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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Insurance settlements expected

An international commission to resolve Holocaust-era claims against European insurers could be formed as soon as this month and begin settling the claims before the end of the year. The head of a group of U.S. insurance regulators said the commission will include some of his colleagues, representatives of the European firms and Jewish groups.

Justice officials seek deportation

The U.S. Justice Department filed a court motion to deport a man alleged to have taken part in World War II atrocities against Jews. According to the motion, Vincas Valkavickas, 78, lied about participating in a 1941 massacre of 3,700 Jews in Lithuania when he applied to immigrate to the United States.

First Lady addresses UJA donors

First lady Hillary Clinton focused on social issues in a talk at a conference of major woman donors to the United Jewish Appeal. The first lady sidestepped the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal.

Some 2,000 Lion of Judah members, each of whom give at least \$5,000 annually to the UJA-federation campaign, are attending the conference.

State Dept. invitations protested

A Jewish organization and a leading advocate of religious freedom issues protested the U.S. State Department's decision to invite several Islamic groups to participate in a religious freedom event.

The Zionist Organization of America and Michael Horowitz, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, said the American Muslim Council, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the American Muslim Foundation have expressed support for militant Islamic groups and known terrorists, and have actively defended regimes that engage in religious persecution abroad.

Missile cooperation sought

A U.S. senator said Congress is seeking more coordination with Israel on missile defense because of worries over missile programs from other countries in the Middle East.

The comments of Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) came during what is believed to be the first-ever joint hearing of the U.S. Congress and the Israeli Knesset.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Pro-Arab tilt of new premier in Russia is cause for concern

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The appointment of the staunchly pro-Arab Yevgeny Primakov as Russia's new prime minister has aroused concerns about its possible ramifications for Russian policy in the Middle East.

Jewish observers, both here and in Israel, point to Primakov's long-standing ties with the regimes in Syria, Iraq and Iran as cause for concern. But others predict he will moderate his pro-Arab stance in order to win Western help in confronting Russia's severe economic crisis.

The picture is further complicated by persistent reports that Primakov is partly Jewish.

According to the recently published Russian Jewish Encyclopedia and numerous sources in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital where Primakov spent his childhood, the new premier is of Jewish descent and once had a different, Jewish-sounding last name.

According to Foreign Ministry sources, Primakov, now 68, has never spoken about his childhood and has never acknowledged being Jewish.

This situation is problematic, according to Mikhail Chlenov, president of the Va'ad, an umbrella organization of Russian Jewish groups.

"To have a Jew at the head of the government is a luxury in Russia," said Chlenov. "But having a Jew who is hiding his roots is even worse."

Chlenov pointed out that Primakov will be forced to take unpopular measures to improve the failing economy and that this could eventually spark the ire of nationalists, who so far have supported Primakov for his championing of Russia as a country still to be reckoned with as a great world power.

If the situation in Russia grows even worse, Chlenov said, those who favored Primakov may remember his hidden ancestry and again pin the blame for the country's woes on Jews.

Russia's economic turmoil recently prompted the ouster of the young, reformist Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko.

The Communist-dominated lower house of Parliament approved Primakov last week after twice rejecting President Boris Yeltsin's previous nominee, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

In Israel, government officials were cautious in assessing the ramifications of Primakov's appointment.

Sources in Israel pointed to the fact that Primakov, considering the leading Arabist in Moscow, repeatedly adopted stances favorable toward Syria, Iraq and Iran when he served as foreign minister.

The sources were also concerned by the strong support that he has gotten from members of Russia's Communist Party — officials known to be less than favorable toward Israel.

Within days after Primakov was confirmed, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote him a congratulatory letter, calling on the new premier to halt the transfer of missile technology to the Middle East.

The United States and Israel have been pressuring Russia for more than a year to stop supplying arms and technical assistance to states in the region, particularly Iran.

In the letter, Netanyahu strongly implied that Primakov's close ties with Arab states could be helpful in stopping the proliferation of arms technology. Those ties date back

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians protest burial

The Palestinian Authority lodged a formal protest with Israel after Israeli officials said they buried two Hamas militants killed last week by Israeli troops. Palestinian officials said the two should be buried according to Islamic tradition.

Israel cited security concerns, saying a public funeral for brothers Imad and Adel Awadallah could lead to violence.

Meanwhile, Israel partially lifted a closure it imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after Hamas threatened retaliation for the killings of the two militants.

Some 10,000 Palestinian workers and business people were allowed into the Jewish state, but the border still remains closed to the general Palestinian population.

Goldstein claim denied

Israel denied a claim by the widow of Dr. Baruch Goldstein to receive government compensation for his death. Miriam Goldstein had claimed that her husband had been a "victim of a hostile act," a designation that would have made her eligible for state funds.

She had argued that her husband, who killed 29 worshipers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in February 1994, was subsequently murdered by a Palestinian mob because he was Jewish.

More Arrow tests planned

Israel will soon try to intercept a live missile during another test of its Arrow defense system, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said. His comment came a day after Israel's Arrow-2 missile destroyed a simulated target during the first comprehensive test of the missile's systems.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested Israel would share the Arrow technology with other nations under threat of attack by militant Islamic states.



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Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
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to the 1960s, when Primakov was stationed in the Middle East as a correspondent for the Communist Party daily Pravda.

Netanyahu adviser David Bar-Illan said Israel does not expect a change in Russia's "generally friendly policies" toward Israel under the new leader.

But he added that Israel is still not satisfied with Russian efforts to curb the spread of nuclear technology in the Middle East.

Russian analysts say Primakov's former deputy, Igor Ivanov, who was appointed the new foreign minister last week, will be more neutral toward Israel and the Middle East than the man he is succeeding.

They note that Ivanov is a specialist on Spain, not an Arabist like his mentor.

But sources in Moscow say Russia will continue to pursue its traditional markets for arms in the Middle East, such as Syria, despite Israeli concerns.

"Russian policy in this sphere will not change — there is no question about it," a Foreign Ministry official said.

Russia's former ambassador to Israel agrees.

"Of course, we will sell arms in the future, as we did it in the past," said Alexander Bovin, who served as Russia's envoy to the Jewish state between 1991 and 1997.

The first appointment Primakov made to his new Cabinet — Yuri Maslyukov, who was named deputy prime minister for economic policy — suggested that this will indeed be the case.

Maslyukov is known for his long-standing ties to Russia's military-industrial complex and is a leading defense industry lobbyist.

Observers say he will staunchly advocate the export of Russian weaponry to the Middle East to help provide cash for Russia's badly depleted Treasury.

But, according to other sources, Russia's financial woes may force Primakov to reconsider some of his past stances.

A former spymaster and member of the Soviet-era Politburo, Primakov is assuming the premiership at a time of profound difficulty in the Russian economy: The ruble is in a free-fall, workers have not been paid in months, bank accounts are not accessible — in many cases they are nearly worthless even when they can be accessed — and the prospect of uncontrolled inflation looms on the near horizon.

These problems could well affect the policies of the man who, after being appointed foreign minister in January 1996, maintained cordial relations with the West while at the same time making it clear that Russia would pursue its national interests even when they clash with the West.

Political observers here say that Primakov will have to pay a price for seeking financial help from the West.

Even though he is hardly sympathetic toward Israel or the West, Primakov "understands perfectly that today's Russia cannot afford putting itself at odds with Western interests, including those in the Middle East," said Konstantin Eggert, foreign editor of the Russian daily Izvestia.

"If Primakov is a clever politician — and his past experience has proven that he is — he should realize that Russia cannot now afford the foreign policy it pursued" before the current financial crisis, Eggert said.

As an example, he pointed to the issue of lifting U.N. sanctions against Iraq.

As foreign minister, Primakov had favored lifting the sanctions to enable Baghdad to sell its oil and pay Russia billions of dollars in debts and construction contracts.

But with the ruble's decline at least partially attributable to the decline in world oil prices, Eggert added, that stance may now go by the wayside as Russian oil executives lobby Primakov to let the sanctions go unquestioned — and thereby keep Iraqi oil off the world market.

This view may be borne out by remarks Primakov made last week immediately after his appointment.

He repeated his longtime opposition to NATO expansion to include countries in Central Europe and his support for ratification of the START-II nuclear arms reduction treaty, signed in 1993 but stalled in the Parliament.

Pointedly, however, he made no references to Russia as a great world power — the stance he had consistently maintained as foreign minister. □

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

Hundreds rally to try to keep sputtering peace process alive

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Five years after the signing of the Oslo peace accords, Jewish activists gathered here this week to try to reignite the hope generated by the euphoria that surrounded the White House ceremony.

More than 400 people marked the Sept. 13 anniversary of the ceremony at a rally Sunday at Washington's Adas Israel synagogue — joining with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's widow, Leah, the Clinton administration's top Middle East diplomat, Martin Indyk, and an array of Jewish leaders — by rededicating themselves to the cause of peace.

They came with the hope "that somehow, the new spirit all of us felt five years ago this day can be regenerated and dispel the current gloom," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, which was part of a loose coalition of more than 25 organizations convening the event.

The groups, including the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, as well as Americans for Peace Now, the National Council of Jewish Women and the New Israel Fund, said they represent the vast majority of the organized American Jewish community.

Prior to the rally, President Clinton met with leaders of the various organizations to express his steadfast commitment to moving the peace process forward. His appearance at the White House meeting, which was originally billed as a briefing with senior administration officials, caught everyone by surprise.

Clinton spoke at length about the peace process, noting that some progress had been made in the last week, during U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross' visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but that obstacles still remained.

The Jewish leaders, in turn, urged him to intensify peacemaking efforts and said the overwhelming majority of American Jews support the Oslo accords and continued U.S. involvement in the peace process.

That message came out at the rally as well.

"For the United States to withdraw from the peace process is unthinkable and would lead to chaos," said Seymour Reich, former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Indyk, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, suggested that U.S. efforts to break the deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians were close to bearing fruit.

He emphasized that the "clock is ticking" as May of next year approaches, when the interim agreement expires.

Despite speeches which stressed the need for staying the course of the Oslo process, criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's peace policies was implied, but not overt.

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, did not attend the rally, citing scheduling conflicts, although the embassy did send a representative.

After hearing excerpts of Yitzhak Rabin's address at the White House signing ceremony in 1993, Leah Rabin took the podium and with glistening eyes, looked over the crowd gathered in what were familiar surroundings.

She and her late husband had frequently attended the synagogue while Rabin served as ambassador to Washington, and had seen their son become a Bar Mitzvah there.

Recalling Rabin's assassination, she said, "There is a price to pay for peace and he became the price we all had to pay," but added, "When we buried Yitzhak, we did not bury the hope."

Steve Spector of Falls Church, Va., left the rally reflecting on how the "hope and euphoria" of five years ago had given way to frustration and the realization that "we have to think in more practical terms.

"We need to make things happen. We can't just hope and wait for it to happen," he said. □

Bubis warns against far-right

A Jewish leader in Germany called on Germans to increase their vigilance against far-right parties campaigning in the Sept. 27 general election.

In a message released to coincide with the upcoming Rosh Hashanah holiday, Ignatz Bubis said he is particularly worried that young people are being attracted to the far-right in increasing numbers.

Day school opens in L.A.

What is being described as the largest non-Orthodox Jewish day school in the United States held its dedication ceremony in Los Angeles. The Milken Community High School, partially funded by former junk-bond king Michael Milken, combines high-tech subjects with intensive Jewish studies.

Swiss ban Neo-Nazi meeting

Local Swiss officials banned a neo-Nazi meeting and rock concert scheduled to occur this weekend.

The government of the Vaud region, which said the event could disrupt public order and incite racial violence, banned the meeting after police seized cassettes of some of the rock groups scheduled to perform at the event. Skinheads from across Europe had been expected to attend.

Children admit to desecration

Four children were arrested in eastern France after admitting that they damaged 71 Jewish graves in July. The children, aged 11 and 12, said they made a game out of the desecrations. They are expected to appear soon before a juvenile court judge.

Persecuted celebs remembered

An exhibition dedicated to the work of German entertainers persecuted by the Nazis opened in Berlin.

The exhibit documents the work of mostly Jewish entertainers from the 1920s and 1930s.

B'nai B'rith to expand sessions

B'nai B'rith plans to expand its anti-discrimination training in Australia to the corporate sector.

A spokesman for the Australian affiliate of the organization said the decision to extend the courses, which are already offered to school students and police officers, stemmed from the recent rise of the racist and anti-Semitic One Nation Party there.

Hotel shows its support

An Israeli hotel included President Clinton's name on its sign to show support for him as he confronts the possibility of impeachment. A spokesman for the renamed Hotel Carmel Clinton Netanya said at least 100 people had telephoned backing the move.

First lady keeps focus on issues in speech to UJA women donors

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Putting the Monica Lewinsky scandal aside, first lady Hillary Clinton basked in the warm support of some 2,000 women at the United Jewish Appeal's annual Lion of Judah conference.

Clinton focused on her trademark issues of health care, child care, reproductive choice and human rights in a luncheon speech for women who give at least \$5,000 a year to their local UJA-federation campaigns.

Introduced as a "passionate advocate for women and families," the first lady did not disappoint the enthusiastic donors, who rushed the room in a stampede when the doors opened.

"No one need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world," Clinton said, quoting Anne Frank, the idealistic young diarist who perished in the Holocaust.

"I believe that with all my heart," she said.

The first lady, a lifelong passionate advocate for women's issues, went on to push the women to work, at home and abroad, to make "the progress of nations depend on the progress of women."

Clinton rallied the faithful in the room, who interrupted her with applause nine times during her 45-minute speech.

Recalling this week's Torah portion, in which Moses prepares the children of Israel to enter the promised land, Clinton urged the women to be "responsible not only to God but to one another."

The message resonated with the women at the conference.

"She speaks for women everywhere. She's what we're all about," said Marcia Karbank, a Lion of Judah donor from Kansas.

"We need to focus on our futures and what's relevant and important" — not the Lewinsky scandal, said Karbank, echoing the sentiments of more than two dozen women interviewed at the conference.

"She is a class act to be able to come here to give us support at a time when we should be supporting her," said Merry Bodziner from Atlanta.

Like many of the women, Bodziner said she was impressed with Clinton's speech. "She is absolutely conscious and supportive of what we are about."

Women attending the three-day Lion of Judah conference also heard Israel's new ambassador to Washington, Zalman Shoval, participate in a panel discussion with Nasser al-Kidwa, the Palestinian representative to the United Nations. □

(JTA student intern Mica Schneider in Washington contributed to this report.)

U.S. and Israeli lawmakers join forces for missile defense

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For a few moments on Capitol Hill this week, Sally Minich and Aviva Grundland united in their grief and their message.

Testifying before what is believed to be the first-ever joint hearing of the U.S. Congress and the Israeli Knesset, Minich and

Grundland urged the legislators to support missile defense systems to spare other families their ordeal.

Funding for missile defense development has been a hotly contested item on Capitol Hill this year as concerns grow over missile and nuclear weapons development programs in North Korea, India, Pakistan and Iraq.

During the 1991 Gulf War, an Iraqi Scud missile slammed into a U.S. Army staging area, killing Minich's youngest son, Frank, an Army reserve specialist. A few days earlier Grundland's husband, Eitan, died when a Scud missile destroyed their home near Tel Aviv.

"The same missile takes your husband, the father of your children and leaves you alone for the rest of your life," Grundland told the members of the Senate, House of Representatives and Knesset, who sat together on the dais in the historic House Armed Services Committee hearing room.

"No citizen in the world is at this point safe, especially in Israel, from missiles," said Grundland, who was on the phone with her husband when she heard the air raid sirens sound. Moments later the line was cut off when a missile, one of 38 that landed in Israeli territory, struck their home.

"Today, we've lost the capability to protect the home front," she said.

And that is what brought American and Israeli lawmakers from across the political spectrum in both countries together.

"The missile threat to the people of Israel and the people of the United States knows no political boundary," said Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.).

Since the Gulf War, Syria has acquired more advanced Scud missiles, capable of carrying chemical and biological warheads into Israel, and Iran has tested medium-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting the Jewish state.

Despite initial favorable reviews of the Patriot anti-missile batteries used during the Gulf War, the system only hit about 40 percent of its targets.

While many more advanced systems are under development in both Israel and the United States, none will be ready for deployment for at least another 14 months.

Echoing the sentiment of all the eight lawmakers at the hearing, Uzi Landau of Israel's ruling Likud Party said, "This is a situation which should be totally, totally unacceptable to all of us."

Israel and the United States already cooperate extensively in the area of missile defense.

In fact, only hours before the hearing began, the Arrow missile-killing missile successfully destroyed a mock target off the coast of Israel in the first test to combine all of the systems of the joint American-Israeli project.

The United States will likely fund two-thirds of the estimated \$1.6 billion cost of developing and deploying the missile.

But more must be done, the lawmakers argued.

The ability of rogue states "to hit Israeli and American troops in the Middle East is far ahead of what we can do to contain it," said Landau, who chairs the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

For Israel, there is "a clear and present danger," added Ephraim Sneh, a retired general in the opposition Labor Party.

During their four-day visit, the Israeli delegation met with top American military officials to discuss merging other missile defense systems and increasing shared technology. □