



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Knesset revises extradition law**

The Israeli Knesset passed a law making it easier to extradite Israeli citizens charged with committing crimes abroad. Under the new law, those who hold Israeli citizenship but are not residents of the country will be extradited, while residents will be tried in the Jewish state.

The law was prompted by, but does not affect, the case of Samuel Sheinbein, a Maryland teen-ager accused of killing an acquaintance who fought extradition to the United States by claiming Israeli citizenship through his father.

Sheinbein fled to Israel in September 1997 after the crime he is accused of committing took place.

### **Survivors protest near Reichstag**

A small group of concentration camp survivors protested Monday outside of Berlin's Parliament building, charging that Germans are too ready to forget the victims of Nazism.

Meanwhile, the Central Council of Jews in Germany officially dedicated its new headquarters in Berlin, and work began there on a new school for Jewish teachers sponsored by the New York-based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

### **Warsaw Ghetto uprising marked**

Jewish and Polish officials placed wreaths Sunday at the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Representatives of the Israeli Embassy read Kaddish during the ceremony, which marked the 56th anniversary of the uprising by 200 young Jews who decided to fight when Nazi troops began to liquidate the ghetto on April 19, 1943.

Most of the 60,000 people remaining in the ghetto at the time were killed during the uprising, which was crushed after three months.

### **Russian neo-Nazis lose in court**

A court in the Russian capital this week banned the Moscow branch of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity movement.

None of the charges brought against the group, whose members wear black uniforms and sport armbands reminiscent of the Nazi swastika, centered on its neo-Nazi character or on its attempts to incite ethnic, religious or racial strife, a punishable crime under Russian law. [Page 3]

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### **Finding a haven in Israel: Some Kosovars seek new life**

*By Avi Machlis*

KIBBUTZ MA'AGAN MICHAEL, Israel (JTA) — Protected from the harsh midday sun by a picnic-table umbrella, Kreshnik Bajraktari, an ethnic Albanian refugee from Kosovo, replays the events that led him to this safe haven alongside the calm shores of the Israeli Mediterranean.

Like most of the 74 people housed here, the 23-year-old Bajraktari's thoughts are far away, tuned to members of his extended family still in the Balkans, the fate of his home in the Kosovar capital of Pristina, his dentistry studies that were abruptly cut off by the war.

Some of the refugees hope to return home as soon as possible; others want to rebuild their lives in Israel. All know that they are lucky.

"We are grateful and appreciate what Israel has done for us," says Bajraktari. "I don't think any country in the world would have greeted us like this."

Last week, on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, 111 ethnic Albanians were airlifted to Israel as a humanitarian gesture. Although the number is symbolic — it would take 7,000 such airlifts to relocate the approximately 700,000 refugees created by the crisis — for this small group, Israel is a guardian angel.

They were given a hero's welcome. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu greeted them, Bajraktari spoke in front of a Knesset parliamentary committee and the group was taken on field trips last weekend to see the country.

However, as the euphoria dies down — the hordes of journalists and television crews are now gone — many appear to be in shock from the events that shattered their lives. Older men play chess and children frolic amid the white stucco field-school dormitories, but a sadness has descended upon these refugees.

Many are desperately calling home to try to locate relatives and friends. All are still coming to terms with what they have left behind and the challenge of rebuilding their lives in a country most know nothing about.

Like many ethnic Albanians, Bajraktari's family believed it would only be a matter of days before NATO airstrikes crushed Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. For 10 days, they hunkered down in their Pristina home, praying they would be spared both the NATO bombs targeting Serb military positions and the Serbian shells crashing down in the city. With no end in sight, the Bajraktari family piled into their car and headed south for the Macedonian border. Although they did not witness any killings, bodies littered the streets of the Kosovar capital.

At the border, cars packed with fleeing families were backed up for miles. Serb soldiers herded the vehicles into an immense parking lot of an abandoned factory. For five terrifying nights, the Bajraktari family stayed there, fearing all along that they might be part of a Serbian scheme to have them slaughtered should NATO bomb the plant.

When they finally reached the refugee camp near Skopje, Macedonia, Bajraktari and his cousin Astrit Kuci, also a dentistry student who had nearly completed his degree, soon found themselves working alongside doctors at the Israeli field hospital. When Israel said it would take in refugees, they were among the first to sign up.

"I have seen some movies about what the Germans did to the Jews in World War II, and it touched my soul," says Kuci, an Israel patch pinned to his T-shirt. "I couldn't believe nobody spoke out against the atrocities then. But when we experienced this ourselves, I realized that Albanians and Jews had the same fate." While most Jews

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Terror fatalities dropped

The number of Israeli fatalities from terror attacks dropped during the past two years, the head of the nation's anti-terrorism task force told the Cabinet on Sunday.

There were 131 terror-related Israeli deaths in 1995 and 1996, and 46 in the following two years, according to Meir Dagan. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed credit for the decline, saying it was a "badge of honor" for his government.

### Israeli population hits 6 million

Israel's population totals 6 million, a 2.3 percent increase over the previous year, according to statistics released on the eve of the nation's 51st Independence Day. Jerusalem remains the country's largest city, with 632,000 residents, followed by Tel Aviv, with just over half that number. Jewish residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip totaled 172,000 people.

### Lebanon remembers shelling

Ceremonies were held across Lebanon to mark the third anniversary Sunday of Israel's shelling of a refugee camp during its 16-day campaign against Hezbollah gunmen.

Israeli officials apologized at the time for the shelling, which killed at least 91 Lebanese refugees who had taken shelter at the Kana U.N. camp during Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath.

### Israel expels Palestinian minister

Israeli police expelled a Palestinian Cabinet minister from Jerusalem on Sunday after he entered the city in violation of an Israeli order.

Ziad Abu Ziad later denied that he had engaged in political activities in Jerusalem on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Last month, Israeli officials revoked Ziad's VIP entry permit, charging he was involved in such activities, which they said violated of the Oslo accords.

would not feel comfortable comparing Auschwitz to Skopje, Israelis have almost instinctively demonstrated sympathy and support for the plight of Kosovo's Albanians.

Israelis have raised more than \$1.25 million to aid the Kosovars and Israeli companies have sent an additional \$500,000 worth of food, blankets and other relief.

"The response in Israel has been phenomenal," Sallai Meridor, acting chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, said recently. He said Israel and the Jewish Agency "felt we had to do something" not "only because we are human beings, but maybe especially because we are Jews."

Israel's Arab community has also raised about \$1.25 million to help the Albanians, most of whom are Muslims. But last week, when Islamic leaders from an Israeli village came to invite the Albanians to a local mosque, the refugees politely declined.

The refugees may be wary of insulting their Jewish hosts and becoming embroiled in another ethnic conflict by showing their affinity with the Muslim community — even though officials with the Jewish Agency for Israel, who are sponsoring their stay, have told them to feel free to practice their religion.

More likely, however, the refugees simply do not identify with the local Muslims. "The Muslims invited us to use the mosque, but we said we are not religious," explains Emrush Rama, a 19-year-old musician who has two earrings in his left ear. "We have a different way of thinking."

Bajraktari agrees: "We were not persecuted because we are Muslims, but because we are Albanians," he says. "We tried to explain this to the local Muslims."

Such views appear to discredit the theory proffered by Ariel Sharon, Israel's foreign minister, that a "greater Albania" could turn into a hotbed of militant Islam in the heart of Europe. Sharon's criticism of Serbian ethnic cleansing has been relatively mild. Many Israelis — and even some Foreign Ministry officials — cannot understand why Sharon has not been as supportive of the Kosovars as the Israeli public has been.

Meanwhile, a portion of another small group of Balkan Muslims that was on the receiving end of Serbian nationalist expansion earlier in the decade remains in Israel today. In 1993, Israel gave refuge to 84 Bosnians who were fleeing under circumstances similar to those faced by the Kosovars.

Safet Bajric is one of 35 who remained in Israel, and now he is working for the Jewish Agency as a translator for the Kosovars.

"We are almost the same type of people," he explains in fluent Hebrew, comparing the Bosnians to the Albanian Kosovars. Bajric, a factory worker who recently bought a house, is full of praise for Israel, although he has one gripe: Israel promised citizenship to the Bosnians who stayed on.

"We did not receive it, though," he says. "We put in a request to the Interior Ministry last year, but have not received a response."

Several of the new arrivals, already believing they will have nothing to return to, want to apply for citizenship. Israel has promised citizenship to those who choose to stay after six months. In addition, many of the refugees want to begin studying Hebrew as soon as possible so they can find jobs.

"We hope to get the Hebrew ulpan started quickly, and we are also trying to find them workplaces," said Jaffa Barsis, who is managing the Ma'agan Michael site on behalf of the Jewish Agency. "Their main problem will be to decide where their future lies, whether to stay here or return home."

For the Jaha family, that is not even a question. In part, they are determined to stay in Israel because their fate was joined with the Jewish people long before the current Balkan war. During World War II, Lamija Jaha's parents hid a Jewish woman named Mira Bakovic in their Sarajevo home.

After she and her family fled their home in Pristina, Jaha, 44, approached the Macedonian Jewish community. "We were totally without hope," she says.

She showed the Jewish community a certificate given to her family by the Jewish community for their heroism during the Holocaust. The community helped her get in touch with Israeli authorities, who had the family brought to Israel.

Jaha came here with her husband, Vllaznim, and their two children. Even though Vllaznim's parents were left behind, the Jahas have no doubts about their futures.

"We left behind one life; that life is over," says Vllaznim Jaha. "I think now it is time to begin another life here." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Russian court bans neo-Nazis as pressure on group intensifies

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russia's largest and best-organized far-right organization has come under fire on several fronts.

This week, a court in the Russian capital banned the Moscow branch of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity movement, a group that may have been responsible for an attack last week on a synagogue in Minsk, the capital of the former Soviet republic of Belarus.

The court hearing was initiated by Moscow city prosecutors, who charged among other things that RNU members were involving minors in their political activities and that the group was operating illegal branches in other parts of Russia.

None of the charges brought against the group, whose members wear black uniforms and sport armbands reminiscent of the Nazi swastika, centered on its neo-Nazi character or on its attempts to incite ethnic, religious or racial strife, a punishable crime under Russian law.

Just the same, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who last December blocked the group from holding its national convention in Moscow, hailed the court's decision and said his office will continue to work against the neo-Nazi group.

Before the verdict was announced, RNU leaders said they would ignore the court decision, adding that they plan to participate in Russia's parliamentary elections, which are slated for December. Last year, the group's leader, Alexander Barkashov, said he may run in next year's presidential elections.

In a separate development, authorities in the Russian town of Borovichi banned neo-Nazi activities, granted a public space to the local Jewish community and initiated a seminar to counter anti-Semitic and hate propaganda among the town's youth.

The moves followed an international campaign launched by U.S. Jewish groups after the tiny Jewish community of 200 in Borovichi, a town of 90,000 people about 300 miles northwest of Moscow, reported a dramatic increase in the neo-Nazi activities.

Last fall, hundreds of stickers saying "Jews Are Rubbish" and showing a man throwing a Star of David into a garbage can appeared in Borovichi.

And this year, dozens of posters proclaiming, "The Yid Is a Plot Against Russians" appeared across town.

According to Edward Alexeev, the leader of Borovichi's Jewish community, his repeated appeals to the town's mayor seeking support for the community yielded no results. But, he added, the situation changed dramatically after a campaign was launched by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the San Francisco-based Bay Area Council of Jewish Rescue and Renewal.

As a result of the campaign, Alexeev said, the mayor received during the past two months at least 600 letters of concern from across the United States, including members of the U.S. Congress, and from such countries as Germany, Spain and Japan.

The authorities "immediately changed their stand," Alexeev said in a telephone interview, adding that he was amazed to see the result.

The anti-Semitic posters "disappeared overnight," he said.

The mayor also turned to the Jewish community for help in organizing a two-day seminar aimed at curbing the activities of neo-Nazi groups.

In the April 12 attack on the Minsk synagogue, which coincided with the Orthodox Christian Easter, arsonists set fire to the entrance of the Dauman Street Synagogue and the slogan "Bash the Yids, Save Russia" was spray-painted on the synagogue's wall.

No one was injured in the incident, but the synagogue's door was destroyed.

Yuri Dorn, a Jewish leader in Minsk, said teen-agers with the RNU may have been responsible for the attack.

Yakov Basin, a long-time Jewish activist and the director of the Minsk-based Belarus-American Bureau on Human Rights, which is affiliated with the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, said the incident was just another sign of rising anti-Semitism in this former Soviet republic. According to Basin, RNU supporters have recently been distributing anti-Semitic materials throughout Minsk. □

#### Activists to revive freedom rides

Jewish and black activists announced plans to recreate the 1960s freedom rides from New York to Mississippi that brought Northern activists to the segregated South for civil rights protests.

The bus caravan, scheduled to leave in June, marks the 35th anniversary of the murder of two Jewish activists from New York and a black activist from Mississippi by members of the Ku Klux Klan.

#### Wallenberg statue unveiled

A statue commemorating the heroism of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg was unveiled Sunday in Budapest. Hundreds of people braved pouring rain to honor Wallenberg, credited with saving the lives of thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis.

#### AJCommittee visits Macedonia

A delegation from the American Jewish Committee was scheduled to leave Monday for Macedonia, where they will explore firsthand the conditions facing the thousands of Kosovar Albanians who have sought refuge there. The AJCommittee has already raised \$500,000 to help the refugees.

#### Australia experimented on Jews

Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany were among those subjected by the Australian army to medical experimentation during World War II, according to Australian newspaper reports Monday.

The refugees who participated in the experiments, conducted at the request of British and U.S. drug companies seeking a cure for malaria, were volunteers for the Australian army who were not permitted to see active duty.

#### Oklahoma group recalls bombing

The Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City donated \$250,000 to the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum Center.

The gift, made last week, commemorates the fourth anniversary of the April 19, 1995, terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building that claimed 168 lives.

The money will be used to fund the part of the museum that will chronicle the lives of those directly affected by the bombing.

#### Reform Jews marks outreach

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations is celebrating 20 years of Reform Jewish outreach this week at a three-day symposium in New York.

UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie commended the movement's outreach, telling about 140 outreach committee members Sunday, "I see our work with the intermarried as our most distinctive achievement."

## NEWS ANALYSIS

## Arab candidate for premier gets little boost from community

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The first Israeli Arab to run for prime minister of the Jewish state is getting little support from the nation's Arabs.

Azmi Beshara is making history with his decision to run in the May 17 elections. But his fellow Israeli Arab politicians are concerned that his campaign to become premier may help the one candidate they want to lose the race — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Theoretically, Israeli Arab voters could not ask for anything more than to have one of their own represent their interests by running for prime minister.

Just the same, the leaders of the two leading Israeli-Arab parties — Hadash, the formerly Communist party, and the United Arab List — have called on their followers not to vote for Beshara.

While some observers maintain that this opposition is motivated by political jealousy, the Arab parties say they are concerned that Beshara's candidacy may damage the chances of the Labor Party candidate, Ehud Barak, to unseat Netanyahu.

In the 1996 election, some 95 percent of Israel's Arab electorate voted for the then-Labor candidate, Shimon Peres. This time around, the Arab vote is being courted by Barak and Yitzhak Mordechai, the leader of the Centrist Party, known in Hebrew as Mercaz.

Netanyahu, a political realist, would settle for the same 5 percent of the Arab vote that he received in 1996.

If none of the candidates wins a clear majority, there will be a runoff vote June 1 between the two top vote-getters.

According to opinion polls in recent weeks, the gap between Netanyahu and Barak is marginal.

The Israeli daily Ma'ariv published earlier this month the combined result of several polls, involving 4,400 respondents, and came up with a by-now familiar result: Netanyahu receives 36 percent of the votes in the first round, Barak gets 35 percent, with 10 percent of the voters still undecided.

In other words, every vote — including those from the 1 million-member-strong Israeli Arab community — will count.

Moreover, if Mordechai and Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, who is running for prime minister as the leader of a right-wing coalition, drop out of the race — as some pundits predict may happen — Netanyahu could be elected in the first round of voting. Israeli Arab leaders are hoping that Beshara, too, will drop out of the race — a move that would bolster the chances of Barak and Mordechai.

Interestingly enough, Beshara has already indicated that he may do just that — "if there are very good reasons," he said.

Beshara, 43, knows full well what his prospects are.

"Of course, I know that I have no chance" of winning the May 17 vote, he told JTA. Rather, he views his campaign as a chance to publicize his vision regarding the "character" of the state. If Israel belongs to all of its citizens, then an Arab prime minister would be just as valid as a Jewish one.

He also views his candidacy as a vehicle to help his people.

"I am simply trying to use my political weight to attain civil rights" for Israel's Arab population, said Beshara. "I am not asking

for privileges, but rather for obvious rights."

Born in Nazareth, Beshara was attracted to communist ideology. After studying in Berlin during the 1980s, he became a professor of philosophy at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank.

After abandoning his communist leanings, he was elected to the Knesset in 1996 as the head of an independent ticket, a-Tajamu-Balad, Arabic for the National Democratic Alliance.

It was shortly after becoming a legislator that he first decided to run for the premiership, believing that he could go after the same votes that would otherwise have gone to a Jewish candidate.

If he does decide to withdraw from the race prior to the May elections, it will only be after he has sought commitments for Israeli Arabs from some of the other candidates, particularly from Barak, who is likely to draw most of the Arab vote.

His tactic reverses the one previously used by Israeli Arab politicians: His negotiations on behalf of his people are coming before the elections, rather than after them, when coalition talks are held.

In the meantime, whether or not he drops out of the running, Beshara is attempting to give his candidacy as much legitimacy as possible. He is refraining from making revolutionary calls — such as the abolishment of the Law of Return, under which Jews worldwide have the right to settle in Israel.

Instead, he is repeating some of the themes he has sounded while in the Knesset, such as a demand for educational autonomy for Israel's Arabs — which he said is not unlike the autonomy of the Jewish religious educational system — and a call for proportional Arab representation in Israel's civil service.

According to Eli Rekhess, a senior researcher at Tel Aviv University who also serves as a consultant to the Abraham Fund for Jewish-Arab Coexistence, Beshara's candidacy can be perceived as both a momentary political move and a historic turning point.

His campaign is historic "because it is the first time that an Arab political figure has chosen this way to express the frustration of the Arab community, whose electoral numbers increase, and yet its political influence decreases. For 50 years, they have remained at the political margin," Rekhess said.

But the "historic significance of the move is somewhat weakened by the fact that none of the other Arab parties support Beshara's candidacy," he added.

Indeed, the only Israeli Arab leader to support Beshara is Dr. Ahmed Tibi, formerly Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's adviser on Israeli affairs.

Beshara and Tibi have formed a joint list to run for the Knesset and to advance Beshara's candidacy for prime minister.

Their alliance is surprising, considering that for years they were bitter political enemies. But with polls showing that they have a better chance of winning election to the Knesset if they run together, the two joined in a political marriage of convenience, merging Beshara's National Democratic Alliance with Tibi's recently formed Arab Movement for Change.

When he announced that he was running for the Knesset, Tibi resigned as Arafat's adviser and hoped that the Palestinian leader would support his candidacy. But Arafat, instead of supporting Tibi, has sent word to the Israeli Arab political community not to endorse Beshara.

He, like most Arab leaders in Israel, does not want to do anything that may help Netanyahu's re-election chances. □