nation's 1997 Russian law on religion, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

Unable to meet the deadline because of bureaucratic delays in Russian officialdom, the Overo Jewish community in the southwestern city of Voronezh and 12 other religious communities there face the possibility of losing the right to meet in public, the Washington-based group said.

Ross tries to break deadlock

U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross is meeting with Israeli and Palestinian officials in an effort to restart deadlocked negotiations.

After meeting with Ross on Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak expressed confidence that "we'll find a way to overcome all the problems that have appeared recently in the negotiations."

Palestinian officials are hoping the United States will pressure Israel to make several concessions they say are necessary before the talks resume.

Settlements get less protection

Israel slashed by 82 percent the budget it assigns to protect Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Israel's Prime Minister's Office said the cut from \$34.5 million to \$6.2 million was made "because the entire Defense Ministry budget was cut."

A spokesman for the Yesha Council, which represents settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, criticized the move, saying, "Somebody up there in the government is depending too much on luck."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Victory of reformers in Iran won't necessarily free 13 Jews

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — American advocates for Iranian Jews welcomed the victory of reform candidates in Iran's elections, but are unclear whether it would lead to freedom for 13 Jews accused of espionage.

They caution that the judiciary is still controlled by the country's hard-line clerical leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said the emergence of a relatively moderate Parliament after last Friday's vote removes the "excuses" Iranian President Mohammad Khatami had given for delaying the trial of the Jews.

Khatami "has a mandate now, and the way they handle the 13 is a test of his intent and of the kind of rule of law that they will implement," Hoenlein said.

The elections were seen as a contest between forces aligned with hard-line Islamic clerics and those who want to see a loosening of strict enforcement of Islamic codes and an opening to the West.

Many believe the arrest of the 13 Jews was part of that struggle.

The trial will test whether the relatively moderate forces truly support democracy and a civil society or if their professions of moderation are "just a facade through which they carry out the same policies with a more gentle face but the same consequences," Hoenlein added.

One American analyst said the elections would influence Iran in the long term, but is skeptical that in the short term they would benefit the 13 Jews or have much impact on Iran's policies toward West.

"The major levers of power — the armed forces, judiciary, electronic media, security and the main economic institutions — remain in the hands of the hard-liners," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, a Philadelphia-based think tank.

He also noted that the Iranian view of reform and moderation may differ radically from the American perspective.

"What the sides are arguing about is the role of Islam, structures and personal freedom, but they're not talking about foreign policy issues," like weapons of mass destruction or sponsorship of international terrorism, he said.

Hoenlein said several unnamed foreign governments had agreed to contact the new members of Iran's government to urge the release of the Jews.

The 13 Jews — religious and community leaders — were jailed in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz last spring.

They have been accused, but never formally charged, of spying for Israel and the United States, accusations both countries vehemently deny.

Last month, shortly after Iranian authorities announced that a trial would be held soon, three Jews were released on bail. No date for the trial has been set. If convicted the Jews would face the death penalty.

Sam Kermanian, secretary-general of the American Iranian Jewish Federation, said that over the long term, the election results will likely pave the way for "the implementation of the rule of law and civil society and much fairer justice system."

But as for the issue of the 13 Jews awaiting trial, Kermanian said, "We hope that just as Iran had promised, they will make sure that all of the rights of the prisoners are preserved and that once the review of their case is complete, Iranian judicial officials

MIDEAST FOCUS

Levy lashes out at Syria

Israel's foreign minister lashed out against the harsh anti-Israel rhetoric emanating from Damascus in the wake of recent Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon.

The comparison of Israel to the "Nazis and Hitler is revolting and causes us to ask ourselves whether the Syrians are truly interested in peace," David Levy told the visiting president of the European Parliament, Nicole Fontaine.

"Syria will not succeed in weakening Israel with this foul hate-filled wave."

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority's top official in Jerusalem canceled a meeting with Fontaine after she refused to meet him in eastern Jerusalem. Faisal Hussein said Tuesday he is concerned that Fontaine's refusal signaled a shift in E.U. policy regarding Palestinian rights in Jerusalem.

Nuclear scientists get access

Israel and the United States signed agreements that will give Israeli scientists access to some types of U.S. nuclear technology. The access had previously been denied because Israel refuses to sign the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The agreements are a "signal that Israel is a friendly country," U.S. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson told a news conference Tuesday in Jerusalem.

The agreements will increase cooperation between Israeli and U.S. scientists in 25 nuclear and non-nuclear areas.

Israeli Arab sentenced for killings

An Israeli court sentenced an Israeli Arab to two consecutive life terms for the murder last August of two Jewish hikers. Abdullah Igbariya, 21, pleaded guilty to stabbing to death Sharon Steinmetz, 21, and Yehiel Funfter, 26, after having decided "to kill Jews."

The court said he expressed no regret for his actions, which were part of a plot to steal their car for a bomb attack inside Israel.



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will indeed come to the conclusion that they are all innocent and every one of them is released." Pooya Dayanim, a spokesman for the Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations, said his group is "very happy" with the results of the elections and that "more moderate and reform-minded people who care about the rule of law and pay attention to world opinion are going to be in charge."

But Dayanim recommended taking a "wait-and-see attitude" concerning the 13.

Dayanim said he was also pleased by the fact that Jews would have a new Parliament member, Maurice Motamed. Only one Jew is allowed to sit on this 290-member governmental body.

Incumbent Manouchehr Eliasi had been viewed as ineffective, said Dayanim, noting that Eliasi had been silent on the issue of the 13 Jews until just before the election, when he announced that he'd been promised the Jews would be released, which Iranian judicial authorities promptly denied.

By contrast Motamed "is known for being a strong advocate of Jewish interests and doesn't play around with words or endear himself to the Iranian regime," said Dayanim.

Kermanian said he did not know if the plight of the 13 jailed Jews had been a central issue in the campaign for the Jewish seat in Parliament.

Ali Fallahian, a former Iranian intelligence minister who was responsible for the Jews' arrest last year, was defeated in his bid for a Parliament seat.

The federation and council, both based in Los Angeles, which has the country's largest concentration of Iranian Jews, have differed in their approach to the plight of the 13 accused of spying.

The federation has advocated quiet diplomacy, while the council has called for international pressure on Iran.

Iranian Jews living in the United States have traditionally refrained from making public statements about the situation inside Iran for fear of endangering family and friends in the Islamic nation. □

U.S. Jewish group raises money to help Chechens survive winter

By *Brianne Korn*

NEW YORK (JTA) — An American Jewish organization has launched a major fund-raising campaign to aid both Jewish and non-Jewish Chechen refugees fleeing Russian troops.

"We've found that Jews want to respond to not only narrowly defined Jewish concerns," according to Martin Horowitz, director of the Jewish Community Development Fund in Russia and Ukraine, which will help disseminate money raised by the American Jewish World Service.

The International Rescue Committee will distribute emergency supplies such as mattresses, blankets and raw materials for shelters. The frigid weather in Chechnya is making a "deplorable situation" even worse, said Gillian Gunn, emergency coordinator for the IRC. Plans for an educational program for refugee children are also in the works.

The Russian Jewish Congress is playing a large part in identifying Jewish Chechen refugees and helping them escape and resettle. The RJC, which hopes to raise between \$2.5 million and \$3 million, has already made plans to supply refugees with apartments in Moscow and Israel.

Horowitz said 400 Jewish refugees have been identified by the RJC but the real number may be much higher. "The Russian Jewish Congress branch in the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan have just begun to work on the ground there," Horowitz said. "They're continuing to work on the area."

Horowitz, who said he hopes to raise at least \$500,000, plans to secure funds for the campaign through advertisements on the Internet and through news releases he will send out to "socially involved synagogues who have responded in the past." □

Donations to Chechen refugees can be made to American Jewish World Service/Chechnya Relief, 989 Avenue of the Americas, 10th floor, New York, N.Y. 10018, or by calling AJWS at 1-800-889-7176. Online donations may be made at www.ajws.org.

JEWISH WORLD

Activists monitor Diallo trial

A group of Jewish activists traveled to Albany, N.Y., to "monitor" the police brutality trial of four officers who last year killed Amadou Diallo, a West African immigrant.

The family of *Gidone Busch*, an Orthodox man killed by police in Brooklyn, was expected to join the activists, organized by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

The activists want "to lend some support to the Diallo family," said JFREJ's associate director, Cynthia Greenberg.

Argentina tightens security

Argentina is tightening security after intelligence reports indicate possible attacks against Jews outside the Middle East by groups based in southern Lebanon.

The Argentine government has blamed Hezbollah for the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of the main Jewish center in Buenos Aires.

Japan urged to confront past

The Simon Wiesenthal Center urged Japan to appoint a commission to investigate the country's World War II crimes or face continuing lawsuits in American courts and hostility from other Asian nations.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the center's associate dean and an expert on Asian affairs, made the comments in Tokyo after responding to an invitation by Japanese legislators to discuss the nation's unfinished wartime legacy.

Girls school opening in Dallas

What is believed to be the first all-girls Jewish high school in the Southwest is opening in Dallas.

The move came after the Orthodox community showed substantial growth in recent years, according to Rabbi Yonasan Schick, the headmaster of the new Mesorah High School for Girls. The school hopes to attract girls from as far away as New Orleans and Houston.

Rabbi slams Holocaust museum

An activist rabbi recently criticized a decision by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to show a documentary about the impact of the McCarthy era on several black entertainers.

"Scandalize My Name: Stories From the Blacklist" is "the first film shown by the museum without any connection" to the museum's mandate, "the preservation of the memory of the Shoah," said Rabbi Avi Weiss.

"Showing this film in this special museum leads us down the slippery slope of universalization of the Holocaust."

Government seeks death penalty against Los Angeles JCC gunman

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Federal prosecutors will seek the death penalty against Buford Furrow Jr., the avowed white supremacist accused of killing a Filipino American mail carrier after he wounded five people at a Jewish community center last August.

Jeff Rouss, executive director of the Jewish Community Centers of Los Angeles, thinks death would be an appropriate punishment.

"This man killed an innocent individual who was a public servant," Rouss told the Los Angeles Times. "He terrorized children and hurt them at day care. His was an act of terrorism and it was an act of murder."

According to the 15-count indictment, Furrow went on a shooting spree at the North Valley Jewish Community Center in suburban Los Angeles last Aug. 10, wounding three young children, a teen-age counselor and an adult receptionist. An hour later, he allegedly gunned down mail carrier Joseph Iletto, because, he later told agents, he was a government worker and not white.

Furrow surrendered to FBI agents in Las Vegas a day after the rampage and reportedly told agents that he wanted to send "a wake-up call to America to kill Jews."

It is unusual for the Justice Department to seek the death penalty — no one has been executed by the federal government since 1963 — and some analysts saw the decision as part of an effort to crack down on hate crimes.

According to The Los Angeles Times, some of Furrow's defense lawyers have approached Jewish attorneys to enlist their help in persuading the government to settle for a lesser sentence — life without possibility of parole. □

Anti-Haider demonstrators take to the streets in Vienna

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A quarter of a million people have braved icy rain in Vienna to protest the inclusion of Jorg Haider's far-right Freedom Party in the new Austrian government.

Saturday's protest extended well beyond the Austrian capital, with thousands taking part in anti-Haider demonstrations in a number of other European cities.

Some 9,000 took to the streets in Paris, and 10,000 demonstrated in Brussels. Other demonstrations were held in London and Oslo. In Belgrade, Yugoslavia, about 50 people marched to the Austrian Embassy carrying banners against both Haider and Vojislav Seselj, a Serbian ultranationalist who is deputy prime minister of Yugoslavia.

The Freedom Party won 27 percent of the vote in Austria's elections last October, becoming the country's second largest party. It took office Feb. 4 in coalition with the conservative Peoples Party. The move polarized Austria internally and isolated it in the international arena. Years ago Haider praised Hitler's employment policies and members of the Nazi SS, but he later apologized for the remarks.

To coincide with Saturday's demonstration in Vienna, private Austrian sponsors took out a full-page ad in the International Herald Tribune calling for international support for the majority of Austrians who did not vote for Haider or the Freedom Party.

The Vienna rally, the biggest anti-government protest in Austria since the end of World War II, drew protesters from across Austria and abroad. It took place in Heldenplatz, or Heroes' Square, the same vast square where jubilant Viennese cheered Hitler when he announced Austria's annexation to the Nazi Reich in 1938. This time demonstrators lit candles and waved placards comparing Haider with Hitler.

Austrian government leaders dismissed the protests. In a statement Sunday, Peter Westenthaler, the parliamentary leader of the Freedom Party, called the demonstration "nothing more than a rather thin deployment of the Communist International with Austria's socialists." □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Despite resistance to feminism, Orthodox women have had impact***By Debra Nussbaum Cohen*

NEW YORK (JTA) — What does it say about a conference on Orthodoxy and feminism when perhaps as many as half the participants insist they are not feminists?

It says that it's an Orthodox conference.

Feminism, described only half-jokingly by one keynote speaker as "the F-word" in Orthodoxy, is a loaded term, though that may be as true today for American women in general as it is for the Orthodox.

The struggle to find a comfortable balance between progress and tradition was obvious at the Third International Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy, sponsored by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, which drew some 2,000 people to a New York hotel Sunday and Monday. But just as obvious was the dramatic impact of feminism on Orthodox Judaism in general. Even those who prefer not to call themselves feminists and do not attribute the changes to feminism live lives that embrace these changes.

Women who never celebrated their own Bat Mitzvah and who never studied the Talmud made sure to bring their daughters, many of whom even more vehemently deny the feminist label, but who have celebrated their Bat Mitzvah in synagogue, are studying Talmud in high school and are preparing for college. Indeed, one of the major changes in Orthodoxy is that a serious Jewish education has become a universally accepted norm for Orthodox girls.

Changes abound elsewhere as well.

In the synagogue, a slowly growing number of Orthodox congregations are instituting changes such as sending a Torah scroll into the women's section during services to enable women to touch and kiss the holy text before and after it is read aloud; designing a new sanctuary with a mechitzah straight down the middle, rather than putting women at the back of the room; offering women an opportunity to join their husbands in front of the congregation to welcome a daughter's arrival and to recite a blessing when their child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah; and permitting women to participate in the congregation's ritual committee.

Changes like these are far from universal, even in modern Orthodox congregations. "I wish we were doing these things in our shul," sighed one Miami woman at a session where four rabbis described these changes.

According to Rabbi Saul Berman of New York, one of Orthodox feminism's leading rabbinic advisers, most of the women seeking counsel from female interpreters of Jewish law, known as yoatzot halachah, are haredi, or fervently Orthodox — the most anti-feminist Orthodox community.

Two New York City synagogues have created congregational internships, where scholarly women work as teachers of both men and women, speak from the pulpit and fulfill other duties similar to those of male seminary students who work as rabbinic interns.

Change has also been felt in Israel, where learned young women are now serving as interpreters of Jewish law in certain areas of halachic expertise. Advances in women's participation in Orthodox life were also reflected in the four booklets put out by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, known as JOFA.

The booklets, titled "The Orthodox Jewish Woman and Ritual: Options and Opportunities," provide an introduction to Jewish law;

new and traditional customs surrounding Bat Mitzvah, Shabbat, death and mourning, and birth, and in personal essays make clear the changes in women's roles from even a decade or two ago.

At the same time, Orthodox feminism has become a flash point, the defining line between those who believe that Orthodoxy should synthesize modernity with tradition, and those who say that tradition must be insulated from modernity. In the fervently Orthodox world, the impact of religious feminism has been only negative, said Rabbi Avi Shafran, spokesman of Agudath Israel of America, who did not attend the conference.

Orthodox feminism, which is viewed in his community as a dangerous by-product of the secular world, has led to "almost a knee-jerk suspicion of even positive things, like women getting together to do charity or say tehillim [psalms] for the ill and bereaved," Shafran said.

Even for many who identify as modern Orthodox, feminism is thought to be code for "angry women."

Indeed, the touchy issue of anger came up at many sessions throughout the gathering. Meeting organizers spoke of the sharp difference between the way they are described by their ideological opponents and the reality of their lives as wives, mothers and grandmothers.

And as if to prove their Orthodox bona fides, female conference speakers often emphasized that their desire for change comes from positive motivation: their love of Torah and their commitment to observance, rather than some external drive to be just like men.

Some "perceive us as these angry women," said Carol Newman of New York, a philanthropist who supports institutes of advanced learning for women and is vice president of JOFA.

But noting that during the conference's last organizing phone call, she was busy making orange juice for her husband and Greenberg was helping her husband find his shirts, Newman said, "I don't know one woman at this conference who is not involved in family life."

Greenberg, reflecting on the delicate balancing act facing Orthodox feminists, said in her keynote address that they need to persuade those who oppose them "that we are not looking at sweeping changes that will upset Judaism.

"And if the word 'equality' doesn't work so well, we'll have to use words like 'justice' and 'mercy' and 'compassion.'"

Two well-known modern Orthodox rabbis, Marc Angel of New York City and Alan Yuter of Springfield, N.J., who together led a workshop, cautioned their listeners not to act too angry.

"Sometimes the feminists are perceived as being too strident, too demanding, too impatient," Angel said in an interview beforehand. In the workshop, Yuter warned that "if you are overly aggressive and angry, you'll create opposition. When you speak loudly, people go deaf. When you speak softly, people hear you."

Plenary speaker Adena Berkowitz, an attorney and JOFA board member, opened her remarks by saying "There's no one here who's angry. Perhaps we're frustrated, but we're not angry."

Her statement was quickly met by murmurs of protest rippling loudly throughout the large hall.

"The Chasidic movement was attacked and vilified in its time, but stayed the course to become part of the mainstream," said Belda Lindenbaum, another philanthropist who has founded, and funds, several Orthodox women's Torah study programs in the United States and Israel.

"Only time will tell if we touch and change the hearts of many, or if we become just a blip in time." □