



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Center Party mulls poor polls

The leaders of Israel's Center Party met for several hours Sunday to discuss the future of Yitzhak Mordechai's prime ministerial candidacy.

Despite poor poll showings, Mordechai has bristled at rumors that he is planning to pull out of the race. The meeting came after one of the party's founders, former Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo, said in a weekend interview that Mordechai should consider withdrawing from the race if it appears that the move would help Barak win in the first round.

### Settler enclaves dismantled

Israeli officials on Sunday dismantled several enclaves set up by Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

The action comes amid ongoing activity by Jewish settlers to establish facts on the ground prior to any future agreements authorizing handovers of West Bank lands to the Palestinians.

### Leaflets target Moscow mayor

Anti-Semitic leaflets targeting the mayor of Moscow are being distributed in two Russian cities.

The leaflets, which include a photograph of Yuri Luzhkov wearing a skullcap at a Jewish event held last year, falsely claim that he is Jewish. [Page 4]

### Albright criticizes Israel

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright criticized Israel for failing to implement its obligations under the Wye peace accord.

In a videotaped message delivered May 6 to the American Jewish Committee's annual meeting in Washington, Albright stepped up U.S. opposition to Israeli settlement activity "because of its destructive impact on the ability to pursue peace." Previously the United States has called settlements an "obstacle to peace."

Speaking at the same AJCommittee meeting, First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton expressed "cautions optimism" that diplomatic efforts under way will succeed in ending the NATO bombing of Serbia, stop the murder and forced relocation of Kosovo Albanians, and allow for refugees to return to Kosovo under the protection of an international force.

Clinton called on all people to "learn from the past" and to "reach out and take risks for peace and stand up for human rights."

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Jewish Agency workers tackle tricky aid distribution in Albania

By Avi Machlis

TIRANA, Albania (JTA) — It did not take long for Jewish Agency for Israel relief workers in Albania to find out just how desperately ethnic Albanian Kosovars needed their aid.

In early April, the first trucks carrying Jewish Agency relief chugged down Albania's dilapidated, single-lane roads toward a dozen isolated camps in the southern Fier and Berat regions, a 50-mile journey that took more than four hours. They knew conditions were poor, but had no idea to what extent the 30,000 refugees there were suffering.

"It was horrible," says Ziva Ohayon, managing director of Latet, an independent Israeli humanitarian organization working with the Jewish Agency to distribute aid in Albania. "They were sleeping on plastic sheets. They had no food. Two babies had just died, and we had baby food in the back of the truck."

Planeloads of relief from across the world are unloaded each day at Tirana airport. Most of it is distributed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is overwhelmed by the logistics of handling such massive quantities of aid.

Israeli field workers say their group is one of a few to take upon itself the complicated task of physically distributing supplies. In addition, the group is the only relief agency to reach the detached southern camps. By their own accounts, Israeli ingenuity, Jewish compassion, political shrewdness and a dose of sabra "chutzpah" has made the agency's relief work in the field swift and effective since its inception in early April.

It was during the Passover seder on March 31 that Salai Meridor, the chairman of the Jewish Agency, first pondered a response to the crisis.

Two days later, Jewish Agency officials were setting up a hotline for Israeli donations and planning to dispatch a relief team.

On Sunday, April 4, Carl Unger, head of the Eastern European division of the Jewish Agency's aliyah department, got a telephone call from Shimshon Shoshani, the director general of the Jewish Agency and the coordinator of the relief logistics. "I want to send you to Albania," Shoshani said.

Unger could not resist the challenge.

The former Israeli colonel thrived out in the field. He carried out Jewish Agency rescue missions in Chechnya, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, and coordinated the mass emigration of Russian Jews to Israel via Budapest between 1989 and 1991.

The next day, Unger, and his Jewish Agency/Latet team were en route to Tirana. "We were determined to do everything ourselves," Unger said. "We are not the only people distributing, but what is unique is that every day we phoned Israel to tell them what the refugees need."

With some \$30,000 in cash strapped to their bodies, the team began laying the groundwork for distribution.

While the first Israeli planes landed, senior Jewish Agency officials met top Albanian officials, including President Rexhep Mejdani.

The first task was to secure free access to Tirana's airport. Approval from officials was secured with the help of small, but effective, Israeli "gifts" of chocolates, cigarettes and perfume to junior airport employees.

"We are not shy," says Unger, explaining why the mission was successful. "If I

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Iranian, Syrian leaders to meet

The presidents of Iran and Syria will later this week renew their support of Hezbollah's resistance against the Israeli presence in Lebanon, Iran's ambassador to Syria said Sunday.

During a visit to Damascus on Thursday, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami will discuss the situation in Lebanon with Syrian President Hafez Assad, the ambassador said, adding that Khatami will also meet with Palestinian groups opposed to the Oslo accords.

### Soldiers wound Palestinians

Israeli soldiers wounded two Palestinians last Friday at an army checkpoint near the West Bank town of Nablus.

The two, who were driving a stolen car, tried to break through a roadblock, the army said.

### Court rules against deportations

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled last week that the Interior Ministry could not deport the non-Jewish foreign spouses of Israelis it suspects of being in Israel illegally.

Ruling on a petition filed by 28 mixed couples, the court said the policy was incompatible with the principles of a democratic state.

But the court added that the ministry is entitled to verify whether the marriages are fictional.

The justices noted that a deportation could be implemented only after the check was completed and a hearing held.

### Liaison to Russian Jews named

Israel's ambassador to Moscow is named head of Nativ, which serves as a liaison between Israel and the Russian Jewish community.

Zvi Magen succeeds Ya'acov Kedmi, who resigned after attacking Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy toward Russian Jewry.

have to call the Albanian deputy prime minister to get something done, I'll do it.

"And if we had to make an offer that they couldn't refuse, we knew how to do that, too."

Each morning for the next week, the Jewish Agency team boarded three or four trucks at 6 a.m.

Halfway through the dangerous countryside — where armed gangs roam — a police escort joined them.

Refugee leaders rewarded the Israelis by crowning them "honorary presidents" of the southern camps.

By the time they returned to their Tirana hotel rooms, it was 4 a.m. the next day. After sleeping for two hours, they boarded the trucks again.

"There is a rush of adrenaline that keeps us going," says Ohayon, 30, who grew up in the town of Sderot and started working for Latet last year while completing her master's degree in political science at Hebrew University. "Humanitarian work takes you to places you would never believe."

In a separate effort, Dr. Richard Hodes, a veteran of 10 years in Ethiopia, was summoned from Africa by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in a Passover telephone call.

Hodes, 45, an Orthodox Jew originally from Long Island, packed his bags, flew to Frankfurt, took a train to Rome, headed for the Italian coast and boarded a boat to Albania.

Since landing, Hodes has been scouring the country to pinpoint refugee needs and provide quick responses.

After finding thousands of refugees sleeping on dirty floors or plastic sheets, Hodes approached Albania's only bedding company and ordered several thousand mattresses.

Hodes is now coordinating repairs of leaky roofs in several structures that are becoming makeshift refugee shelters.

The expert in emergency medicine and infectious diseases is also negotiating a "takeover" of several medical clinics to upgrade services for some additional refugees in Albania.

JDC has been in Albania for five years, providing Jewish education for the tiny, aging community of 50 Jews — one a member of the Albanian Parliament.

"He enables us to get a foot in the door and to speed things up," Hodes says.

The efforts of these Jewish field workers are becoming increasingly important as the number of refugees swells.

There are more than 400,000 Kosovar refugees in Albania today, and the country of 3 million expects at least 200,000 more in the coming weeks.

The influx of refugees is further complicating the logistical challenge facing the UNHCR.

In addition, the Albanian government is holding back some supplies in storehouses.

Some relief workers fear that supplies are being siphoned off to the local black market.

As the war drags on, say field workers, the international media will probably lose interest in yet another prolonged Balkan tragedy.

"We are already seeing this happen, and we are worried," warns Ohayon of Latet, itself a cash-strapped organization. "We know that when the coverage stops, so will the money and the aid." □

## Argentina orders probe into audiotape

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentina ordered a probe last week into an audiotape that has raised suspicions local police were involved in the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy here.

On the tape, police officers are heard ordering a patrol car away from the embassy minutes before the explosion occurred.

Similar suspicions of police involvement have surfaced in connection with the July 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in the Argentine capital.

The two bombings, which killed 115 people and left some 500 wounded, remain unsolved. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Religious legislation reintroduced

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives last week reintroduced legislation aimed at restoring the broadest possible protections for free religious practice.

The Religious Liberty Protection Act was crafted with the help of religious groups to fill the void created when the Supreme Court struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1997.

But the new version of the legislation failed to advance in the last session of Congress after former House Speaker Newt Gingrich insisted on a watered-down version.

The current House leadership, however, has cleared the way for the bill to move forward, raising the prospects for the passage of a new law that would make it harder for government to interfere with religious practice.

### Book accuses Dutch banks

Dutch banks made billions of dollars trading property stolen by Nazis from the nation's Jews during World War II, according to a book slated to be published in the Netherlands on Monday.

In his Dutch-language book, "Robbery, the Theft of Jewish Belongings During World War II," Gerard Alders asserts that the banks' actions were covered up by government officials after the war for fear of a backlash.

### Former Swiss leader honored

Swiss Jewish leaders were among those who recently honored the nation's outgoing foreign minister at a ceremony hosted by the Foundation Against Racism and Anti-Semitism.

Flavio Cotti received \$34,000 from the foundation in recognition of his efforts, while serving as president last year, to get the Alpine nation to confront its wartime past.

Cotti stepped down from the Cabinet in late April fulfilling a pledge he made in January to resign in order to give his conservative Christian Democratic People's Party new leadership in advance of the nation's October elections.

### Hotel guide book excluded Israel

The American Jewish Congress last week lashed out at the publisher of *The Leading Hotels of the World* for omitting Israel from an edition intended for the Arab world.

In a letter to the guide's New York publisher, AJCongress Executive Director Phil Baum wrote, "Your actions are an anachronism, a throwback to the time when some businesses thought it necessary to become complicit in the Arab position that Israel must be isolated."

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Jewish Agency helps Kosovars other aid organizations missed

By Avi Machlis

TIRANA, Albania (JTA) — The Jewish Agency for Israel is sustaining 30,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees, living in about a dozen isolated camps in southern Albania, who have not been reached by other international aid organizations.

"We went to the camps to distribute directly where no other relief agencies have gone," said Ziva Ohayon, managing director of Latet, an independent Israeli humanitarian group working for the Jewish Agency in Albania. "This aid can sustain these refugees for about three months."

Ohayon made her comments Wednesday to United Jewish Communities leaders on a mission to Tirana, the Albanian capital, to assess relief work being done by the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The delegation of 27 participants from 16 communities continued from Tirana to Budapest to visit Serbian Jews who fled NATO bombings. More than 30 Serbian Jews came back with the mission to Israel early Thursday morning, where they will either "wait out" the war or decide to stay in Israel.

Mission participants said that seeing the suffering of both sides in the conflict reinforced their determination to continue providing humanitarian aid.

"It was very important for UJC, as a new entity, to have a firsthand, nonfiltered, close-up and personal look at the rescue and relief work being done in the field by our overseas partners," said Carole Solomon, UJC's national campaign chairwoman. "We have to look beyond our borders. History has forced us to do so."

Mission delegates arrived on one of two planes, carrying a total of 20 tons of relief, including food, toiletries and diapers. The Jewish Agency has airlifted 120 tons of supplies to Kosovar Albanians throughout the region on nine flights since early April.

Israelis have donated more than \$1.25 million in cash and \$500,000 worth of supplies to support the campaign. JDC's Kosovo relief efforts have raised more than \$2.25 million in the United States. JDC has been distributing mattresses, bedding and thousands of activity kits for children, including crayons, coloring books and dolls.

Albanian Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta greeted the delegation at the once-quiet Tirana airport, now dominated by NATO helicopters and military tent encampments along the runways. Meta thanked the Jewish people who "have suffered in the past and understand quite well the humanitarian side of this crisis.

"We expected this solidarity because the Albanians have shown and demonstrated their solidarity with the Jewish people during the Second World War," he said, urging American Jews to continue their support. More than 420,000 refugees have arrived in Albania since the crisis began. At least 200,000 more are expected, and the crisis is placing a severe burden on Albania, Europe's poorest country.

Chaim Chesler, chairman of the Jewish Agency's immigration and absorption committee, pointed out that Albania saved virtually all its Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Today, there are 50 Jews in Tirana.

The mission continued to the Piscina refugee camp, located at what was once a swimming pool in Tirana, where a truck full of Jewish Agency relief items were unloaded. They met refugee families and children, many wearing tattered shoes without laces. Children proudly showed off their JDC activity boxes. In some tents, JDC boxes lay alongside cartons of aid from the Red Crescent, the Muslim relief organization.

Dr. Richard Hodes, JDC's field worker who is scouring Albania to identify refugee needs, called the Piscina camp — with its neat rows of tents and organized distribution of aid — the "Hilton of the refugee camps." In camps throughout the country, refugees were living in far worse conditions.

Marc Gold, of the Montreal Federation CJA, said he felt somewhat uncomfortable "intruding" on the Kosovars' personal crises. But the experience hammered home the importance of Jewish involvement in Albanian relief and the rescue of Serbian Jews. "In both cases, we are fulfilling our role as a light unto nations," he said. "This is what we Jews do, and that felt very good and natural." □

## Jewish coalition changes name, forms PAC to support Republicans

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish Republicans know that in politics, money often speaks louder than words.

That's why the National Jewish Coalition announced last week a restructuring that includes the establishment of a political action committee to funnel political contributions directly to Republican congressional and presidential candidates.

As part of the reorganization, the pro-Republican group changed its name to the Republican Jewish Coalition and plans to provide volunteers to work for Republican candidates.

The changes provide an "opportunity for the Jewish community to speak to candidates on a political and financial level," said Matt Brooks, the coalition's executive director.

Brooks will also head the PAC, which hopes to donate more than \$100,000 in the 2000 elections.

The Republicans freely admit that they took a page out of the Jewish Democrats' playbook.

"There's no pride of authorship here," Brooks said.

"There's an imbalance we wanted to set straight to compete on a much more level playing field."

In 1995, the National Jewish Democratic Council created its own political action committee, which gave away more than \$1 million to Democratic candidates in the 1998 election cycle, according to Stephen Silberfarb, NJDC deputy executive director.

The Republicans will operate as a traditional PAC, with a \$5,000 limit to a candidate in a general election.

The Democratic PAC bundles individual checks together and gives them to candidates in blocks. Even though individuals have a lower \$1,000 maximum, the bundling results in a higher total dollar figure. Like the NJDC, the Republicans plan on waiting until after primary election contests to give money.

Brooks knows that the group has its work cut out for it when it comes to winning over Jewish voters who traditionally give more than 70 percent support to Democratic candidates.

The groups plans to run a series of ads on The New York Times' op-ed page beginning next week and has lined up all the Republican presidential contenders to speak to a conference in December. □

## Pro-Jewish Moscow mayor target of anti-Semitic leaflets around city

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Anti-Semitic leaflets aimed against the mayor of Moscow are being distributed in two Russian cities.

The leaflets reproduce a photo of Yuri Luzhkov wearing a yarmulka at a Jewish event last year. The text that goes along with the picture falsely claims that Luzhkov is Jewish.

Luzhkov is widely seen as a frontrunner in Russia's presidential elections, which are slated for June 2000.

The leaflets have been distributed in at least two locations, according to media reports.

Earlier this year, some Moscow residents found them stuffed in their mailboxes. This month, residents of Kirov, a city located

500 miles east of Moscow, found similar leaflets in their mail.

The leaflets use a photo of Luzhkov and Russian Jewish Congress President Vladimir Goussinsky — both sporting skull-caps — taken last September at the opening of the Holocaust Memorial Synagogue inside Moscow's World War II memorial park. The picture taken at the ceremony, also attended by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, was published in a Moscow daily.

Luzhkov, who is known to be a close friend of Goussinsky, has won a reputation among Russian Jews for his support of the Jewish community. The leaflets cite several quotes from Luzhkov speaking favorably about Jews. The leaflets also assert that Moscow mayor's "original" last name is Katz, adding in large print, "And this man wants to become president of Russia!"

The leaflet generated front-page reports in the Moscow press. Izvestia, a leading daily, described the use of ethnicity as an "alarming feature of the national election campaign."

There are no Jews among the likely contenders for the Kremlin seat.

"In the absence of real Jews in the race, you can fight against fake Jewish candidates," says Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt. "The trend has become obvious in the [Russian] political landscape." □

## Judges rule Orthodox-born child must stay with Catholic parents

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — An Orthodox, Yiddish-speaking couple in Britain has lost a six-year legal battle to win back their 8-year-old daughter from her Roman Catholic foster parents.

The court of appeal rejected claims by the biological parents of the child, who suffers from Down syndrome, that her Jewish birthright is being stolen by her foster family.

The three judges ruled that the child should remain with her foster parents because of her exceptional attachment to them and her limited capacity to understand the rituals and tenets of the Orthodox faith.

They said her biological parents' fear that she was losing her religious heritage was insufficient to tear her away from a couple whose devotion had helped her survive severe breathing problems, which require the permanent use of a tracheotomy tube.

The child, one in a large family, has lived with her foster parents since the age of 17 months, when her biological mother's health problems prevented her from caring for her daughter.

At the time, no Jewish foster parents could be found to care for the child, and the arrangement with the Catholic couple was intended to be temporary.

The judgment, described by one of the judges as the most poignant he has ever made, entitles the biological parents to have contact with their daughter four times a year.

He described the biological parents as "warm, decent, caring people," but he noted that the foster parents "should be commended for their unstinting devotion."

Another member of the three-panel court said "no one would wish to deprive a Jewish child of her Jewish heritage." But she ruled that the child's religious heritage could neither be treated as an "overwhelming factor" nor displace important factors relating to the child's welfare. □