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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israelis, Palestinians to meet

Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials are expected to meet in the coming days in a bid to break the 16-month impasse in the peace process. The United States has set the end of the month as a deadline for an agreement on a further Israeli redeployment from the West Bank and urged the two sides to sit down for face-to-face talks. But State Department spokesman James Rubin, voicing the frustration of the Clinton administration, also said that the ball is now in Israel's court to conclude a deal with the Palestinians.

Hikind acquitted of bribery

New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind was acquitted of accepting bribes from officials of the Council of Jewish Organizations of Boro Park, a neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y.

But in the same trial, a federal court convicted Rabbi Elimelech Naiman of bribing Hikind by paying yeshiva tuition for the assemblyman's children and also for paying a Paris hotel bill after the Hikind family vacationed there. The jury acquitted Hikind after finding that he accepted the gifts with no intention of providing favors in return.

Lithuania promises restitution

Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus promised a top U.S. official that he would try to advance efforts to restore Jewish communal property. During his visit, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs Stuart Eizenstat also discussed the restitution issue with leaders of the local Jewish community. Meanwhile, Jews in Lithuania's second-largest city of Kaunas are continuing to battle in court over who should be controlling five synagogues already returned to the Jewish community. [Page 4]

Yeltsin criticizes certifications

Russian President Boris Yeltsin criticized his justice minister for allowing extremist and ultranationalist groups to receive official certification. In a meeting with the minister, Yeltsin said the Russian Constitution prohibits the registration of such groups. The Kremlin complained recently about the rise of extremist and neo-Nazi groups in Moscow after several attacks by skinheads on Africans and Asians, and after the May bombing of a Lubavitch synagogue in the Russian capital. [Page 4]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Raising hopes for tourism, a casino rises in biblical Jericho

By Gil Sedan

JERICHO, West Bank (JTA) — Two giant buildings grow out of the arid terrain near this ancient town.

Tall, newly planted palm trees flank the entrance to the complex.

These new additions to the landscape presage the opening of a casino scheduled to debut here this fall — the first legal gambling house to operate either in Israel or in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

The biblical town that Joshua entered, hit hard by dashed hopes and unemployment, is hoping that Lady Luck will intervene.

The Austrian company Casino Austria has invested some \$150 million in Oasis, a project that will include hotels, a congress hall, golf courses, tennis courts and a casino, and will occupy an area of more than 3 square miles.

According to Alexander Tuchek, the Austrian director-general of the project, the tourism and leisure center will revolutionize the entire Middle East.

"The new site will attract the peoples of the area and will offer its guests pleasure and entertainment in a wonderful place," said Tuchek, who estimates that the project could provide work to 1,000 residents out of the city's total population of 20,000.

But many Jericho residents are not so sure.

On the surface, the idea appears to have merit. Jericho certainly needs a shot in the arm.

The town was full of optimism in 1994, when it became the first to enjoy Palestinian autonomy. Indeed, residents once hoped that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat would set up his self-rule government here instead of in the Gaza Strip. But like the rest of the areas under Palestinian control, it has seen its economic conditions worsen since the Israelis left.

All initiatives to open casinos in Israel to date have failed so far because of religious opposition and the concern of organized crime involvement.

Israelis used to flock each summer to casinos in Turkey, but these were banned last year at the demand of Islamic leaders.

Jericho is located only a half hour's drive from Jerusalem, and 90 minutes from Tel Aviv.

With temperatures rarely falling below 60 degrees, Jericho is an ideal winter resort town.

Looking to boost Israeli tourism, the Palestinian Authority approved the project, but some residents of Jericho are not as enthusiastic.

"Turkey has closed its casinos, so why should we open them?" asked Hajj Mansure Al-Slymah of the Jericho Chamber of Commerce.

The person on the street here longs for the Israeli shopper — not the Israeli gambler. Before the Oslo peace accords, Israelis traveling from Jerusalem to the north via the Jordan Valley had no choice but to pass through Jericho, then one of the safest places in the West Bank.

They would stop at its outdoor restaurants and its colorful fruit and vegetable stands.

Now, as part of new security arrangements, a bypass road has been built, allowing Israelis to travel through the Jordan Valley without traveling through Jericho.

"We believe that whoever visits the casino will not make it to Jericho proper," said

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian wounded in bombing

An Arab man was slightly wounded when a bomb exploded in a trash container outside Orient House, the Palestinian Authority's de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem.

There was no claim of responsibility for the bombing. Palestinian officials blamed Jewish extremists.

Legislators clash over tests

Secular and religious lawmakers in Israel dashed over a plan calling for genetic testing of immigrants whose Jewish roots are in doubt.

Knesset members from the religious parties claimed the tests were sometimes necessary to establish family links.

Secular legislators argued that the tests should only be performed when immigrants request them.

Israeli Arabs protest meetings

Leaders of Israel's Arab community are protesting a series of secret Cabinet sessions devoted to the country's Arab minority.

Deputy Prime Minister Moshe Katzav admitted that some of the sessions were devoted to signs of growing militancy among Israeli Arabs.

But he added that their main purpose was to find ways to upgrade the level of services to the Arab community.

Barak seeks rules change

Israeli opposition leader Ehud Barak announced that he wanted the power to name some Labor Party officials to run on the party's Knesset list in the next elections without having them run in the primaries.

Observers said Barak's proposal was made in an effort to attract the just-retired head of the army, Amnon Shahak, to join Labor.

Barak dropped the proposal after it was roundly criticized during a meeting of party leaders.

Kzeam Moaquet, chairman of the local chamber of commerce.

Indeed, because the casino is located just inside the Palestinian side of the border with Israel, visitors will still be able to avoid the center of Jericho.

Downtown Jericho has one main square, with several gray and empty streets leading into it.

There are shabby buildings, and local residents walk around with sour countenances.

Only the palm trees and the green orchards in this Jordan Valley oasis add a touch of brightness.

One of the ancient buildings near the main square is the Hisham Palace Hotel, which was reopened as a hotel in 1995.

Sheik Rajai Abdu, a Muslim cleric and co-owner of this family business, returned to Jericho after a lengthy stay in the United States, hoping that the hotel could serve as headquarters of the Palestinian Authority and enjoy the potential tourism boom in the town.

But neither the government nor the tourists materialized — and the hotel's 30 rooms are still empty.

Although the casino could possibly help his business, Abdu still opposes the plan. "Casinos in the Holy Land go against our religion. But even in business terms, it is not the kind of tourist attraction we would like to see here," said the liberal Muslim cleric.

The fact that the Palestinian Authority approved the project and gave it the necessary licenses, proves, in Abdu's eyes, "how corrupt our leaders are." □

Labor member claims premier interfered in criminal sentencing

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli opposition legislator is accusing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of attempting to influence the sentencing of a businessman who has been convicted of supplying Iran with chemical weapons materials.

Labor Knesset member Nissim Zvilli charged Monday that Netanyahu had tried to influence the judge in the trial of Nahum Manbar.

The charge of interfering in the judicial process came just days before an Israeli court was slated to sentence Nahum Manbar on Wednesday.

Manbar faces a life sentence.

The prosecutor had charged that in 1990 Manbar made contact with the head of Iran's chemical weapons program and that he subsequently became involved in deals to provide Tehran with information, equipment and raw materials to produce chemical weapons.

The premier's office denied that Netanyahu had had any contacts with Judge Amnon Strashnov, either during the trial or after the conviction was handed down last month.

Commenting on the verdict at the time, Netanyahu said he hoped the court would impose a heavy sentence.

He called Manbar a criminal who committed a terrible act, the likes of which he could not recall in the history of the state.

Manbar's attorney, Amnon Zichroni, in turn accused Netanyahu of interfering with the judicial process by making such statements before sentencing was completed.

Zvilli said this week that he had obtained information from sources "very close to the Manbar trial" that Netanyahu had tried to intervene in the legal process.

Likud Knesset member Meir Sheerit rebuked Zvilli for "having spread an unfounded rumor."

Other senior Likud officials questioned why Labor legislators were ready to endorse "every false rumor" in order to make political gains.

Despite Netanyahu's denial of any involvement in the case, several Knesset members, including coalition and opposition members, demanded a thorough investigation into the matter. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Former Capitol Hill sex symbol makes run for California governor

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Of all the candidates across the country running for political office this year, it is a safe bet that there is only one who:

- Was named by People magazine as “one of the 50 most beautiful people in the galaxy” and was dubbed “The Hunk on the Hill” while serving in the U.S. House of Representatives;

- Read Martin Buber’s “I and Thou” in the original German; and
- Is a Jew with a Muslim woman as his running mate.

Meet Daniel Hamburg, the Green Party’s candidate for governor of California.

In an era of carefully packaged, poll-driven politicians backed by multimillion-dollar campaign chests, Hamburg stands out with his unapologetic leftist agenda.

Hamburg’s war chest totals some \$10,000, his campaign headquarters in his hometown of Ukiah is staffed by two paid workers and he stays with friends while making his pitch in larger cities.

The 49-year-old candidate grew up in St. Louis in a home that was not particularly observant. “My parents were basically twice-a-year Jews,” he says.

Thus his encounter with Judaism was “much too prosaic” and exerted little influence until he enrolled in Stanford University’s religious studies department.

There he discovered Martin Buber, first in the philosopher’s “Tales of the Hasidim,” and then in his most famous work, “I and Thou,” which Hamburg read in German while an exchange student in Austria.

At Stanford, he minored in anti-Vietnam war protests and then embarked on a somewhat erratic career, steadied by a consistent outlook that stood, as he puts it, “at the intersection of spirituality and social action.” His role models, then as now, were such men as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela, whose examples he sought to follow during two years teaching in China, and later in Johannesburg as a political consultant to Mandela’s post-apartheid government.

In 1992, running as a Democrat, Hamburg was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from California’s huge, sparsely populated first congressional district, which stretches for 350 miles from the Oregon border to just north of the San Francisco Bay Area. But the freshman congressman’s progressive agenda alienated the National Rifle Association, the Christian Coalition and the influential timber and oil companies. Hamburg lost his re-election bid in 1994.

Two years later, Hamburg resigned from the Democratic Party — convinced that “it no longer was a vehicle for social change” — and joined the Greens.

Hamburg’s running mate for lieutenant governor is Sara Amir, an immigrant from Iran who is a scientist with California’s Environmental Protection Agency.

The main platform planks of the Green Party directly counter the politics of most Californians, as expressed in recent referendums. The platform includes reinstatement of affirmative action, strengthening bilingual education, an end to immigrant “bashing,” and abolition of the death penalty.

Hamburg says there are about 100,000 registered Green voters in California. In this year’s open primary, Hamburg received 90,000 votes, and Amir a surprising 147,000.

That’s obviously not enough to win a statewide race, though Green Party members now occupy 29 local offices. Hamburg sees his campaign as a “seeding effort” to develop the Greens as the most viable alternative party, especially among minorities and Democrats, “who hold their noses while voting for the Democratic ticket.”

Married for 27 years and now a grandfather, the lean and tall candidate remains a striking figure, square-jawed and with abundant salt-and-pepper hair pulled back into a ponytail.

Looking back now on his brief fame as Capitol Hill’s sex symbol, Hamburg laughs.

“My kids thought it was a riot and my wife said that the publicity would help me in getting my message across,” he says.

“Now, though, I’m a bit unhappy about the whole thing because it trivialized the political process. That’s really part of our cultural sickness.” □

House to debate vetoed bill

The House of Representatives is scheduled to begin debate as early as Wednesday to override President Clinton’s veto of a bill that would impose sanctions on Russian companies that sell missile technology to Iran.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which argues that Israel’s security is endangered by Iran’s success in purchasing missile technology from Russia, is urging members of Congress to override the veto. More than 400 members of the House voted for the bill earlier this year.

Senators named to panel

Sens. Alfonse D’Amato (R-N.Y.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) were appointed to the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust assets in the United States. The 21-member group, which will be charged with examining Holocaust-era assets that made their way to the United States, will also include members selected from the executive branch, the House of Representatives, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and private citizens.

Panel to mull religion bill

A House panel is slated to hold another in a series of hearings on legislation aimed at preventing government from interfering with the free practice of religion. Legal experts and church-state watchdogs are scheduled to testify about the constitutionality of the Religious Liberty Protection Act, a bill designed to restore religious protections that were struck down last year when the Supreme Court struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Program to include Philadelphia

A program placing rabbis as visiting teachers in Catholic parochial high schools — and priests and nuns in the same role in Jewish high schools — is expanding to Philadelphia this fall.

The program to raise interreligious awareness, which is run by the American Jewish Committee in cooperation with local Catholic archdioceses, already operates in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

Estonian SS holds rally

Some 1,500 World War II veterans from the Estonian SS Legion held a rally in the Baltic country’s capital city of Tallinn. No top political officials or military leaders attended Saturday’s event.

The day before the rally, Estonian Foreign Minister Toomas Ilves warned that the march could trigger a propaganda campaign against Estonia in the international press.

Lithuanian Jews look to U.S. for help in recovering property

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The president of Lithuania has promised a top U.S. official that he would try to advance efforts to restore Jewish communal property.

President Valdas Adamkus made the promise to Stuart Eizenstat, the U.S. undersecretary of state for economic affairs, who was in the Baltic nation last week to discuss U.S.-Lithuanian economic relations.

Local Jewish leaders had asked Eizenstat, the Clinton administration's point man on restitution issues, to intervene on their behalf.

During his visit, Eizenstat also traveled to Ukmerge, a small town previously known as Vilkomir, that was home to his ancestors who emigrated to the United States around the turn of the century.

Lithuania's Jewish community of 5,000 has been one of the most successful in the former Soviet Union in reclaiming communal property.

Since Lithuania regained independence seven years ago, the state has returned several synagogue buildings.

Two of those returned are located in the capital city of Vilnius and five are in the second-largest city of Kaunas, formerly known as Kovno.

But Jewish leaders here say that problems persist because a 1995 restitution law narrowly defines communal real estate as property that originally had been used for religious purposes.

Jewish leaders believe that not only synagogues should be returned but also former schools and old-age homes, as well as private property formerly owned by Jews.

Meanwhile, the return of former synagogues in Kaunas has led to a bitter dispute within the city's small Jewish community.

A court in Kaunas ruled last month that all five synagogues previously returned to the Jewish community should now be transferred to their previous owners.

Kaunas was one of the major Jewish centers in Eastern Europe before its destruction by the Nazis during World War II. Most of the city's prewar Jewish population of 40,000 was killed during the Holocaust.

After local authorities returned the first two synagogue buildings to the Jewish community in 1992, a group of elderly Jews who see themselves as the successors to the prewar Jewish community sued the city's Jewish community.

The elderly group has long run the Choral Synagogue, the city's only functioning Jewish house of worship under Soviet rule.

They claimed that they should have control of the other synagogues as well.

The community, which has been renting out the recovered synagogues and using the income to fund activities for the city's Jews, plans to appeal the court's decision.

Simonas Davidavicius, leader of the local Jewish community, said the property dispute has put the city's 500 Jews into a "difficult and strange situation."

In a telephone interview from Kaunas, he predicted that because of the internal Jewish dispute, state officials would now think twice before returning property to the community. □

Russian president criticizes registration of neo-Nazi groups

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin has criticized his justice minister for allowing extremist and ultranationalist groups to receive official certification.

In a meeting with Pavel Krasheninnikov last week, Yeltsin said the Russian Constitution prohibits the registration of such groups.

The development came as the president's commission on human rights announced that the threat of neo-Nazism in Russia is becoming increasingly alarming.

Some experts predict that Russian authorities are seeking to raise awareness about the dangers of political extremism and neo-Nazism in an effort to rally pro-reform forces in advance of the presidential elections in 2000.

The Kremlin complained recently about the rise of extremist and neo-Nazi groups in Moscow after several attacks by skinheads on Africans and Asians — and after the May bombing of a synagogue in the Russian capital.

After meeting with Yeltsin on July 9, Krasheninnikov told reporters that the president had expressed concern about local authorities across Russia certifying such groups as the overtly anti-Semitic Russian National Unity, or RNE, a paramilitary organization.

The RNE has usually maintained a low profile in national and local elections.

But it is now making plans to run in the parliamentary elections slated for 1999.

The legal status of the RNE has been uncertain since the Justice Ministry refused to register the movement at the federal level last year.

But the movement's local branches are officially registered in 25 Russian regions.

And a local court in southern Russia ruled recently that a local journalist libeled RNE by calling it a "fascist organization."

The court ordered the newspaper that published the article two years ago to pay a fine and to publish an apology.

Krasheninnikov has said that Russian legislators need to develop a legal definition for fascism, as neo-Nazism is called in Russia.

Only this could help "stop the threat of fascism in Russia," he said.

Last year the Russian Parliament's lower house, which is dominated by Communists and ultranationalists, rejected a proposed bill against facism.

Focusing on the problem, Yeltsin's commission on human rights said in a July 9 statement: "Fascist ideology is offering simple recipes for dealing with difficult problems and is making up bogus enemies as an outlet for the negative energy accumulated in society.

"Paramilitary extremist organizations are actively using the arsenal of fascist ideology and propaganda," the commission said, adding that more incidents, including the recent bombing of the Marina Roscha synagogue in Moscow, have occurred "when they passed over from military training disguised as sports activity to direct acts of terrorism." □