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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Goussinsky arrest condemned

Russian security services had Russian Jewish leader Vladimir Goussinsky arrested because they are angered by their failure to "make a fully controlled puppet out of the Jewish community in Russia," said the leaders of several leading Russian Jewish groups.

The leaders also said that if Goussinsky is not released, they will call for large public demonstrations.

Meanwhile, several U.S. lawmakers planned to introduce a resolution Thursday calling for an end to the Russian government's intimidation of the media.

European rabbis back Shayeveich

A group of European rabbis weighed in on a controversy over Russia's chief rabbi by saying it would continue to recognize Adolph Shayeveich in that role.

The statement by the Conference of European Rabbis came after 26 Lubavitch rabbis elected Rabbi Berel Lazar to take over the position.

Clinton: No three-way summit yet

The time is not ripe for a three-way summit with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to hammer out a final peace deal, President Clinton said.

His comment came just hours before Arafat was due to arrive in Washington for a meeting Thursday with Clinton.

In another development Wednesday, U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross joined Israeli and Palestinian officials during a second day of talks in the Washington area.

The State Department said U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright may meet with the two sides in the coming days.

Nazi officer arrested in Germany

A former SS officer was arrested in Germany on suspicion of murdering a Jewish slave laborer in September 1943.

Anton Malloth, 88, was arrested on May 25, but prosecutors did not release details until Wednesday after inquires by JTA. Malloth is accused of killing the laborer in the Terezin Ghetto after he found food hidden in the man's shirt.

More than 30,000 Jews died at the Czech transit camp, also known by its German name of Theresienstadt.

Reform rabbi's call for new giving patterns is 'shocking'

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Reform movement's rabbinic arm is urging Reform Jews to "reconsider our giving patterns" by not increasing gifts to federations and directing those funds instead to organizations in the United States and Israel that actively support religious pluralism.

The call comes as the Jewish federations' central fund-raising system is seeking to increase funding for overseas needs.

Stephen Solender, the chief executive officer of the United Jewish Communities, the national umbrella of federations, called Menitoff's statement "shocking."

He said that such a strategy would be a "wrong move, and the wrong people will get hurt — people who need to be rescued around the world."

In a strongly worded column circulated this week in the Central Conference of American Rabbis' newsletter and distributed to journalists, the CCAR's top professional, Rabbi Paul Menitoff, wrote that the UJC has "all but excluded the religious movements" from its governance structure and has "shown little interest in issues of pluralism."

The column urges Reform rabbis to ensure that they and their colleagues from other streams of Judaism work with local federations to develop an "equal partnership."

"Synagogue Jews constitute the majority of donors to federations," he said, adding that "we need to make certain that they put the word 'pluralism' in the UJC vocabulary."

Reform and Conservative Jews have for years been engaged in a campaign for legal recognition and financial support of their movements in Israel.

Menitoff's column calls on Reform Jews to continue supporting federation campaigns, but says that "instead of automatically increasing annual federation gifts, we and our people should channel those dollar increases, and additional funds" to Reform institutions in the United States and Israel and to philanthropies "such as the New Israel Fund that not only take us and pluralism seriously, but also disseminate funds to causes in Israel that most of us support."

This is not the first time Reform rabbis have urged members of their movement to consider giving donations directly to non-Orthodox causes in Israel, in addition to their federation gifts.

In the fall of 1997, when the religious pluralism controversy heated up in Israel, there were indications that Reform and Conservative rabbis across the country would use their High Holiday sermons to urge that contributions be directed to their movements.

To avert that threat, the federations launched a special "unity campaign" to raise \$10 million for Reform, Conservative and Orthodox institutions in Israel.

Nearly three years later, the campaign has raised \$25 million of the \$30 million it promised, Solender said this week. And he added: "We're not going to stop" at \$30 million.

But some Reform and Conservative leaders say they feel the results of that campaign have been exaggerated. "It had some modest, positive results, but there was a difference of opinion about how successful it was," said Rabbi Charles Kroloff, the CCAR's president.

Menitoff's column appeared just days before a major UJC meeting in Chicago. However, Menitoff, the CCAR's executive vice president, said in an interview that

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak downplays Shas threat

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he would press on with the peace process despite a threat by a leading coalition party to quit his government.

"I'm not dealing with petty politics," Barak said Wednesday.

"I'm dealing with the national agenda. We have important work to do."

His comments came as officials from the fervently Orthodox Shas Party said it is unlikely they will back off their plans to resign from the government on Sunday.

Israel: Palestinians can remain

Israel will allow thousands of Palestinians to remain in the self-rule areas even though they settled there without permission from Israel.

Wednesday's decision by the Security Cabinet will apply to 5,000 Palestinians who entered the Palestinian areas on tourist visas, according to a spokesman for the Israeli army's coordinator of activities in the territories.

IDF prepares for more violence

The Israeli Defense Force is preparing for another outbreak of Palestinian violence in the territories before a final peace deal is reached.

A senior Israeli army officer said the Palestinians are more interested in achieving statehood through confrontation than negotiations.

Jerusalem census counts differ

The Palestinian Authority's first Jerusalem census points to a higher Palestinian population in the eastern portion of the city than Israel has previously reported.

The study says the Palestinian population in areas annexed by Israel after 1967 was 210,209 in 1997, compared with 180,000 reported by the Jewish state.



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he did not deliberately time it that way and that the column is a response to long-standing concerns about the UJC, rather than taking issue with any of the items on the Chicago meeting's agenda.

At Thursday's meeting, the UJC is expected to approve a new budget and the first report of its Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee, known as ONAD.

The bulk of the funds for overseas needs — \$237.7 million was allocated last year — went to helping needy Jews around the world, bringing new immigrants to Israel and helping absorb them in the Jewish state.

One of the recipients of those funds, the Jewish Agency for Israel, allocates approximately \$4 million to the Conservative and Reform movements' institutions in Israel. ONAD recommended to continue that level of funding, with the money to be taken from the total the federations contribute collectively.

Reform rabbis — and those from the other religious streams of Judaism as well — have been disappointed for months about their lack of representation in the newly formed UJC.

When the United Jewish Appeal and Council of Jewish Federations merged last year to become the UJC, many rabbis hoped it would be an opportunity to strengthen ties between the religious movements and the federations.

Under the system put in place, several lay leaders from the religious movements are now serving on UJC governance bodies: One seat on the 25-person Executive Committee is shared by the four movements, each movement holds one seat on the 550-member Delegate Assembly and the movements also hold a small number of seats on the 123-member Board of Trustees.

Representatives of religious movements comprise a full third of the UJC's Renaissance and Renewal Pillar. The pillar, which is still in its early formative stages, is one of four special committees charged with formulating the UJC's future priorities.

In his column, Menitoff dismissed the movements' role in the pillar, saying "for the movements to be included in a planning group for one 'pillar' out of four and to be kept away from any role to speak of at the governance tables is not an indication of our being taken seriously."

"At best, the religious movements have been thrown a crumb from the policy-making pie and the rabbinate has been ignored," Menitoff continued.

Leaders of the Reform, Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical arms have had several meetings to discuss the matter with the UJC's Solender.

But Menitoff and Rabbi Steven Dworken, executive director of the Orthodox movement's Rabbinical Council of America, say the meetings have accomplished little.

Dworken, whose movement disagrees with the non-Orthodox about pluralism issues, expressed concern about the UJC representation.

Given the role rabbis play in raising funds and encouraging congregants to contribute to Jewish causes, he said, "you would think that the rabbinate would be represented" in the UJC.

For his part, Solender said the governance structure is "not fixed in concrete" and that the Bylaw Committee is beginning to re-examine the issue.

"We're at the first stages," he added, "and to jump to conclusions especially after we've met with them is inaccurate and unfair."

Solender said that the UJC is concerned about religious pluralism in Israel. "We're monitoring the situation right now and carefully watching what's occurring, trying to quietly work behind the scenes to keep extreme positions from surfacing," he said.

Menitoff, meanwhile, emphasized that he was not calling on rabbis to encourage people to stop giving to federations and the UJC, "but rather to direct increases toward more sympathetic institutions."

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's synagogue arm, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said he is "sympathetic" with Menitoff's concern and remains disappointed that the UJC is not giving the movements a greater voice.

However, he appeared to view it more as a lost, rather than ongoing, battle.

"I'd hoped to create a true bridge between the religious movements and federation world that took us a step beyond, but that did not happen," he said, but added, "We are not pleading for a seat at their table. It's an opportunity missed." □

JEWISH WORLD

Ex-AIPAC head for governor?

A former chairman of the America Israel Public Affairs Committee and a major player in Boston's Jewish federation is exploring a run for the Massachusetts governor's office this year, according to Boston's Jewish Advocate newspaper.

Steve Grossman, 54, who has served as national chairman of the Democratic National Committee and has been a key fund-raiser for the Clinton administration, would be the first Jew in more than 40 years to run for the office.

Lawmakers back Russian Jew

Some 21 members of the U.S. Congress wrote a letter expressing concern about a recently released Russian Jew who was jailed for not serving in the war in Chechnya.

Dmitry Neverovsky was released in April after pressure from human rights groups.

But his case has still not been closed, raising the possibility that new charges may be brought against him.

In addition, the court has ordered Neverovsky, who was imprisoned for several months in November after he insisted upon his constitutional right to alternative national service, to undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

D.C. interfaith meeting planned

Rabbis, priests and representatives of the Vatican are meeting next week in Washington in what is believed to be the first such meeting in the United States.

The June 19-20 meeting, which will include members of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue, is an outgrowth of Pope John Paul II's recent visit to Israel.

Jewish protesters fined

Czech authorities fined three Jewish protesters for refusing to leave a construction site above a former Jewish cemetery in central Prague.

Czech police said six "English-speaking" Jews were involved in the protest in Vladislavova Street, which lies half a mile from Prague's famous Old Jewish Cemetery.

Comic strip artist gets grant

A comic strip artist who focuses on Jewish themes received a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant." Ben Katchor strips have run in the Forward newspaper for several years and his books include "The Jew of New York."

The foundation annually gives out hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece to academics, scientists, activists and artists.

Flap over official's remarks spills over to U.S. Congress

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The flap over recent comments on the Arab-Israeli conflict made by the U.S. national security adviser has spilled over to the halls of the U.S. Congress.

Competing letters are circulating on Capitol Hill regarding Sandy Berger's May 21 speech at Tel Aviv University, in which he is accused of describing violence between Israelis and Palestinians as both a "curse and blessing."

Some members of Congress are complaining that Berger's remarks were misguided and asking President Clinton to step in, while others are supporting the national security adviser.

The Jewish world is also continuing to weigh in on the issue, with some groups continuing to call for Berger's resignation, and others defending him and rebuking his critics.

U.S. Rep. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) is asking his colleagues to sign on to a letter to Clinton, asking the president to have the adviser explain his remarks.

The New Jersey congressman interprets Berger's comments as saying violence may be a blessing because it could speed up peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

At the same time, three members of the House International Relations Committee who support Berger are circulating a letter saying that Berger did not in any way refer to violence as a blessing in his speech on the Middle East peace process. The letter, started by Reps. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Howard Berman (D-Calif.), urges their colleagues not to sign on to what they called Saxton's "well-intentioned but misguided" letter.

Berger maintains that when he used the phrase "the curse and the blessing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" he was not referring to violence, but rather the proximity between Palestinians and Israelis.

B'nai B'rith wrote to Berger asking for clarification of his remarks and in a response to Richard Heideman, the international president of B'nai B'rith, Berger explained his thinking:

"This proximity can be a curse if it encourages violence. It can be a blessing if it enhances the incentive to seek peace," Berger wrote.

"My argument is that the proximity, or physical interconnectedness between Israelis and Palestinians, can deepen the incentive for seeking a solution."

B'nai B'rith officials say they accept Berger's clarification, calling it a reminder that the United States in no way countenances violence as a means to force additional concessions from Israel.

But Morton Klein, the national president of the Zionist Organization of America, who initiated the campaign against Berger, does not accept Berger's explanation because Berger also said in his speech that "proximity is bound to create further friction and further violence."

To say that proximity is a blessing makes no sense, according to Klein.

Klein has demanded that Berger retract his statement and has called for Berger's resignation.

The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs also called on Berger to be fired for his remarks.

In an open letter distributed by the ZOA, 21 American Jewish victims of Arab violence in Israel said Berger's remarks are "appalling." They called on the national security adviser to retract his statement and urged Clinton to replace Berger if he refuses to retract his words.

Members of the ZOA, who lobbied Congress on Wednesday on a number of issues during its annual mission to Capitol Hill, were asking members of Congress to sign Saxton's letter, said Klein.

At the same time, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Americans for Peace Now have voiced strong support for Berger and rebuked his critics. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

As the sun sets on Assad, is Barak's government next?*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The coincidence could hardly have been lost on Ehud Barak: As President Hafez Assad was laid to rest in Syria, Israel's Shas Party appeared to lay the premier's "peace coalition" to rest.

The fervently Orthodox party's Council of Sages, headed by spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, sounded what could be the first notes of the prime minister's coalition's death knell Tuesday. The council ordered Shas ministers to hand in their resignations at Sunday's Cabinet meeting.

If Shas, which holds 17 of the Knesset's 120 seats, keeps to its decision, it would undo Barak's 68-52 majority in Parliament.

At midweek, it appeared that the shaky political partnership between Shas and the secular Meretz Party, Barak's other major coalition partner, was going to collapse.

The prime minister never concealed his desire to keep Shas inside his peace camp and somehow iron out its differences with Meretz's leader, Education Minister Yossi Sarid, over the funding of Shas' financially troubled school network.

With Shas as his largest coalition partner, Barak had come close to peace with Assad's Syria earlier this year.

A sliver of land alongside the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was all that separated the two sides in January, when talks between the two countries ran aground.

Shas, despite murmurs among its rank-and-file members, stood firmly beside Barak during that period, as did Meretz.

Another Orthodox coalition partner, the National Religious Party, threatened to quit if a deal was signed with Syria for Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights. The Russian immigrant party Yisrael Ba'Aliyah also showed signs of strain as Barak moved toward sweeping land concessions to Syria.

Together with his own One Israel bloc, and with the Israeli Arab parties' support from outside the coalition, Barak was confident that he would win majorities in the Cabinet and in the Knesset for the evolving land-for-peace deal with Syria, and then successfully present it to the Israeli people in a referendum.

But with Assad's death, the conventional wisdom is that any prospects of reviving peace talks with Syria have been dealt a severe blow. Assad's son and heir apparent, Bashar, will need time to stabilize his government.

The secession of Shas would be a blow of equally heavy, if not heavier, weight to the peace process — both with Syria and the Palestinians.

Granted, Barak may possibly cobble together an alternative government and scrape by in Knesset votes, at least for the immediate future, with the help of the 10 Israeli Arab legislators.

But if all the Orthodox parties and their supporters line up against him — reconstituting, in effect, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rightist-religious coalition — Barak's prospects of negotiating a peace accord with either Syria or the Palestinians, and making it stick, will be enormously diminished.

For one thing, many Israeli settlers on the West Bank and the Golan are Orthodox. Their homes and futures are on the line. They will be much more resistant to peace if they know that the entire

Orthodox camp is united in opposition to Barak.

A government without Shas would have difficulty winning a convincing majority in the referendum Barak has pledged to hold before finalizing any land-for-peace deal.

Knowing this, Israel's partners in peace talks will be all the more cautious about "wasting" their core concessions to a government that does not have the internal strength to capitalize on them.

This may be especially true for the Palestinians, who resumed talks with Israel this week near Washington. Shas' announcement that it is resigning from the coalition came three months before the two sides are scheduled to reach a final peace treaty.

Israeli-Palestinian talks have not been going smoothly, and Shas' announcement that it is jumping ship is not likely to help.

But as of this week, Shas had not yet done the deed. Before Sunday's Cabinet session, a compromise still could be worked out.

"The Sages' decision does not preclude continued negotiations," said Rafael Pinhasi, secretary of the Shas Council of Sages.

Indeed, even if the ministers submit their letters of resignation, the law provides for a further 48 hours before they take effect. That period, too, could be filled with last-minute haggling.

"It's not over till it's over," a seasoned political pundit warned.

No one in politics, he reasoned — not even the Likud opposition, with its leadership rivalries still unresolved — seems to want elections this early in the Barak government's term.

Likud leader Ariel Sharon, however, said he hopes the Shas announcement would lead to early elections and the establishment of a nationalist government. But One Israel minister Yossi Beilin told Israel Television that new elections were not an option now.

"There will not be any early elections," he said. "We have no time to waste, we have a political process to see to."

Political crises, however, have a way of rolling forward on their own momentum to places that politicians never really intended to reach. □

Syria's designated leader says he'll follow father's line on peace*By Mitchell Danow*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Syrian President Hafez Assad's son and heir apparent commented on the peace process this week — but there is disagreement about what exactly he said.

On Tuesday, on the sidelines of his father's funeral, Bashar Assad met with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and vowed to pursue his father's policies toward Israel.

Every Syrian "is committed to continue in the same way that President Assad was following," Bashar said after a 10-minute meeting with Albright.

Albright said she was encouraged by her meeting with Bashar, whom she described as "ready to assume his duties."

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who was part of the U.S. delegation led by Albright, later said that he interpreted Bashar's comments as indicating he would not continue his father's intransigence toward Israel, but would adopt a more flexible approach.

Many analysts interpreted the comments differently, saying Bashar is unlikely to stray from the hard line his father set in negotiations with Israel. Hafez Assad had demanded a total Israeli pullback from the Golan Heights to the June 4, 1967, lines. □