



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Coalition agreements with Yisrael Ba'Aliyah and United Torah Judaism gave Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu 66 seats in the new Knesset. Meanwhile, Netanyahu continued negotiations with coalition partners and senior officials in his Likud Party to finalize appointments to the Knesset Cabinet. [Page 3]

■ Russian Jews are looking to President Boris Yeltsin to emerge victorious in next month's run-off election. Yeltsin will face off with his Communist rival, Gennady Zyuganov, in the second round of the presidential ballot. [Page 1]

■ American Jewish groups in the forefront of the fight for religious pluralism in Israel expressed alarmed over agreements that Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu signed with Orthodox coalition partners. [Page 3]

■ The Russian Justice Ministry postponed a decision on whether to renew accreditation of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Authorities suspended the agency's credentials last month and were to respond to the application for a new license over the weekend.

■ Israeli Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu will visit the White House on July 8, American officials said. Warren Christopher, the U.S. secretary of state, may visit the Jewish state next week.

■ Security forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of killing an off-duty Israeli police officer and wounding his wife in an attack in the West Bank village of Bidya.

■ Jewish groups are rallying behind legislation that would make it easier for federal authorities to prosecute those responsible for arson attacks on black churches. [Page 4]

■ The military trial of former SS Capt. Erich Priebke in Rome was suspended pending a ruling by an appeals court on whether members of the three-judge panel hearing the case are biased in favor of the defendant. [Page 2]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Russian Jews optimistic that Yeltsin will triumph

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian Jews reacted with cautious optimism to the results of the first round of an election that will determine the country's future.

"I believe that Yeltsin will remain in office, giving all of us a chance to build a normal human life," Russia's chief rabbi, Adolph Shayevich, said after Sunday's elections.

Most of Russia's Jews had supported democratic-leaning candidates. Some community leaders voiced optimism about an ultimate Boris Yeltsin victory in the runoff, which could be held as early as July 3.

With 98 percent of the ballots counted, Yeltsin had secured 34.8 percent of the vote. His closest rival, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, won 32.1 percent of the vote.

The outcome of the runoff will depend in large part on who manages to woo the supporters of nationalist Alexander Lebed, a retired general who had a surprisingly strong third-place showing with about 15 percent of the vote.

Liberal economist Grigory Yavlinsky of the Yabloko bloc was reported to be fourth with about 7 percent, followed by the ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who captured less than 6 percent of the vote.

Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress, called Yeltsin's lead in the first round "a huge success," given his extremely low ratings in public opinion polls some three months ago.

But, Osovtsov said, "what could guarantee a Yeltsin victory in the second round is his political alliance with Lebed, the third in [the] race."

Yeltsin is reportedly meeting with Lebed to discuss how they might cooperate, but the uncertainty of the alliance and its fruits is troubling for some.

"The results leave many unanswered questions as to what will happen during the second round," said Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

"There are no guarantees that those who support Lebed will throw their support behind the candidate Lebed eventually endorses for the presidency."

Indeed, Alexander Lieberman, director of the Moscow bureau of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, believes that the majority of those who cast their votes for Lebed are likely to support Zyuganov in the second round.

Zyuganov also has tried in the wake of the election to lure Lebed into his camp, though the retired general has in the past ruled out joining any Communist-led coalition.

But Lieberman and other local experts see Lebed as one who is able to draw both Communist supporters and those who have historically voted for ultranationalist Zhirinovskiy.

"Although Lebed is an outspoken anti-Communist, his campaign's motto, 'truth and order,' reminds me very much of the Communist or Zhirinovskiy rhetoric," said Lieberman.

Fear of continuing phenomenon

But even a Yeltsin victory in July is not seen by some Jews as a sure remedy for the country's economic and social ills.

"Russia's democratic future will depend on Yeltsin's entourage," said Osovtsov, who has sharply criticized Yeltsin for his policy in the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

Yeltsin has also been seen as giving in to ultranationalist pressures in recent months, a phenomenon that some fear could continue.

The recent suspension of the Jewish Agency for Israel's operating license is one such example. A June 15 deadline for new accreditation passed this weekend, and it is not certain when a decision on the renewal will occur.

A majority of Jewish voters interviewed at Moscow polling stations on Sunday said that they had voted for Yeltsin, while liberal economist Yavlinsky also had some support.

"I had to vote for Yeltsin," Mikhail Abramov, 44, an engineer, said

at a polling station in the center of Moscow. "Under other circumstances I would rather vote for Yavlinsky, who didn't start the war in Chechnya," Abramov said, indicating that because Yavlinsky was unlikely to make it to the second round, he did not want to waste his vote.

For Ilya Faynshtein, a 30-year-old English language teacher at a Moscow high school, the day of the election was meaningful as a tribute to democracy.

"I don't know what will happen after the elections, but I'm convinced that today, democracy in Russia is taking a big step forward," she said.

At one of Moscow's polling places, a Jewish woman who appeared to be in her 80s ran headlong into the strict rules surrounding the balloting.

Sarah Gordon tried to convince the chairman of the local election committee that her 89-year-old husband had made a mistake when he put a mark next to the name of Zhirinovsky in the ballot paper.

Zhirinovsky followed Yeltsin on the list of 10 candidates on the ballot.

Gordon, a former prisoner of the Minsk ghetto, wanted the official to correct the ballot, claiming that her husband's vote was a result of poor vision and shaky hands.

To Gordon's great distress, the official turned down her request, saying that it would be a breach of the election law.

International observers of the election said Monday that there had been no breaches of voting procedures or election laws during the Sunday polling.

Among more than 1,000 observers that had been accredited by the Russian government was an Israeli delegation of four diplomats and international experts.

Meir Rosenne, an Israeli observer and former ambassador to Washington and Paris, concurred that the election was held in accordance with democratic procedure.

Chanan Bar-On, a former Israeli ambassador in the Netherlands, who witnessed a night vote count at one of the stations, told journalists that there had been no possibility of vote-fixing.

"No vote fraud could be committed that would influence the final results," said Bar-On, after visiting eight polling places in the greater Moscow area.

He said one of the strongest impressions from his visits was that "people looked proud of being given an opportunity to express their will." □

Prosecutor in Priebke trial claims judges favor defendant

By Polly Stroud

ROME (JTA) — The military trial of a former Nazi officer has been suspended, pending an appeals court ruling on whether the three-judge panel hearing the case is biased in favor of the defendant.

Chief Judge Agostino Quistelli announced Monday that the proceedings would resume July 10. If the petition to dismiss the panel is accepted, the trial will start over.

The defendant, former SS Capt. Erich Priebke, 82, is accused of taking part in the 1944 massacre of 335 men and boys, about 75 of them Jewish, in the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome.

Priebke has admitted to drawing up the list of victims, checking the names off at the caves and personally shooting two people. But he contends that he would have been killed himself if he had not carried out orders.

Prosecutor Antonino Intelisano said a report had been filed with judicial authorities that questioned the impartiality of the panel. Intelisano did not elaborate on the report's contents.

But RAI public television reported that the petition

included accusations that one of the judges had said at the start of the trial that the verdict was already decided.

Earlier, attorneys representing families of the victims protested the judges' decision to cut short the list of their witnesses. The trial, which convened May 8 before a military court, includes a civilian lawsuit brought by relatives of the victims.

In addition, when Quistelli last week blocked some of the questioning of a key witness, former SS Maj. Karl Hass, attorney Giancarlo Mangia told the judge that his actions "could raise suspicions."

And the Rome newspaper *Il Messaggero* reported that another judge was overheard discussing his anniversary with Priebke, telling the accused to send greetings to his wife.

In another ruling Monday, Quistelli reportedly decided that the court should not hear testimony from the widow of Herbert Kappler, the SS chief in Rome at the time of the massacre.

The judge did admit as evidence a tape of an interview Kappler gave to a RAI journalist in 1974. Kappler's wife, Annelise Wenger, brought the tape to Rome with her Sunday from Munich, Germany.

The trial is expected to be one of the last of its kind, given the advanced age of victims and perpetrators.

If convicted, Priebke could be sentenced to life imprisonment.

Capital punishment was outlawed in Italy after World War II. □

Just don't call him 'Bibi'

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — You can call him prime minister or Benjamin Netanyahu.

But you can't call him "Bibi" anymore.

The spokesman for the prime minister-elect this week demanded that journalists stop using Netanyahu's nickname.

"I don't believe it shows respect to call the prime minister of Israel by his nickname," spokesman Shai Bazak told Israel Radio.

Israeli politicians on both sides of the political spectrum are called by nicknames from their youth, including Ariel "Arik" Sharon, Rafael "Rafal" Eitan, Avraham "Beiga" Shochat and Rehavam "Gandhi" Ze'evi.

Netanyahu has said he got the nickname to clear up confusion between himself and an older cousin, Benjamin B.

"He was the big B.B. ... I was the small B.B.," Netanyahu said. □

Barak calls on diplomatic corps

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ehud Barak, Israel's outgoing foreign minister, called on the Jewish state's diplomatic corps to advance the peace process.

Addressing some 60 diplomats in a Jerusalem hotel, Barak said he believed that the new government under the leadership of Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu would continue the peace process in its own way.

"As a citizen, I wish the new government success," he said.

Barak also said he thought that Israel and its peace partners needed to be forthcoming in order for progress to occur.

"I believe with all my heart that calculated risks must be taken for peace, but no one should be mistaken — it takes two to tango," he said. □

Netanyahu finalizes deals to form right-wing coalition

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to have clinched a new government this week after signing a coalition accord with Natan Sharansky's Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party.

"We're in," Sharansky, a former Soviet Jewish dissident, told reporters Monday after talks with Netanyahu.

Netanyahu said he planned to present his government to the Knesset on Tuesday, after making his Cabinet appointments.

The agreement with Sharansky gave Netanyahu the necessary Knesset majority to gain approval of his government.

On Sunday, Netanyahu's Likud Party, which ran a joint list with the Geshet and Tsomet parties for the Knesset, signed coalition agreements with the National Religious Party, Shas and The Third Way.

After reaching agreement with Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, Netanyahu rounded out his coalition by signing an accord with United Torah Judaism, giving the incoming government 66 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

The Likud Party on Monday also published the policy guidelines of the new government, which Netanyahu said were an attempt to continue the peace process to achieve "a peace with security."

The guidelines oppose the creation of a Palestinian state and an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and vow to preserve Israeli rule over a united Jerusalem. They represent a more hard-line approach to the peace process than that of the outgoing government of Shimon Peres.

Peres, who chaired Monday's opening session of the 14th Knesset due to his status as its oldest member, said, "I am convinced above and beyond differences of opinion, concern for the peace, security and welfare of the State of Israel unites all of us."

Netanyahu had hoped to present his government at the opening session, but he spent the day trying to finalize Cabinet appointments. He held talks with senior Likud Knesset members who had been expressing concerns that they were being left out of the new Cabinet.

While none of Netanyahu's appointments were confirmed, the latest reports slated Dan Meridor as finance minister; Ze'ev "Benny" Begin as science and technology minister; Moshe Katzav as communications minister; and Ariel Sharon as housing minister.

Earlier reports had indicated that Geshet Party head David Levy would be named foreign minister and retired Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, who placed second in Likud's Knesset list, would be appointed defense minister.

But reports that Sharon would head the Housing Ministry angered United Torah Judaism, which said it had been promised the portfolio.

Under its agreement with Likud, Yisrael Ba'Aliyah was slated to get the Absorption Ministry, and the combined Ministries of Trade and Industry. □

Coalition agreements sound non-Orthodox alarms in U.S.

By Cynthia Mann

NEW YORK (JTA) — American Jews in the forefront of the fight for religious pluralism in Israel are expressing alarm over the agreements signed by Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu and his Orthodox coalition partners.

"We are frightened" by "commitments the government is prepared to make to delegitimize non-

Orthodox religious Jewry," said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

United Synagogue is part of the recently formed North American Coalition to Advance Religious Pluralism in Israel.

Coalition members fear that these agreements will strain relations between non-Orthodox Jewry around the world and the Jewish state.

They have requested a meeting with the next prime minister this week in Jerusalem to express their concern.

Among the agreements reportedly reached between Netanyahu and two religious parties — Shas and the National Religious Party — is one that would close the door opened by the Supreme Court last year to non-Orthodox conversions in Israel.

The government also reportedly has made a deal to support legislation that would bar Reform and Conservative representatives from serving on religious councils, which would undermine another recent Supreme Court ruling.

Speaking to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations last week, Zalman Shoval, a Likud Party official, pledged that there would be no change in the "status quo" governing religious matters.

But such a pledge means different things to different people. To some, it means protecting advances made by non-Orthodox movements through the Supreme Court to break the monopoly of the Orthodox over religious life in Israel.

To others, it means preserving continuing Orthodox hegemony over religious affairs, from marriage to burial, that has existed since the state's founding, despite recent court rulings challenging such control.

Shoval said he made the pledge on behalf of the new prime minister.

But since then, Netanyahu concluded deals with the religious parties to form a new government, sparking renewed concern in many Jewish circles.

"Words of reassurance that there will be no movement backward" on the status quo "are meaningless," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations. "What we've seen to date indicates exactly the opposite."

The two reversals would "constitute a tremendous blow and affront to our movement and our membership," Yoffie added.

'Strong feelings'

Epstein called it "very problematic" for Israel to ban non-Orthodox conversions because it delegitimizes non-Orthodox rabbis. He said a meeting with Netanyahu, "who wants to build relationships with the Diaspora," would help the new Israeli leader "understand the strong feelings" of Conservative and Reform Jews, who represent 85 percent to 90 percent of affiliated U.S. Jews.

The fund-raising establishment also raised its voice. Leaders of the United Israel Appeal, the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations proposed that a resolution calling for the legal protection of pluralism be considered next week at the annual assembly of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The agency is the primary recipient in Israel of funds raised by these entities.

The resolution calls on the government to refrain from passing or amending laws on conversion or other issues "in a way which may estrange major parts of the Jewish people from their linkage to the nation, to the culture and the Jewish state."

Orthodox Jewish groups here, meanwhile, have welcomed the prospect of reversing the gains made by non-Orthodox movements in Israel, saying that such moves prevent the erosion of authentic Judaism. □

**Taking aim against church arson:
Groups support bill, raise funds***By Anne Miller*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For months, Jewish activists have been searching for a way to do more than express solidarity with black clergy and parishioners whose churches have been torched by arsonists.

Such an opportunity presented itself last week, when Congress began considering the Church Arson Prevention Act, which the House is expected to pass as early as this week.

Jewish groups such as the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the Anti-Defamation League have asked members of Congress to support the measure, which would make it easier for federal law enforcement agencies to prosecute the arsonists.

At least two Jewish groups have also launched fund-raising drives to help the at least 34 Southern churches — most of them are predominantly black — that have been targeted by arsonists in the past 18 months.

The congressional measure is being considered as an amendment to the Federal Religious Vandalism Statute, the so-called hate crimes legislation passed in 1988.

Under that law, any crime against religious institutions falls under the federal jurisdiction only if the crime resulted in more than \$10,000 in damage. It also only applies to religiously motivated hate crimes.

The proposed act would make it easier for arson cases to be tried in federal courts by eliminating the \$10,000 minimum amount of damage now necessary for the cases to fall under federal jurisdiction.

The groups are also working to expand coverage of the law to include not only arsonists and other vandals motivated by religion bias but those committing such crimes for racial reasons.

Suspected vandals can now claim that their actions were racially motivated and avoid federal courts.

Closing loopholes

Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League, says closing such loopholes is an important tool for federal prosecutors. "Our approach has been that it's not enough to simply search for the perpetrators and punish them," he said. "We need to seize this opportunity for a broad response to hate crimes generally."

"If a church was burned because everyone there was black, no one should be able to escape prosecution," he added. Lieberman also said the ADL is reviewing hate crime laws in the states where the church fires occurred, "looking to improve or expand state hate crime laws in the wake of this series of arsons."

Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) has introduced a similar measure in the Senate, though Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) is expected to author "broader, more ambitious" legislation, Lieberman said.

The Congressional Black Caucus scheduled hearings this week on the proposed measures. The ADL is expected to testify.

Meanwhile, in full-page ads last Friday in the Washington Post, The New York Times and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the ADL urged readers to "speak out," write letters of support to members of the churches involved and "contribute as much as you can to help rebuild these houses of worship."

Future ads will be co-sponsored by the Urban League and are scheduled to appear in African American newspapers, in Jewish newspapers and as radio public service announcements.

At the same time, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and the New York Board of Rabbis are

creating a fund to rebuild the Matthews Murckland Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C.

The church was destroyed by fire June 6. Pastor Larry Hill is set to address the groups on Tuesday, when he is scheduled to be presented with an initial cash gift on behalf of the New York Jewish community.

It is "very, very important that the Jewish community not be so arrogant and naive to think that this could not happen to synagogues," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the foundation. Jews should be "rallying together with our brothers and sisters in the South." □

**U.S. survivors of Nazi camps
can get German compensation***By Tom Tugend*

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — American citizens imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps can seek restitution from the German government through a new U.S. government program.

"It is essential that those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis receive reparations for what they lost," said U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, who announced the program June 13 at the Simon Wiesenthal Center here. "We can't calculate their loss in mere money, but we can seek to redress their losses."

The Holocaust Claims Program is an outgrowth of the case of Hugo Princz, who battled the German and U.S. governments for 40 years to obtain reparations for the 38 months he was held in Treblinka, Auschwitz and Dachau. His parents and six siblings died in the camps.

Princz, now 73, was born to a naturalized American businessman in what is now Slovakia, making him a U.S. citizen at birth. Although the family had American passports, they were imprisoned by the Nazis.

In September, the United States and Germany signed an agreement under which Princz and 10 other American survivors shared a one-time payment of \$2.1 million from the German government.

The new program gives other U.S. survivors of the Holocaust until Sept. 30 to file claims with the U.S. Justice Department's Foreign Claims Settlement Commission.

Reno estimated that there may be five to 50 such survivors who, like Princz, fell through the cracks and were never compensated. This number may include some American Jewish servicemen, who were sent to slave labor camps after being captured.

However, the claims agreement specifically excludes, at Germany's insistence, survivors who were only subject to forced labor, as well as those who already received any amount of compensation.

Princz's attorney, William Blake of Washington, D.C., agreed with Reno's estimate of other similar survivors, adding that he has been contacted by 10 to 12 possible claimants.

The amount of money paid to future claimants will depend on their concentration camp experiences, as well as on the total figures negotiated by the U.S. and German governments.

Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), who, with the New Jersey congressional delegation, championed legislation leading to the Holocaust Claims Program, urged Justice Department officials to "err on the side of inclusion" in considering survivors' claims. "This is especially important in the case of survivors who suffered loss of liberty or physical abuse from Nazi persecution, but who may not have actually been in a camp," Berman said.

Eligible survivors must file their claims by Sept. 30 with the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, Washington, D.C. 20579. For information or to obtain forms, phone (202) 616-6975 or fax (202) 616-6993. □