

## IN THE NEWS

## New Iranian gov't opposes Israel ties

Iran's new president said he seeks improved relations with all Middle East nations except Israel.

"I will strive to expand relations with everyone, with the exception of Israel," Saudi newspaper Okaz quoted Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying Sunday. [Story, Pg. 3]

## Bielski to head Jewish Agency

Zeev Bielski was unanimously elected chairman of the World Zionist Organization.

The Ra'anana mayor was elected by the Zionist General Council last Friday after World Likud withdrew its candidate, former Israeli Minister for Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky.

The chairman of the WZO also chairs the Jewish Agency for Israel.

World Likud pulled Sharan-sky's name after learning he would not win a majority in the council and that Bielski remained the candidate preferred by a key committee of the Jewish Agency, a WZO source told JTA.

The Jewish Agency assembly is expected to ratify the nomination on Tuesday.

## German immigration law is modified for FSU Jews

Germany is changing elements of its new immigration regarding Jews arriving from the former Soviet Union.

Jewish leaders reacted positively to the June 23 announcement that the restriction limiting immigration to those under age 45 would be dropped, and that a hardship clause for victims of Nazi persecution would be introduced.

The law was part of legislation enacted last year to codify the immigration of all groups to Germany.

Critics feared it would greatly reduce the historic wave of Jewish immigration to Germany over the last 15 years, which had quadrupled the Jewish population here to more than 105,000.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Seems like old times? Prosecutors looking into Russian Jewish group

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

**M**OSCOW (JTA) — Russian prosecutors have launched a preliminary investigation into a Russian Jewish organization for publishing a 500-year-old Jewish text.

Earlier this month, Moscow prosecutors declined to open a criminal case against the authors of a letter calling on Russian authorities to ban Jewish religious organizations as extremist. Now, prosecutors have said they intend to investigate a Jewish organization that published the Shulchan Aruch, which the authors of the anti-Semitic letter had cited as evidence for their claim.

The preliminary investigation has led at least one Russian Jewish official to draw parallels to anti-Semitic events in Russia's past. However, it is not clear whether the initial investigation will lead to a full probe of the Jewish group, the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities of Russia, or KEROOR.

The events are motivating Russian Jewish groups that often squabble with each other to find common ground in opposing the prosecutors' actions.

The letter, which first surfaced in January, called for an investigation into the activities of Jewish religious groups in Russia that work according to "the morals of Shulchan Aruch," a code of practical halachah, or Jewish law, that the letter claims contains norms that are offensive to Orthodox Christians.

Alleging that Jews believe in "anti-Christian morals," the signatories also demanded that Jews be banned from employment in the civil service and in the media.

The letter, which had 20 Duma deputies among its 5,000 signatories, urged a criminal prosecution of KEROOR, which published a Russian translation of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, an abridged version of the code, in 1999.

The news that the prosecutors are investigating a Jewish group generated a front-page report last week in one of Russia's national dailies, and prompted all three of Russia's major Jewish groups to respond.

Sergey Marchenko, a spokesman for the Moscow prosecutor's office, told the Izvestia newspaper that his agency found it necessary to look into KEROOR, although he declined to say what prompted this move.

Izvestia speculated that the probe may result in a criminal charge of extremism against KEROOR.

The probe incensed Russian Jewish groups. Even a Jewish organization that has been at odds with KEROOR said it is flabbergasted that prosecutors went after a Jewish organization instead of prosecuting those who penned the anti-Semitic letter.

"We are outraged by the very fact of this check," Alexander Boroda, chairman of the board of the Federation of Jewish Communities, told the AEN news agency on June 23. "A review of books that were written in the 16th or 17th century and are our heritage tells about the shortsightedness of the Moscow prosecutor's office," he added.

Rarely do national newspapers in Russia publish rabbinical commentaries on a classical Jewish text in a front-page story.

But that happened last week when Izvestia ran a detailed commentary by Pinchas

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### AROUND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

## ■ Russian prosecutors probe a Russian Jewish group for publishing a Jewish book

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Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi and head of the rabbinical court affiliated with KEROOR, who provided his remarks on the passages in the Shulchan Aruch that seemed to most irritate those who penned the anti-Semitic letter. Among the passages is a prohibition for Jews to teach non-Jews any crafts or for Jewish women to help non-Jewish women during childbirth.

In his comments for the paper, Goldschmidt explained that such laws and prohibitions originated in ancient history — some in pre-Christian times more than 2,500 years ago — and referred to idol worshippers, not to Christians.

While his commentary might help the Russian public understand the ongoing dispute over an obscure Jewish code, Goldschmidt told JTA he was uncomfortable providing such comments to the newspaper.

"It's ironic that I'm going into the role of my predecessor, Rabbi Yakov Maze," Goldschmidt said, referring to the Moscow chief rabbi who testified on matters of Jewish law during the Beilis trial, an infamous 1913 blood libel case.

"The issues that were at stake during the Beilis trial back then came back to haunt Russia today," Goldschmidt said.

In a related development, leaders of two Russian Jewish organizations called on the leadership of the Socialist International on June 23 to prevent the organization of social democratic, socialist and labor parties from accepting into its ranks a Russian party whose leaders signed the anti-Semitic letter.

In separate statements, the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Russian Jewish Congress reminded the Socialist International leadership that most of the Russian lawmakers who signed the letter were representatives of Rodina, a left-leaning nationalist party and one of the four Russian political parties currently represented in the Russian Duma, or parliament.

According to some reports, the Socialist International is currently considering a membership application from Rodina.

Leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities told a conference in Moscow that Rodina members are suffused with anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

"Not one of them apologized," Vladimir Slutsker, the RJC president, said in his statement, referring to the Rodina members who signed the letter. "Not one was expelled from the party or from the Rodina parliamentary faction."

In the meantime, the leader of Rodina, Dmitry Rogozin, wrote to Goldschmidt on June 23, distancing himself from the members of his party who signed the letter.

Rogozin, whose party has gained in popularity since it was founded a few years ago, wrote that in his party's opinion, theological sources cannot serve the basis for legal prosecution of anyone regardless of faith, including Jews.

He said he regretted that the letter was signed by members of his party and condemned anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Yet, Rogozin's letter did not mention any sanctions against the 14 Rodina lawmakers who signed the anti-Semitic letter.

Goldschmidt cautiously welcomed the letter but said he would expect Rogozin to rebuke — and perhaps even expel — those lawmakers

from his party.

He said the situation created by the anti-Semitic letter and the follow-up reaction of the prosecutors testified to the fact that anti-Semitism is being used for political gain, especially during the run-up to the next parliamentary election, due in late 2007.

"Whether we want it or not, religious anti-Semitism has already become a prime factor in the upcoming elections," said Goldschmidt. ■

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**Alexander Boroda**

Federation of Jewish Communities

## Sorry not the hardest word

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — A Canadian newspaper has apologized for mistakes made in an article on the recent Israeli-Palestinian summit.

The Globe and Mail newspaper apologized for reporting that the recent meeting between Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas took place on "disputed home turf" in Sharon's "flag-draped residence in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City."

The meeting was actually held in the prime minister's residence in western Jerusalem.

The Globe's report came from freelance reporter Carolyn Wheeler, who devoted two paragraphs to describing Sharon's residence in eastern Jerusalem, which she said "remains a stinging symbol for Palestinians."

Wheeler also described participants at the meeting as "grim-faced," although she was not at the scene. "Obviously, it's a very embarrassing error," the Globe's interim foreign editor, Guy Nicholson, told the Jerusalem Post.

"We asked her for some background about where the story location was. Unfortunately, she was not actually at the scene of it. She wrote it off of television and wires." ■

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# Election of Iranian hard-liner concerns Israel

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Few people in Israel expected a positive turnaround in Iran, but the election of hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of the Islamic Republic has raised eyebrows among even the more pessimistic pundits.

Even before giving his first media conference, the fundamentalist mayor of Tehran made clear there would be no new tack toward Israel.

"I will strive to expand relations with everyone, with the exception of Israel," he told the Saudi newspaper Okaz on Sunday.

That was no surprise in itself, as political leaders in Iran must parrot the policies of the religious clerics.

But under the outgoing president, the reform-minded Mohammed Khatami, there had been an internal domestic tension that benefited Israel. Khatami even hinted that Tehran could soften its stance on the "Zionist enemy" in the event of a satisfactory Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

Ahmadinejad is no moderate. A reserve officer in the Basij Militia, which suppresses any signs of Western modernity, he enjoyed a sweeping victory in the weekend election, leading Israeli experts to reassess the strength of the reform movement in Iran.

"The surprise in itself is a very troublesome 'mishap,' as Iran is Israel's primary strategic threat, and a situation in which the election of a certain president comes as a surprise to Israel and the West cannot be tolerated," wrote Alex Fishman, the defense correspondent for Yediot Achronot.

Fishman predicted increased Iranian efforts to sabotage the recent Israeli-

Palestinian rapprochement, through Tehran's Shi'ite proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, and the terrorist cells Iran sponsors in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Even Israeli Arabs are in Iran's sights, Fishman said.

"The Iranian efforts to penetrate radical groups among Israel's Arabs will be deepened, as will the espionage and subversion within Israel," he wrote.

But that threat pales in comparison to Iran's nuclear program, which Israel believes will be capable of producing weapons within months. According to Meir Litvak, an Iran expert at Tel Aviv University, Ahmadinejad has no control over the program, as it is entirely in the clerics' hands. "They will decide on the continued development of nuclear weapons," Litvak said.

But the president-elect is not expected

even to exert rhetorical pressure to rein in the program. He has already declared the pursuit of nuclear capability — he claims it is for peaceful purposes — a national prerogative. And he said Iran had "no significant need" for relations with the United States, a sure sign that he will not shy from

a future fight to defend his country's nuclear ambitions.

Israel, which has long tried to keep relatively quiet in international efforts aimed at preventing Iran from getting the bomb, spoke out Sunday.

"Faced with the Iranian nuclear threat, the international community

must, more than before, formulate a unified and stern policy toward Iran," Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said Sunday. "We must ensure that modern Western countries do not become hostage to Iranian radicalism." ■

'Iranian efforts to penetrate radical groups among Israel's Arabs will be deepened.'

Alex Fishman

Yediot Achronot

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous continues its Holocaust education seminar at Columbia University for a group of public middle and high school teachers from across the country. The program, which ends Thursday, seeks to develop ways of helping students approach the Holocaust and making it meaningful to students of all backgrounds.

### TUESDAY

■ Zeev Bielski is expected to be approved the next chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The approval by the Jewish Agency's assembly would come after the failed candidacy of Israel's former minister for Diaspora affairs, Natan Sharansky. Bielski is supported by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

## The semantics of disengagement

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A lot of people aren't happy with disengagement — the word, that is.

What a speaker uses to describe the Israeli government's plan to leave the Gaza Strip this summer — in Hebrew, "hitnatkut" — says a lot about what he or she believes it means.

Israel formally describes the plan as "disengagement, with a willingness to coordinate elements with the Palestinians," an Israeli official said.

"There are issues of perception, whether Israel is doing it for its own interests, or whether it is retreating under terrorism," the official said.

"Disengagement" suggests that Israel is controlling the event, the official said, while the other terms — withdrawal, pullout and especially evacuation, referring to the 9,000 settlers who must leave their homes — could suggest a departure under fire.

"We're not going to play into that," the official said.

U.S. officials, including President Bush

and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, also prefer "disengagement," bolstering Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the plan incurs blistering opposition from settlers and hawks at home.

For Palestinians, an opposite set of considerations apply. Palestinian Authority officials prefer "withdrawal" or "evacuation" to avoid letting Israel spin the move.

That's because the full plan, as outlined in Israeli Cabinet documents, includes the West Bank security barrier and plans to expand some West Bank settlements, all part of the process of "disengaging" from the Palestinians.

Using "disengagement" might mean endorsing such plans, Zeinah Salahi, a Palestinian negotiator, said during a U.S. tour last month.

"The disengagement plan refers explicitly to continued construction of the wall and the strengthening of the settlements," she said. "Obviously, those are two things the Palestinians don't support. We're willing to coordinate, but only the evacuation process, the withdrawal from the settlements." ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Israeli teens killed in West Bank

Two Israeli teenagers were killed and three others wounded in a drive-by shooting near Hebron.

The attack occurred last Friday afternoon as the group was waiting to hitchhike outside Beit Haggai in the southern Hebron Hills.

One 17-year-old youth was killed outright, and another died of his wounds Sunday.

The Al-Aksa Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack.

### Israel gets Palestinian conscript

A Palestinian youth who converted to Judaism reportedly enlisted in the Israeli military.

Amnon Yitzhak-Shachar, who was born Ayman Abu-Zubuch in the Gaza Strip town of Khan Younis, reported to Israel's main draft office last week and was mobilized, Ma'ariv said Sunday.

According to the newspaper, Yitzhak-Shachar would not mind serving in a combat unit and fight his former compatriots in Gaza.

The Palestinian Israeli became interested in Judaism as a teenager, when he accompanied his father to work in Kfar Saba.

He said his parents banished him from Khan Younis after his conversion, and that he chose his new first name, Amnon, after the surname of the Israeli family that adopted him.

The Israeli army had no immediate comment.

## WORLD

### New Zealand restores Israel ties

New Zealand restored ties with Israel, ending a yearlong cutoff over a spy scandal.

In a statement, Prime Minister Helen Clark said Sunday that she had received a letter from Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, apologizing for two suspected Mossad agents who confessed to trying to obtain a New Zealand passport fraudulently last July.

"The conclusion of this exchange of letters today means that the matter at issue is now behind us and we can move forward to resume friendly diplomatic relations with Israel," Clark said.

The two Israelis, convicted of fraud, served three months in an Auckland prison and paid a \$35,000 fine.

Israel declined to comment on New Zealand's charges that they were government agents, prompting Clark to suspend diplomatic ties.

### Gingrich: Israel is a test for U.N.

Normalizing Israel's status at the United Nations is one of five standards the United States should use in assessing U.N. reform, according to a congressionally mandated task force.

Newt Gingrich, the former Republican speaker of the House of Representatives and a cochairman of the task force, presented the group's findings to Congress on June 22.

Israel is denied membership in a regional group, and the benefits membership provides — including a spot in the rotating membership on the Security Council.

Israel also is singled out for criticism by a number of subsidiary U.N. bodies.

### BBC appoints Mideast editor

The BBC appointed a Middle East editor for the first time to oversee the corporation's coverage of the region.

The corporation's Mideast coverage has been fiercely criticized by some for an anti-Israel bias.

Award-winning veteran BBC journalist Jeremy Bowen, who was a correspondent in Jerusalem between 1995 and 2000, will now provide key analysis, focus and commentary on the situation. Before

taking up the post, the 45-year-old was briefed by U.K. Jewish community leaders on their concerns that the corporation has displayed a consistent prejudice against Israel.

### Irish police arrest suspect

Irish police arrested a man they believe is responsible for a series of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish property in Dublin.

Officers, who had been monitoring a number of Jewish sites in the city, arrested the man as he spray-painted swastikas on the gates of a synagogue.

The surveillance operation was ordered after the suspect had been caught by video cameras daubing the walls outside the same synagogue earlier this month.

The vandalism campaign began in November and has involved monthly attacks on the Irish Jewish Museum, two Jewish cemeteries, both synagogues, a Jewish nursing home and the former home of Isaac Halevi Herzog, a former chief rabbi of both Ireland and Israel.

### British Jews upset by boycott recommendation

British Jews condemned a decision by the Anglican church to consider divestment from Israel.

The boycott resolution was passed unanimously last Friday at the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nottingham, which represents the 38 provinces of the church around the world.

The council recommended the church withdraw corporate investments that supported "the occupation of Palestinian lands."

### Survey finds lots of Argentine Jews

Some 280,000 to 300,000 people of Jewish heritage live in Argentina, according to a survey.

The survey was done in 2004 by an American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee study group, in association with a local organization.

The definition was wide, as the group considered all those born to a Jewish mother or father, or those with a Jewish grandparent.

The results were published in the national daily La Nacion.

The numbers, which were larger than previously believed, may allay fears of a huge drop in Jewish population caused by emigration during the 2001-2002 economic crisis.

### Victims threatened by alleged attacker

A man arrested for attacking Jewish customers at a kosher restaurant in Paris threatened to kill one of the victims who had filed charges against him.

The man made the threats after returning to the scene of his alleged crime on Saturday night.

### French Web decision to be appealed

A French group of Internet providers will appeal a decision to block access to a site with anti-Semitic content.

The Association of Internet Providers in France said it would appeal the decision made by the Paris court earlier this month to block access to the Web site Aaargh — Association of Amateur War and Holocaust Historians — which was blocked for its revisionist and anti-Semitic content.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Nazis outnumbered on battlefield

Counterdemonstrators outnumbered participants at a Nazi rally in the United States.

An estimated 500 counterdemonstrators showed up Saturday at a battlefield in Virginia to oppose the 150 members of the Nazi Party.