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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Albright defends aid cuts

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended the Clinton administration's plan to cut U.S. economic assistance to Israel by an additional \$30 million a year.

Last year, Congress and the White House agreed to an Israeli plan to cut support by \$120 million a year while increasing military aid by \$60 million.

In testimony to the House International Relations Committee, Albright defended President Clinton's request to now cut a total of \$150 million a year in aid.

She cited American plans to provide \$1.2 billion in new aid to Israel to help defray the costs of redeployments from the West Bank called for under the Wye agreement. "While we do not wish to in any way deprive the Israeli government of what it believes it needs, I think that we need to make sure that the Wye" aid package for Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan is funded, she said.

Court rules against extradition

U.S. officials expressed disappointment after Israel's Supreme Court ruled that an 18-year-old Maryland youth could not be extradited to the United States to face murder charges.

In a case that has strained U.S.-Israeli relations, the court overturned a lower court's decision and ruled that a law protecting Israeli citizens from being extradited for crimes committed abroad applies to Samuel Sheinbein. Sheinbein, who will instead be tried in Israel, claimed citizenship through his father, who was born in pre-state Israel and left for the United States as a child. [Page 3]

New agency chairman elected

The treasurer of the Jewish Agency for Israel was elected to replace the current chairman, Avraham Burg, a Labor Party candidate for the next Knesset.

The timing of Sallai Meridor's assumption of the chairmanship will depend on when Burg begins campaigning for a Knesset seat.

The agency's Board of Governors also approved Alex Grass of Harrisburg, Pa., to replace Charles "Corky" Goodman of Chicago as chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors.

The new positions are expected to be ratified at a meeting of the Jewish Agency in June. [Page 1]

Avraham Burg stepping down — and back into Israeli political fray

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK, (JTA) — Avraham Burg announced this week that he is jumping from the Jewish Agency for Israel back into the Israeli political arena.

His return to politics cuts short his term as chairman of the Jewish Agency, a post he has held for four years.

Burg, a former Knesset member for the Labor Party, was recently elected to the party's list of candidates for Israel's May election.

Sallai Meridor, the agency's treasurer, was elected acting chairman by the agency's Board of Governors, which met in Jerusalem this week.

Meridor, the brother of Dan Meridor, a leader of the new center party, was slated to take over as chairman on Jan. 1, 2000 anyway, but Israel's call for early elections has advanced the timetable. The scheduled rotation was a result of an agreement forged between the Likud and Labor parties.

In other agency business this week, the 121-member board approved the nomination of Alex Grass of Harrisburg, Pa., to replace Charles "Corky" Goodman, a Chicago businessman, as its chairman.

Grass is the founder of Rite Aid Corporation, a major retail drugstore chain. He has served in numerous high-level roles, including chairman of the board of the United Jewish Appeal. He is the outgoing chairman of the board of Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Agency officials said they did not think the early transfer of power would affect the work of the agency, which has been undergoing some significant changes in recent years.

The Jewish Agency is the principal recipient of funds raised by Diaspora local federations and the United Jewish Appeal, which together raised an estimated \$760 million in its 1998 annual campaign. "I don't think we'll miss a beat," Goodman said of Burg's departure.

"I'm not saying we won't miss him," Goodman said in a phone interview from Jerusalem. "He's a great man, and I'm certain he will stay close" to the agency.

The exact timing of Burg's departure is not yet known. He told the Board of Governors that he would step down when Labor Party leader Ehud Barak calls upon him to take an active role in the campaign.

Both Meridor and Grass are expected to be ratified in their positions in June at a meeting of the agency assembly. Burg held a Knesset seat for the Labor Party when he was elected chairman in 1995 to replace Simcha Dinitz, then under indictment for misuse of agency funds. The son of Yosef Burg, a National Religious Party member who served in each Israeli government for the state's first 40 years, Avraham Burg never made a secret of his own political aims.

A preview of his current move came in 1996. He caused a stir when an Israeli newspaper article quoted him as saying he would resign from his agency post if his political ally, then-Premier Shimon Peres, were re-elected and offered him a Cabinet position.

Seasoned Jewish communal leaders were not surprised by his ongoing political aspirations. "Knowing his background and political ambitions," then-chair of the United Jewish Appeal, Shoshana Cardin, said at the time that she had assumed Burg would return to government work should a position "come up that he found important enough. But I think he does find this job important."

During Burg's tenure, the agency began a series of severe budget cuts designed to overcome a deficit of over \$100 million, in addition to debts that have largely been

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinians reject Wye offer

The Palestinian Authority rejected an offer by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to implement portions of the Wye agreement. The premier had offered to release additional Palestinian prisoners serving time for criminal offenses and to open a safe passage route for Palestinians traveling between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said there was nothing to discuss unless Israel is also willing to carry out the further West Bank redeployments called for under the agreement.

Activists mark Hebron slayings

Israeli police prevented Peace Now activists from demonstrating at the grave of Dr. Baruch Goldstein on the fifth anniversary of the day the Jewish settler killed 29 Palestinian worshipers in Hebron.

The activists had wanted to protest the shrine that still stands at Goldstein's grave, which has become a pilgrimage site for his right-wing supporters.

IDF strikes back at Hezbollah

Israeli troops killed three Hezbollah gunmen in the southern Lebanon security zone. In an earlier incident, a member of Hezbollah who was planting roadside charges was killed during an Israeli air strike.

The casualties came after three Israeli officers were killed in a close-range firefight in the security zone earlier this week.

Legislator faces indictment

An Israeli Arab member of the Knesset is to be charged with incitement to murder for remarks he made regarding the shooting of a Bedouin youth at the hands of an Israeli security official.

During a Bedouin protest over the incident, Taleb Alkana called for revenge. He later said his comments were misinterpreted, adding that he is being persecuted because he is an Arab.



Daily News Bulletin

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repaid. Agency leaders attribute some of the ongoing deficit to a loss of income from Diaspora fund-raising efforts, with local communities keeping more funds at home for local services.

The cost-slashing measures included transferring social service and educational programs and other agency responsibilities to the Israeli government.

At the same time, the agency was forced to prove itself to Diaspora Jews, many of whom viewed the agency bureaucracy as bloated and redundant.

Eventually it cut its employees from 4,500 to about 900, and separated its politically appointed staff from its professional staff.

A merger of the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal, which funnels money from the UJA to the Jewish Agency, will give the federations more power in determining how much of the annual campaign is allocated to Israel.

But the contract for the merger, which is expected to be ratified by some 200 federations at a meeting in June, stipulates that the allocations to the Jewish Agency will continue at current levels — about \$200 million — for the next two years.

And Jewish Agency board members say they expect that the retailored agency will be more of an agent of the new entity, attuned to the desires of the federations.

“One of the purposes of this new organization, as opposed to the three old ones,” said Goodman, is to instill confidence and a sense of responsibility and control in the federations, so that they will “find it in the best interest of the Jewish people to work closely together, fund programs together and do what we’ve always done”: work through the Jewish Agency to “help people in need.”

During the board meetings this week, delegates met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who suggested the creation of a tripartite committee to promote closer working ties among North American Jews, the Jewish Agency and the government of Israel.

Goodman said he does not foresee any other radical changes in the agency's programs. “We have our hands full,” he said, with a strategic plan in the works and the day-to-day business of “bringing 50 to 60 thousand people a year to Israel, which frankly consumes two-thirds of our budget” of \$350 million. □

Despite Russia's economic woes, funding for Jewish projects is strong

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Russian Jewish Congress plans to distribute nearly \$2.6 million for communal projects, most of them in Moscow, according to the group's 1999 budget.

The budget, which is little changed from the previous year's, demonstrates that the financial strength of the leading domestic underwriter of Jewish life here has not been hurt by the country's ongoing economic crisis.

Indeed, some Jewish leaders here had previously feared that the crisis — in which the ruble lost some 73 percent of its value during the last six months — would seriously impair the congress' efforts to support communal projects. In fact, given the decline in the ruble against the dollar, the latest budget represents an increase.

Created in 1996 with the backing of Russia's leading Jewish business people, the group raises about one-tenth of the money spent in Russia on Jewish projects.

The largest contributions to the Russian Jewish community come from abroad — from the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a private foundation affiliated with the Lubavitch movement.

The largest portion of the RJC campaign, \$500,000, will go to support charitable and social projects in Moscow.

In addition to supporting Jewish communal life in the Russian capital, the congress has encouraged the creation of a network of branches in 45 Russian provinces to support local Jewish needs.

In the past three years, the branches distributed some \$5.2 million from funds raised from local businesses. The two most successful campaigns topped \$1 million each — in Samara and Kazan, both located in the Volga region. □

JEWISH WORLD

Senators focus on anti-Semitism

Jewish organizational officials expressed alarm at the re-emergence of anti-Semitism in Russia and called on Congress to bring the issue to the forefront of bilateral relations with Moscow.

At a senate subcommittee hearing, the officials said Congress can play a key role in addressing the problem by giving it a high profile, encouraging Russian leaders to speak out against intolerance and supporting those who are trying to move Russia toward becoming a more democratized, pluralistic society.

During the session, the subcommittee chairman, Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), reiterated his earlier stance that Russia's record on religious freedom should be linked to U.S. foreign aid to Moscow.

WJC may back boycott

The World Jewish Congress may next month recommend a boycott of French banks if they do not settle Holocaust-era lawsuits against them soon.

The WJC's executive director, Elan Steinberg, said the French banks were not responding to the charges against them as well as Swiss and German banks had.

A total of \$8 billion in today's dollars was seized from Jews in Nazi-occupied France and no more than half was ever returned, according to Steinberg. French banks deny that they are not being cooperative and point to their work with a French commission that is probing the wartime looting of Jewish assets.

Spirit of reconciliation sought

A handful of senators gathered in the spirit of post-impeachment reconciliation at a Capitol Hill forum coordinated by the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), an Orthodox Jew who co-chairs a public policy center affiliated with the group, said members of Congress must work to heal bipartisan divisions not only by reaching out to each other but by finding ways to "reach out to the public, to reconnect, to reassure of the worthiness of our intentions." A variety of religious leaders, including Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, president of the international fellowship, also addressed the gathering.

Zurich pogrom remembered

Zurich officials unveiled a plaque to commemorate the approximately 150 Jews who were killed there 650 years ago.

"The flourishing Jewish community of medieval Zurich was brutally extinguished" in that pogrom, a city official said at the ceremony. Community members were burned, beaten and murdered after being blamed for a plague, known as the Black Death, sweeping across Europe. Only a handful escaped.

Israeli ruling against extradition evokes dismay, but no aid threats

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Official Washington reacted with relative calm to an Israeli Supreme Court decision not to extradite a Maryland teen-ager to stand trial for a 1997 murder.

Although officials, including Attorney General Janet Reno, expressed disappointment with the ruling, the reaction contrasted sharply with Israel's initial announcement that it would not extradite Samuel Sheinbein.

At that time, some politicians had threatened to hold up aid to Israel.

The case then went to the Israeli courts.

Israel's Supreme Court ruling Thursday that the 18-year-old Sheinbein could not be extradited to the United States overturned a lower court decision. The Israeli justices ruled 3-2 that a law protecting Israeli citizens from being extradited for crimes committed abroad applies to Sheinbein. The teen had claimed citizenship through his father, who was born in pre-state Israel and left the country as a child.

Israeli prosecutors said Sheinbein would be indicted for murder early next week, possibly Sunday or Monday. American prosecutors will try the case in an Israeli court, and if convicted, Sheinbein would serve his sentence in an Israeli jail.

Sheinbein fled to Israel in September 1997 to avoid standing trial for the murder of his former friend, 19-year-old Alfred Tello. Tello's dismembered body had been found in a house in a Maryland suburb earlier that month.

Another suspect in the murder, Aaron Needle, 18, hanged himself in his jail cell following his arrest. Needle and Sheinbein were classmates at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in suburban Washington, D.C.

The justices in the majority said that the law preventing extradition should be amended by the legislature, in order to allow for exceptional cases like this one.

Indeed, some legislators said they would introduce legislation to amend the law.

American calls for extradition had come from the highest levels. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had been personally involved in urging Israel to hand over Sheinbein, who remains in an Israeli jail awaiting trial.

Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), the chairman of the House committee responsible for foreign aid, did not reiterate a previous threat to seek a cut in aid to Israel if Sheinbein was not extradited. Callahan said through a spokesman that he is "naturally disappointed" in the decision, but "we have to respect that."

Callahan said that he "trusts that the decision will not prevent due process from taking its course."

"We can be disappointed but we can't really influence the judicial process in Israel, the United States or any other country," he said.

For her part, Reno told reporters, "Of course we're disappointed with the response, but at the same time we're going to be dedicated to doing everything we can to work with the local prosecutor and with Israeli authorities, if the case is tried there, to see that justice is done." At the same time the United States is "looking at whatever we can do in terms of further steps to be taken in the review process," she said without elaborating.

In Jerusalem, Sheinbein's lawyer, David Libai, a former justice minister, said after the court ruling: "Our Supreme Court again proved to be independent and did not yield to political pressures from the United States."

Israeli justice and political officials emphasized that Sheinbein would not get off easily. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office issued a statement stressing that "Israel is a state of law and the authority for interpreting the law is the Supreme Court, whose decision we must honor.

"We hope and are sure that the U.S., as an enlightened state of law, will accept the ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court which is known as independent and apolitical."

If convicted, Sheinbein faces a life sentence, which typically runs for 25 years in Israel. With good behavior, Sheinbein could be released after serving two-thirds of a sentence. □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Lawmaker delivers speech seen as call to launch pogroms

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Is a Russian lawmaker who is seeking to become the country's next president calling for pogroms against Jews?

Albert Makashov, the hard-line Communist legislator whose repeated anti-Semitic statements have sparked controversy, said in a speech Monday that there are "good Jews" and "bad Jews" and that those whom the nationalists consider good "will continue to live," while the bad "will have a hard time."

The speech in Novocherkassk, a largely Cossack mining town in southern Russia, drew widespread media coverage in Russia.

Speaking at a conference sponsored by a nationalist group known as the Movement in Support of the Army, Makashov told the audience: "Jews are brave. They are so brave because we are sleeping, because none of us has yet knocked on their door."

He also suggested the group, of which he is a leader, should change its name to the Movement Against Yids.

Makashov, who recently announced he will make a bid for the Russian presidency when elections are held next year, was greeted with thunderous applause by the approximately 2,000 audience members.

On Wednesday, the Kommersant Daily, Russia's leading business newspaper, ran a front-page article under the headline, "Pogroms Are Not Far Off." Another daily newspaper, Novye Izvestiya, offered a similar reaction.

Jewish leaders, meanwhile, are urging law-enforcement agencies to take measures against Makashov.

"The inactivity of the authorities gives rise to serious doubts" whether they are going to stop the anti-Semitic campaign launched by Makashov, said Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Just the same, he disagreed with the newspaper assessments that the remarks would prompt open violence against Jews.

"Makashov has not yet reached the level of influence that would allow his calls to be put into practice," Osovtsov said.

Mikhail Gelfer, head of the Jewish community in the Rostov region, where Makashov spoke, said members of his community were "horrified" by the speech.

He, too, discounted the likelihood of pogroms — but did feel that the speech could lead to an increase in anti-Semitic incidents.

Very few members of the region's Communist-dominated administration and numerous Cossack groups share Makashov's views, Gelfer said.

Makashov announced recently that he would split from the Communists and run under the banner of the Movement in Support of the Army in parliamentary elections that are slated for December. He said he would use that position as a base from which to run for the presidency next year.

Makashov is now co-leader of the movement along with Viktor Ilyukhin, another lawmaker who split off from the Communists to join the movement. Ilyukhin, who attended Monday's speech, gained notoriety last December by blaming Russia's ongoing economic crisis on the Jews.

Several media observers believe that their "defection" from the Communist Party was part of a carefully thought-out campaign by

the party to attract ultranationalist segments of society who would not otherwise support the Communists.

This is particularly true with respect to the Cossacks, many of whom are anti-Communist. Most members of this ethnic group in Russia and Ukraine share family stories about the large-scale repressions that Communists waged against the Cossacks in the 1920s and 1930s. Last month, prosecutors launched a criminal investigation of Makashov for his anti-Semitic statements, but scant progress has been reported. □

Congress urged to press Russia to curb anti-Semitism

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Alarmed by the re-emergence of anti-Semitism in Russia, Jewish officials are calling on Congress to bring the issue to the forefront of bilateral relations with Moscow.

At a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations European Affairs subcommittee Wednesday, the officials said that Congress can play a key role in addressing the problem by giving it a high profile, encouraging Russian leaders to speak out against intolerance and supporting those who are trying to move Russia toward a more democratized, pluralistic society.

David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, called for careful monitoring of the situation and said the U.S. government must show "zero tolerance for mainstream acceptance" in Russia of anti-Semitism.

Mark Levin, director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said, "The U.S. must signal to Russia that we stand by a strong commitment to human rights and we are ready to assist them in every way possible in building the foundations of democracy."

Russia's unstable political situation, coupled with a deteriorating economic climate, has led political parties on both the right and left to blame Jews for society's ills.

Anti-Jewish rhetoric, Nazi-style demonstrations, desecrated cemeteries and synagogue bombings have sown the seeds of fear among the estimated 450,000 to 600,000 Jews living in Russia.

The Clinton administration has raised the issue in a series of high-level meetings with Russian officials, prompting Russian President Boris Yeltsin and others to speak out.

But Jewish leaders say Russian government officials, particularly Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, must do more to counter the anti-Semitic upsurge.

The subcommittee chairman, Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), said, as he has in the past, that the issue of Russia's mistreatment of Jews should be linked to U.S. foreign aid to Moscow.

"Our ability to assist Russia is really predicated on their ability to live up to their agreements on human rights and religious freedom," Smith said. Smith won approval for an amendment to last year's foreign aid bill that linked Russia's aid with its record regarding a controversial law limiting religious freedom in Russia.

The Jewish officials who testified, including Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, did not go as far as Smith in suggesting that foreign aid to Russia be linked to its actions in curbing anti-Semitism. Levin said in an interview that kind of approach remains a "dilemma" in light of the important role aid to Russia plays in helping to promote democracy. □