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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Swiss seeking Papon's arrest

Swiss officials are seeking the arrest of a convicted Nazi collaborator who fled France days before his appeal. Maurice Papon fled over the Alps last week to the southwestern Swiss resort of Martigny, the officials added. [Page 4]

Insurer gives access to its files

Germany's largest insurance firm agreed to allow access to 150,000 key files containing "thousands" of unpaid life insurance policies of Holocaust victims, according to Elan Steinberg, the executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

Steinberg said Thursday the files include more than 1,000 policies that were paid to the Nazis instead of Holocaust victims.

The decision by Allianz, which was the last of five major European insurers to allow access to its files, was announced at a meeting in Washington of an international commission investigating Holocaust-era policies. The move came a week before Jewish groups were to consider calling for a boycott of the company.

Voucher amendment defeated

The U.S. House of Representatives defeated an amendment that would have provided elementary students in low-performing schools up to \$3,500 in tuition vouchers for private and parochial schools.

Students in any grade who were the victims of violence at school could also have applied for the vouchers.

While many Jewish organizations actively opposed the measure, the Orthodox Union urged lawmakers to pass the amendment, proposed by Rep. Dick Armey (R-Tex.).

Clinton shuttle denied

President Clinton does not plan to shuttle between Damascus and Jerusalem next month in a bid to revive Israeli-Syrian negotiations, according to spokesman Joe Lockhart. He added that an Israel Radio report of the shuttle is "not accurate."

Meanwhile, Clinton officials said Martin Indyk will again become ambassador to Israel. Currently assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, Indyk will swap posts with Ambassador Edward Walker, the officials added. Indyk was the U.S. envoy to Israel between 1995 and 1997.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israelis, Jewish activists shift to high gear to lobby for Wye aid

By Michael Shapiro

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With nearly \$2 billion in aid to fund the Wye agreement still trapped in the budget battle between congressional Republicans and President Clinton, pro-Israel activists and Israeli officials are engaged in one of their most intense lobbying efforts in years.

A few hundred activists are expected to descend on Capitol Hill on Tuesday to urge lawmakers to provide the aid requested by the president before Congress adjourns this fall.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee said it expects close to 200 of its members to be in Washington for a previously scheduled meeting whose focus now will be on lobbying for the Wye aid.

Other national Jewish leaders are also expected to participate.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the umbrella group of local community relations councils, has put out a "clarion call" to its agencies to intensify their lobbying efforts for Wye aid and foreign aid in general.

"Our job is to condition the environment in Washington" so that the Wye money will be included "when the president and the Congress are sitting around the table" looking for a legislative vehicle to fund the special aid package, said Martin Raffel, JCPA's associate executive vice chairman.

After the signing of the Wye accord a year ago this Saturday, Clinton asked Congress to provide Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians with \$1.9 billion in special funds to help implement the deal which, among other things, called on Israel to undertake a further withdrawal from the West Bank in three phases in exchange for an aggressive Palestinian effort to root out terrorism.

So far, only \$100 million for Jordan was approved after the death of King Hussein in February.

Clinton had asked for \$1.2 billion for Israel, \$400 million for the Palestinians and \$300 million for Jordan.

At the time of the Wye signing, Republican congressional leaders raised concerns about how they would pay for Clinton's pledge and were upset that they were not consulted before the offer was made.

Those concerns became moot after implementation of the agreement was halted by then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But now, with the agreement moving forward after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat reached a new understanding in Egypt in September, funding for Wye has become an issue once again.

It has also become one of the focal points in the battle over spending priorities between the Republican-controlled Congress and the Democratic-controlled White House.

This week, Clinton vetoed a \$12.6 billion foreign aid bill that narrowly passed both houses of Congress because it fell \$2 billion short of his request and does not include funding for Wye.

The aid bill included nearly \$3 billion in economic and military aid for the Jewish state.

The foreign aid bill "sent the worst possible signal to our friends in the Middle East, and the strongest possible encouragement to those in the region who would do us

MIDEAST FOCUS

Police question Netanyahu

Israeli police questioned former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about valuables they say he kept illegally after leaving office.

Thursday's interrogation came one day after police seized dozens of valuables during a search of the Netanyahu home.

Palestinians killed in factory fire

At least 14 Palestinians were killed and 30 injured in a fire at a chemicals factory in the Palestinian-controlled part of Hebron. Most of the dead were female workers who were trapped inside when the fire broke out Thursday. Israeli and Palestinian rescue crews worked together to put the blaze out.

Hamas officials end hunger strike

Two Hamas leaders ended their five-day hunger strike in a Jordanian jail. Khaled Mashaal and Ibrahim Ghosheh, arrested in Jordan last month, reportedly resumed eating after King Abdullah said he would attempt to improve relations with Hamas.

Israel treated Indonesian leader

Indonesia's newly elected president reportedly favors dialogue with Israel. Abdurrahman Wahid visited Israel a number of times to receive medical treatment, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The newspaper also said he took part in a gathering organized two years ago by the Peres Center for Peace and visited the grave of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Jericho may offer civil marriages

A former Arab Israeli legislator hopes to help make the desert town of Jericho bloom — with wedding bouquets. Abdel Wahab Darawshe said his company hopes to help Israeli couples interested in a civil ceremony get married in the self-rule town before Palestinian justice officials.

harm," National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said Wednesday at an event sponsored by the Israel Policy Forum.

"As we have made clear, the president will not sign a foreign operations bill that does not contain" the Wye aid.

As part of the Israeli lobbying effort, two top government officials made a pilgrimage to Capitol Hill this week, urging key lawmakers to appropriate the aid.

Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh concluded his meetings, expressing optimism that the aid would be approved before Thanksgiving.

Interior Minister Natan Sharansky, who accompanied Netanyahu to the nine days and nights of talks last October at Wye, a secluded retreat on Maryland's Eastern Shore where the agreement was reached, told lawmakers that the aid promised by Clinton was a key factor in the Israelis decision to agree to the deal.

The Israelis knew that the agreement, which called for a further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank in exchange for a Palestinian crackdown on terrorism, would incur substantial costs to redeploy troops and dismantle bases.

Israeli officials, in calling for the Wye aid to be funded, have said the costs are already being incurred.

Science Minister Matan Vilnai and Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami also are expected in Washington next week to continue the Israeli lobbying push.

Dennis Ross, the U.S. special Middle East coordinator, told a private meeting earlier this month that Congress' failure to appropriate the aid would be "devastating" to the peace process, according to sources who attended the off-the-record briefing held by the Israel Policy Forum.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has made similar comments, suggesting that the whole peace process could be held up without the Wye aid.

But Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) expressed concerns about the implementation of the agreement.

"We want the Wye accords to work," Lott said at an Oct. 13 Orthodox Union event here, but he added that Congress needs "to be careful about providing the money before the actions are taken."

Lott said he has "always been worried about the Palestinians living up to their commitments."

One proposal that has been floating around Capitol Hill would have the aid approved in the spring as part of an "emergency" spending bill.

But Howard Kohr, executive director of AIPAC, said there is support for Wye aid on Capitol Hill now, although the exact legislative vehicle for aid is still not clear.

"The rhetoric of 'We support Wye' has to be met with the actions," the AIPAC official said.

Observers said the aid could be included in a revamped foreign aid bill or some kind of catch-all spending bill that would fund programs not already provided funds through the regular appropriations process.

Although pro-Israel activists have said both Democrats and Republicans in Congress support the Wye aid but are struggling to find the money to fund it, top Republicans have made clear in the last week that they are not thrilled with shipping more aid overseas and have pitted foreign aid against domestic spending.

"The president wants more money for foreign aid, but at what cost?" Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) asked this week.

"The president wants to either raise taxes or raid the Social Security trust fund, and then turn around and give this money to foreign nations.

"This is completely unnecessary and Republicans will play no part in this scheme," he said.

Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), the chairman of the House appropriations foreign operations subcommittee, raised eyebrows when he said during debate over the foreign aid bill that "every time somebody walks in the White House with a turban on his head," the president decides to give him some money.

For their part, Clinton administration officials and Democrats have criticized Republicans for being "isolationists."

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) said in an interview that the way in which Republicans are playing foreign aid against Social Security and other domestic programs is "absolute poison." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Israel a step closer to ending its isolation at United Nations

By Julia Goldman

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — France has opened the way for Israel's full participation at the United Nations by withdrawing its objection to Israel joining the European regional bloc at the world body.

Now only a handful of European states remain opposed to Israel's membership in the group, a prerequisite for joining important U.N. committees and the Security Council.

Israel's outgoing U.N. ambassador, Dore Gold, said the issue could be resolved in a matter of weeks, ending Israel's isolation as the only country to be denied membership in such a group.

"We are on the verge of a major breakthrough in the normalization of Israel" at the U.N., the ambassador said at a luncheon in his honor in New York sponsored by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

France had previously been a chief opponent of the move, a role now held by only Ireland and countries in the southern tier of Europe.

Observers say competition is a key reason for the opposition to Israel's membership in the Western Europe and Others Group. Increased membership in a regional group reduces the chances for each individual member-state to be appointed to important posts.

Admission in a regional group requires consensus on the part of its standing membership: Not all members must approve the admission, but none can object.

Of the five regional groups at the United Nations, Israel geographically belongs to the Asian bloc, but members of that group — Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others — have consistently blocked Israel's entry.

Gold, who leaves his post Oct. 28 after more than two years, said that at this time last year there was no feeling that a consensus could be reached among the European group's members, which include the United States, Australia, Canada and Norway.

He credited the change to the work of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, who made Israel's inclusion in a regional bloc a diplomatic priority.

Last month, Albright related to Jewish leaders in New York that in meeting with world leaders at the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, she took along a copy of the American Jewish Committee's full-page advertisement from The New York Times.

The ad starkly shows that Israel alone is ineligible to sit on the U.N. Security Council, while nations cited by the U.S. State Department for terrorism — including Iraq, North Korea and Syria — as members of regional groups, are eligible.

In another turnaround at the United Nations, the Security Council unanimously passed a resolution unequivocally condemning what has become a global scourge.

The resolution, initiated by the Russian Federation, condemns unequivocally "all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation."

Although it does not mention any nation by name, Gold said the resolution represents a "180-degree shift" in international consensus on terrorism and "creates the groundwork" for international action against "states that support terrorism, many of which are adversaries of Israel."

The resolution draws upon a 1994 declaration against terrorism by the General Assembly, but represents the first strong statement by the Security Council.

In passing the resolution Oct. 19, the 15-member body called on all United Nations member-states to fully implement and adhere to international anti-terrorist conventions, to cooperate on a bilateral and multilateral basis in fighting terrorism and "to deny safe havens for those who planned, financed or committed terrorist acts by ensuring their apprehension and prosecution or extradition."

Harris Schoenberg, the director of U.N. affairs for B'nai B'rith International, attributed the Security Council's passage of the resolution to the end of the Cold War.

He said countries that had been less aggressive against terrorism — such as Russia, which currently holds the Security Council presidency and initiated the measure there — have been hit by recent terrorist attacks. □

Free care proposed for survivors

Florida's insurance commissioner unveiled a plan to provide free home health care to some 10,000 Holocaust survivors living in the state. Bill Nelson is slated to present the plan to a meeting this week in Washington of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

Nelson added that he would urge the panel to approve up to \$10 million for the proposal, using funds already deposited into an account by European insurers suspected of not honoring survivors' policies.

FBI warns of millennial violence

The FBI is warning local police about potential violence by extremists who attach special importance to the year 2000. Among those who may initiate violence are white supremacists "who seek to initiate a race war," the FBI said Wednesday.

Pius said Holocaust exaggerated

Pope Pius XII told the United States in 1942 he believed reports of German atrocities against Jews were exaggerated, according to a newly discovered document in the U.S. National Archives.

The document also indicated that the pope, widely criticized for not speaking out against the Holocaust, felt he could not denounce the Nazis without also criticizing the Soviet Union.

Hungarian Jews seek property

Hungarian Jewish leaders met U.S. officials in Budapest to request the return of property looted from Hungarian Jews by American forces at the end of World War II.

"We at least must save the valuable assets of the 600,000 martyrs that were killed," the leader of Hungary's Jewish community, Peter Tordai, said Wednesday. "It is our moral obligation." The request came after a U.S. presidential commission said last week that in May 1945, American soldiers took the property, originally looted from Hungarian Jews by the Nazis.

Israel to dedicate Turkish school

Israel plans to dedicate a school in Turkey for children left homeless by the August earthquake that killed more than 17,000 people there. The school, funded by the American Jewish Committee, is part of a part of an Israeli-built village that also includes a medical facility, 312 housing units, a business center and two playgrounds.

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is expected to join Israeli Premier Ehud Barak and AJCommittee Executive Director David Harris at Sunday's dedication ceremony. The AJCommittee has raised more than \$500,000 for Turkish earthquake relief, which will be used for the school and other projects.

Switzerland tries to track down Nazi collaborator who fled France

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — Swiss officials are seeking the arrest of a convicted Nazi collaborator who fled France days before his appeal.

Maurice Papon, sentenced in France last year to 10 years in jail for helping deport Jews to Nazi concentration camps, fled over the Alps last week to the southwestern Swiss resort of Martigny, the officials added.

After France issued an arrest warrant Thursday, the Swiss officials said they would attempt to track down Papon. The warrant was issued hours after France's highest court threw out Papon's appeal because he did not appear for his hearing.

"Given that the defendant did not give himself up to justice, his right to appeal is rescinded," Supreme Court Judge Hector Melville said Thursday.

Papon was found guilty in April 1998 of helping deport some 1,500 Jews from the southwestern Bordeaux area to Nazi death camps when he was the secretary-general of the regional prefect's office and supervisor of its Office for Jewish Questions.

The initial trial, which began in October 1997 and was delayed several times by Papon's health problems before ending in April 1998, was one of the longest in French history. It included hundreds of witnesses.

Lawyers had expressed disbelief that Papon, who went on after the war to become Paris's longest-serving police chief as well as budget minister, would try to evade the law. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Ukraine's Jews see president as safe bet as elections near

By Lev Goredetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — As Ukraine approaches its presidential elections at the end of this month, the country's Jews appear to be supporting the status quo.

The roughly half-million Jews are joining the majority of Ukrainians in supporting the re-election of the country's current president, Leonid Kuchma, who is ahead of the dozen other contenders in the polls leading up to the Oct. 31 elections.

Kuchma's support among Ukrainian Jews derives from a view that Kuchma, although uncharismatic and unable so far to jump-start the Ukrainian economy, represents the safest bet. He personifies the relative political and social stability that has reigned here in recent years and is not tainted with the anti-Semitism that marks some other, mostly populist, leaders.

"Today there are no bright national leaders in Ukraine. So, despite the bad economic and social situation, poverty and mass unemployment, Leonid Kuchma has no real rivals," said Rudolph Mirsky, the leader of the Jewish community in the city of Lvov.

As it generally does, the Jewish community is taking a low-key approach to the elections.

"We are not advising our community members to vote for any concrete candidate. We are just calling on them to participate in the elections," said Yosef Zissels, the vice president of the Jewish

Confederation of Ukraine, an umbrella organization.

Running second in the polls is Natalya Vitrenko, who heads the Progressive Socialist Party.

The presidential race turned violent in the beginning of October, when two grenades were hurled at her at a rally, leaving nearly 20 people injured, some of them in serious condition. Vitrenko escaped with light injuries.

She says that among the false allegations that her enemies are currently spreading about her is that she is of Jewish origin.

While such state-sponsored anti-Semitism is now absent, according to Jewish sources, there are grass-roots anti-Semitic incidents, particularly in central and western Ukraine.

A newspaper in Lvov recently called Kuchma "the president of all the Jews," according to Mirsky, a retired professor who heads the local B'nai B'rith chapter there.

On Yom Kippur, police had to intervene after a group of neo-Nazis in Lvov, considered to be the center of Ukrainian anti-Semitism, tried to stage a clash with a group of visiting Bratslav Chasidim. But police halted the incident — a fact that is not lost on Ukraine's Jews.

As Anatoly Gendin, a Jewish leader in the Crimea, which is rife with ethnic controversy and unrest, put it, "True, the economy is in a very bad condition, but the social and political situation has been under control. For example, when a Jewish cemetery in Simferopol was desecrated this May, necessary police measures were taken and the perpetrators were detained. I don't see any alternative to Kuchma." □

Neo-Nazi fugitive from Germany surfaces in Britain four years later

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A neo-Nazi activist who fled Germany in 1995 after being sentenced to 14 months in prison for inciting racial hatred has been found hiding in Britain.

Germar Rudolf faces two additional Holocaust denial charges in Germany, and the chairman of the London-based Holocaust Educational Trust, Lord Janner, urged the German authorities to seek his extradition immediately.

"The sooner he is out of this country the better," Janner said.

A hero in the international neo-Nazi movement, Rudolf, 34, has been living in a succession of sleepy towns in southern England under his former wife's maiden name, Scheerer.

According to reports, he first fled from his home in Germany to Spain, where he stayed with his patron, former Nazi Gen. Otto Ernst Remer, who put down the 1944 attempted putsch against Hitler.

However, Rudolf decided to move on when he suspected that the German authorities had discovered his Spanish hideout and he arrived in Britain in 1996.

Since then, he told a London newspaper that tracked him down over the weekend, he has been working "as a Holocaust revisionist 24 hours a day."

He said he considered himself to be a "political prisoner" in Germany and had fled to Britain "because I wanted to be free."

Rudolf's appearance has fueled new calls for the introduction of legislation in Britain to outlaw Holocaust denial, a step that several British governments have declined to take. □