

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Status quo in overseas allocation

The North American Jewish federation system decided to maintain its current distribution of overseas allocations.

Meeting Monday in New York, members of the United Jewish Communities' Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee decided to maintain its longstanding 75/25 split in overseas allocations to the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, respectively. That percentage translates to roughly \$144 million for the Jewish Agency and \$43 million for the JDC. It does not include additional elective funds from the system and funds donated directly from individual federations.

In addition, the committee decided to allocate an extra \$20 million to be split evenly between the two groups. The decision must be approved by the UJC board of trustees, which meets next month.

### Fence goes to court

The U.N. General Assembly voted to send the issue of Israel's security barrier to the International Court of Justice.

The General Assembly voted 90-8 on Monday to have the court, based in The Hague, address whether international law requires Israel to construction of its West Bank fence. The United States opposed the measure, and most European countries abstained from the vote.

Israel has said it is prepared to present its case before the court, arguing that the fence is justified on grounds of self-defense. U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that the resolution would not enhance Israeli-Palestinian peace.

"We think that the resolution could undermine rather than encourage direct negotiations between the parties," he said, explaining the U.S. vote.

### Mubarak: Press for talks

The United States should press Israel and Syria to negotiate a peace treaty, Hosni Mubarak said.

Speaking Monday at a news conference during a visit by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, the Egyptian president said Bashar Assad's recent comments to The New York Times indicated a willingness to renew talks with Israel. Both Israeli and U.S. officials have dismissed the comments by Assad, Syria's president, as disingenuous.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### As pro-Kremlin party wins in Russia, fears for democracy's future abound

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW, Dec. 8 (JTA) — After a sleepless night watching the vote count in Russia's parliamentary elections, Alexander Osovtsov sounded extremely tired.

Osovtsov, who was running on the slate of Yabloko, one of Russia's two major liberal parties, failed to get into the new Duma, Parliament's lower house, in Sunday's vote. Nor did SPS, another liberal party. Like Yabloko, it failed to cross the 5 percent threshold needed to win parliamentary seats.

The clear winner was the pro-Kremlin United Russia Party, which won an estimated 37 percent of the national vote, nearly three times as much as the second-place party. The overwhelming showing by a party so closely aligned with President Vladimir Putin led many to express concern about the future of democracy in Russia.

"All restrictions are now down. The Kremlin is now free to do whatever it wants," Osovtsov said.

Putin said the elections were both free and fair, but Osovtsov wasn't alone in bemoaning the results of the vote.

The Council of Europe and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe criticized the ways in which state-owned media outlets trumpeted Putin's party.

The recent jailing of Jewish oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an active supporter of the liberal parties, also was seen as boosting United Russia.

"On Sunday, Russia took a big step backward," said Tankred Golenpolsky, founder and editor of Moscow's International Jewish Gazette.

Jewish voters appeared to have supported a losing cause.

While it's difficult to say how exactly Jews voted Sunday, results of the vote among Russians living in Israel offer a glimpse of Russian Jewish electoral sympathies.

About 100,000 Russians living in Israel have the right to vote in Russian elections, though only about 10,000 cast ballots.

According to the Russian Embassy in Tel Aviv, which was responsible for the vote count, 41 percent of Russian Israelis supported SPS, 24 percent voted for Yabloko and 16 percent preferred United Russia.

Yabloko and SPS weren't alone in their failure: Only four parties out of 23 in the race were able to cross the 5 percent threshold.

In addition to United Russia, the other three winners were the Communists, with 13 percent, the party of ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, at 12 percent, and the leftist nationalists from the Homeland bloc, with 9 percent.

The Communists won only half of what they received in elections four years ago, but Zhirinovskiy's party doubled its Duma representation. Some observers are speculating that Zhirinovskiy may strike a parliamentary agreement with the Kremlin, giving United Russia a majority.

The liberal parties favored by many Russian Jews still are likely to have a few seats in the Duma.

According to Russian electoral law, half of the seats in the 450-member body are distributed proportionally to party lists that capture more than 5 percent. The other 225 seats go to the winners of direct votes in single-seat districts, and the liberals are expected to win a handful of those seats.

United Russia secured at least 222 seats out of the total 450.

Many analysts agree that the new Duma may rubber-stamp changes to Russia's

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Less time for Israeli reserves

Israeli men 40 and older could be exempt from military reserve duty as of January.

The decision by a special Knesset committee this week drew a mixed response from reserve soldiers, many of whom have borne a heavy burden of service during the Palestinian uprising.

The proposal still must be written as legislation and approved by the Knesset, Ha'aretz reported. "Rather than deal responsibly with the problem, the government has simply decided to cut blindly," Ori Ron, a campaigner for reservists' rights, told Army Radio on Sunday.

Currently, most Israeli reservists are demobilized by age 44.

### Dolphinarium driver jailed

An Israeli court sentenced an Arab man who aided the Dolphinarium suicide bomber to 12 years in jail.

Mahmoud Nadi drove the bomber to the site on June 1, 2001, for less than \$50.

Before Monday's sentencing, he told the court he did not know his passenger's plans. The blast killed 21 people.

### Yassin: Jews, go to Europe

The spiritual leader of Hamas said that if there must be a Jewish state, it should be in Europe.

Speaking to the German news magazine Der Spiegel, Sheik Ahmed Yassin said he opposes a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the recent "Geneva accord" peace proposal.

"The plan is worse than the Oslo one, because it abandons the right of return for the refugees," he said.

In fact, the Oslo accords, signed in 1993, did not deal specifically with the refugee issue, and the Geneva proposal leaves the issue ambiguous.



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constitution if the Kremlin finds it appropriate. Some speculate that Putin, who is expected to win re-election in March easily, may use this leverage to pass legislation allowing him to seek a third presidential term in 2008 or to alter the basis of Russia's young democracy in some other way.

A day after the elections, liberal Russian media were discussing the stunning margin of victory of the pro-Kremlin forces, the impressive show of the two nationalist parties and the unprecedented weakness of the liberals, who for the first time in Russia's post-Soviet history will not have any significant parliamentary representation.

"The country woke up in a new country," read the headline of Gazeta, a leading Moscow daily.

Many Jewish voters were disappointed and frustrated by the results.

"The elections showed that Russia is not ready for liberal changes, that people don't need them anymore. The people need populism; the people give up real democratic values in favor of authoritarian-styled rule," Golenpolsky said.

"Voters followed United Russia, which didn't offer any political program nor any kind of ideology outside of its unconditional show of support" for Putin, said Alexander Sakov, a Jewish leader and editor of a Siberian Jewish monthly in the city of Omsk.

Not all Jewish leaders agreed.

The vote showed "that the majority of the population is supporting the way Russia has been following in the last four years," Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, said in a statement Monday. The support for United Russia "is a clear-cut signal that people don't want coups and revolutions, that they vote for stability," he said.

Aside from the defeat of the liberals, many Jews are concerned about the impressive showing by politicians with known anti-Semitic and ultranationalist records.

Nikolai Kondratenko, a former governor in southern Russia known for his anti-Zionist rhetoric, won a seat on the Communist list. Albert Makashov, who became notorious seven years ago for anti-Semitic remarks, won in a district where he lost a re-election bid four years ago. Dmitriy Rogozin, a co-chairman of Homeland, built his campaign on thinly veiled anti-Semitic tirades against the "Jewish rich" and has pledged support for a greater Russia and protection of the interests of ethnic Russians abroad.

While sociologists have yet to explain the significant surge in the nationalist vote, some Jews are expressing serious concerns.

"While few will miss the departing Communists, whose leaders fell to a new low in their Jew-baiting rhetoric this election cycle," Leonid Stonov, the director of international bureaus and activities at the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, said in a statement, "it's better to have the anti-Semites and racists in opposition to the government than in bed with it.

"With so many nationalist leaders in the Duma, in the four years to come we will have a constant venue for all kinds of anti-Semites and radical patriots," said Alla, a university instructor who was at a Moscow JCC on Monday afternoon and refused to give her last name.

"Perhaps I sound too alarmist, but I fear for my own and my children's safety when I think that words of hate can translate into action," said Alla, who supported SPS.

Mark Levin, executive director of the Washington-based NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia, said almost all the Russian Jewish leaders he contacted in the wake of the election "expressed a certain amount of concern" over the results.

Levin took a wait-and-see attitude.

"We're going to see if, in the post-election situation, there is going to be a fundamental change in the government's attitude toward the Jewish community and the State of Israel," he told JTA.

Putin generally has pursued pro-Jewish policies during his time in office.

For his part, Osotsov said that now that his party has lost, he is worried about his own personal future.

The director of projects with the Open Russia foundation, a charity group created and chaired by Khodorkovsky, Osotsov said he would prefer to continue working in Russia but is not ruling out the possibility that he might be arrested, along with some other people close to Khodorkovsky's Yukos oil company.

"If I don't find myself in prison sometime soon, I will leave Russia," he said. □

## JEWISH WORLD

### Scholars fight 'Protocols'

Some European scholars called for measures to be taken against hate literature, including "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

Following a two-day seminar this week in Venice, academics from 38 European universities called for hate literature targeting any single faith to be considered an assault on all faiths.

They urged research into the creation and dissemination of hate literature and related conspiracy theories in order to combat them.

The seminar was organized under the auspices of UNESCO by the Simon Wiesenthal Center's campus arm and Olokaustos, a Venice-based Holocaust studies center.

### S. Africa gets new chief rabbi

Rabbi Warren Goldstein was chosen as the next chief rabbi of South Africa. The first South African-born man to hold the post, Goldstein will succeed Rabbi Cyril Harris, who is retiring on Jan. 1, 2005. Goldstein, 32, was ordained in 1996 at the Yeshiva Gedola in Johannesburg.

### Brazilian Hillel opens

Hillel will inaugurate its first office in Rio de Janeiro. Rio's Hillel, slated to be inaugurated Monday evening, is Brazil's second. It will feature a large Jewish library, multimedia center and conference rooms. Unlike in the United States, Hillels in Brazil are not housed on university campuses.

Philanthropist Edgar Bronfman, a major supporter of the building, was slated to attend the opening ceremony, to be held at an elegant beachside hotel.

### Former JTA bureau chief dies

JTA's former bureau chief in Washington, David Friedman, died at 68 after a long illness.

Friedman, who died Dec. 2, served as JTA's Washington bureau chief from 1981 until his retirement in 1992.

During his tenure, Friedman covered pivotal news events, including Israel's war in Lebanon, the first Palestinian intifada and the Soviet Jewry march on Washington.

### Oh dreidel, dreidel, dreidel

Students at Indiana University set an unofficial record for dreidel spinning.

As the school's fight song played over loudspeakers in the background, 713 dreidels were spun for 10 seconds at Indiana on Sunday, a record pending confirmation by the Guinness Book of World Records.

The previous record was set at the University of Maryland.

## Juicy trial in South Africa as Israeli mobster goes to court

By Michael Belling

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — An alleged Israeli mobster is facing charges in South Africa that include murder, kidnapping, robbery and intimidation.

The trial of Lior Saat, which will go forward after Johannesburg's High Court ruled last week that it has the jurisdiction to try him, is one of the highest-profile South African criminal trials in years and represents a potential point of embarrassment for the country's Jews.

The trial has been dominated by a series of dramatic events — the daylight murder of a prominent Johannesburg socialite and key witness, allegations of police involvement in the kidnapping of the accused, a challenge to the jurisdiction of the court and the judge recusing herself at an early stage of the trial.

Hazel Crane, a wealthy businesswoman and close friend of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the former wife of ex-president Nelson Mandela, was gunned down last month near her home in an affluent Johannesburg suburb by an unknown assailant. She was killed while driving to court to attend the trial.

Crane, 52, was previously married to Shai Avissar, reportedly the head of the Israeli mafia in South Africa, who was himself murdered in 1999, although his body was only discovered in a shallow grave near Pretoria, about 30 miles from Johannesburg, in February 2000.

Saat is accused of murdering Avissar using a baseball bat and a gun, with the assistance of another Israeli mobster.

One of the other charges against Saat alleges he held a pistol to Crane's head in 2000, threatening her life if she testified against him about Avissar.

Until her death, Crane was at court almost every day during the first three weeks of the trial, often accompanied by Madikizela-Mandela.

Crane said her life had been threatened on several occasions, and bodyguards often accompanied her to court.

The day after Crane's killing, the police said they wished to question Amir Moila, alias David Milner, in connection with the shooting. After the discovery of Avissar's body, media reports said Moila was wanted for questioning with regard to that murder.

In the meantime, Saat had entered a special plea alleging that the South African courts had no jurisdiction to try him, as he had been arrested illegally.

He claimed he had been kidnapped in Maputo, Mozambique, which shares a border with South Africa, and then was illegally brought into South Africa in April 2001. There is no extradition treaty between South Africa and Mozambique.

On Dec. 3, Judge Geraldine Borchers accepted the police version of the arrest, ruling that the court had jurisdiction to hear the charges against Saat.

The murder trial will commence in March.

Borchers added, however, that she would not preside at the trial. She said her views on Saat's credibility, including a finding that he was capable of dishonesty, could be seen as affecting her impartiality as a judge.

In court proceedings about the lawfulness of Saat's arrest, it emerged that he had fled South Africa in March 2000, not long after the discovery of Avissar's body, using a false passport under the name Jonathan Cohen.

At the time of his arrest in Mozambique, he was using the name Yosef Eden and had another false passport, this time Israeli. The police said he was arrested in Mozambique because his visa had expired.

An apparent attempt was made on Saat's life not long after his arrest, when an unknown gunman opened fire at a traffic light in downtown Johannesburg on the police vehicle transporting him and several other prisoners to court who were awaiting trial. Saat was wounded in his buttocks. The prisoner next to him, a young man facing a minor drug charge, was killed. No arrests have been made in connection with the shooting.

Two other potential witnesses in the trial also were murdered in the months after Saat left South Africa. Saat now has a special police security escort at all times. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Olmert proposal roils Likud, and changes Israel's national agenda**

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In a single passionate interview recently, Israel's deputy prime minister, Ehud Olmert, managed to do what most politicians only dream about: recast a nation's political and diplomatic agenda.

Although Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been talking vaguely about "unilateral steps" vis-a-vis the Palestinians for some time, nothing could have prepared the Israeli public for the urgency in Olmert's recent plea. Olmert called for Israeli withdrawal from large swaths of Palestinian-populated territory, including parts of Jerusalem, without so much as a hint of a Palestinian quid pro quo.

Olmert, the former mayor of Jerusalem, made his call for a unilateral pullback in a high-profile exchange with a leading political journalist, Yediot Achronot's Nahum Barnea. The interview startled the left by appropriating one of its central ideas — the demographic threat to the Jewish state — and throwing the right, to which Olmert nominally belongs, into confused disarray.

Borrowing from the political idiom of the left, Olmert told Barnea that time was running out and that Israel needed to separate from the Palestinians before they started calling for a single binational state in which Arabs soon would be the majority.

Since there is no chance of a deal with the Palestinians any time soon, Olmert argued, Israel would have to make the move unilaterally — and the sooner the better.

Olmert's proposal comes in the wake of the unofficial "Geneva accord" peace proposal, launched with much fanfare last week, and a grass-roots peace petition led by Palestinian intellectual Sari Nusseibeh and former Israeli security official Ami Ayalon. Settlers also proposed their own peace plan recently.

Olmert's dramatic policy shift is significant because, unlike the other initiatives, it arises from within the ruling Likud Party.

Yet it comes at a political price: If it sinks without a trace, the proposal could cost Olmert his career. If it gets off the ground, it could break up Sharon's center-right coalition and even split the Likud, to which both Olmert and Sharon belong.

But it also could change the course of Israeli history if it rallies the right behind policies already supported by much of the left.

Olmert gave an inkling of things to come in an early December speech, when he quoted Israel's first prime minister on the folly of trying to retain the entire biblical Land of Israel.

"Suppose we would have conquered all of western Israel," David Ben-Gurion mused shortly after the 1948 War of Independence, referring to the West Bank. "Then what? We would create a single state. But that state would want to be democratic. There would be general elections and we would be a minority. Faced with the choice of the whole land without a Jewish state or a Jewish state without the whole land, we chose a Jewish state."

Then, in the interview with Barnea, Olmert elaborated on the demographic threat to which Ben-Gurion had alluded.

The time is fast approaching when Arabs will constitute a majority in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza. Then, Olmert said, Palestinians will abandon their calls for an independent state and instead will demand a one-man-one-vote system in a binational state that they will control.

"The day we come to that," Olmert said, "we will lose everything. Even when they carry out terror, it's hard for us to convince the world of the justice of our cause."

"How much the more so," he continued, "when all they ask for is one man, one vote? I shudder to think that the same liberal Jews who led the struggle against apartheid in South Africa will be at the forefront of the struggle against us."

The event that crystallized Olmert's thinking was the collapse of the government of Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in September.

Abbas' failure in optimal international conditions led Olmert to conclude that a peace agreement with the Palestinians was not possible.

Adding to Olmert's sense of urgency was Israel's loss of support on the world stage, and especially in the United States, in the wake of Abbas' failure, and the emergence of new peace proposals like the Geneva accord, which are less favorable to Israel than the official "road map" peace plan.

Progress in building the security barrier between Israel and the West Bank made the idea of unilateral separation more practical.

The key question now is the extent to which Sharon will back Olmert's proposal. Olmert implied that Sharon has gone through the same thought process and has reached similar conclusions.

But aides say the unilateral pullback that Sharon favors would come only after an attempt to reach an agreement with the new P.A. prime minister and would be much smaller in scope than Olmert's.

Likud critics of both Sharon and his deputy believe Olmert is floating a trial balloon for the prime minister, and that Sharon will modify his policy according to the feedback. In both cases, though, the withdrawal would entail evacuation of Jewish settlements.

The talk of unilateral withdrawal has triggered a fierce ideological debate within the Likud, with most public figures highly critical of Sharon and Olmert, accusing them of selling out party principles and giving in to terrorism.

One legislator, Gilad Erdan, has signed up one-third of the party's Knesset caucus against the unilateral moves; another, Ya'acov Hazan, has tabled a bill stipulating that any dismantling of settlements would require a two-thirds majority in the Knesset.

In a tense Likud Party caucus meeting in late November, Erdan challenged Sharon, saying bluntly, "Perhaps we," the ideological purists, "don't belong in the party — and perhaps someone else doesn't."

The direction the ideological battle will take depends on whether party heavyweights who oppose unilateral moves — especially Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — decide to lie low or to challenge Sharon. Theoretically, Netanyahu could lead a vote of no-confidence in Sharon and, with the support of 61 Knesset members, replace him as prime minister.

Such a scenario is far-fetched — it would mean splitting the Likud — but it's a possibility.

What is certain is that if Sharon does move toward unilateral withdrawal, Sharon would lose his two right-wing coalition partners, the National Union bloc and the National Religious Party, and would have to bring in the Labor Party to replace them.

The immediate question is whether Sharon will stay the course and risk his coalition, his position in the Likud and a possible head-on clash with his greatest rival, Netanyahu. □

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)