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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Alexander Schindler dies at 75

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, a leading figure in the Reform movement who championed the rights of women and gays in Jewish religious life, died early Wednesday morning at the age of 75.

Schindler, who served as president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from 1973 to 1996, supported patrilineal descent and worked to include intermarried couples in the Jewish community. [Page 1]

Leah Rabin buried in Jerusalem

Dignitaries from around the world gathered to take part in the funeral in Jerusalem of Leah Rabin, widow of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people joined the Rabin family and friends to pay last respects at a memorial service held Wednesday in the Tel Aviv square where her husband was gunned down five years ago.

Rabin, who died Sunday after losing a battle with cancer, was later buried beside her husband at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl Cemetery.

Eulogizing Rabin, U.S. first lady and Senator-elect Hillary Rodham Clinton, said, "Their lives were and are Israel's history. Now their legacy must be Israel's future."

7 killed in Mideast clashes

At least seven Palestinians were killed in clashes between Palestinian gunmen and Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli forces had prepared for heightened violence Wednesday, the 12th anniversary of Yasser Arafat's symbolic declaration of Palestinian independence from exile in Algiers.

In another development, Israeli security forces operating in the West Bank captured 15 Fatah militia members suspected of involvement in recent attacks against Israelis.

The head of Fatah in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti, said Wednesday that such actions by Israel would lead to an escalation of violence.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was to convene the Security Cabinet on Wednesday to discuss Israel's response to the ongoing Palestinian violence.

Barak has come under growing domestic pressure to give the army a free hand to strike back harder at the Palestinians.

OBITUARY

Alexander Schindler, longtime leader of Reform movement, dies

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the longtime leader of the Reform movement who was considered a "giant" in the larger Jewish community, has died at the age of 75.

He died early Wednesday morning from heart failure at his home in Westport, Conn.

As president of Reform Judaism's Union of American Hebrew Congregations from 1973 to 1996, Schindler — who viewed Judaism as a dynamic faith — advocated a number of revolutionary changes.

Reversing the tradition of discouraging proselytizing, Schindler devised a controversial "outreach" program for non-Jewish spouses of Jews, challenging Jews to become "champions of Judaism" to these spouses.

He also called on the Jewish community to welcome intermarried couples into synagogue life and supported patrilineal descent, the controversial notion that a child with a Jewish father and gentile mother can be considered Jewish if the child is raised Jewish. At Schindler's urging, the Reform movement's rabbinic arm officially recognized patrilineal descent in 1983, something more traditional Jews have sharply criticized as a major blow to Jewish unity.

Interviewed by JTA earlier this year, Schindler said he had no regrets about the decision and said it was "just not true" that patrilineal descent had caused tensions between Reform and other streams of Judaism.

"When the decision was made, Orthodox rabbis said by the year 2000 we'd be two Jewish people," he said. "It hasn't happened."

In addition, Schindler championed equality for women in Judaism, as well as acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews.

He was a keynote speaker earlier this year at the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Jewish Organizations.

"He was a revolutionary," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who succeeded Schindler as president of the UAHC. "The things we take for granted about outreach now were on Page 1 of The New York Times when he said them."

Schindler was Yoffie's childhood rabbi in Worcester, Ma., and Yoffie remembers his "wonderful ability to talk to kids and tell extraordinary stories."

"He was one of the most extraordinary orators in American life at a time when oratory is a lost art not only in the Jewish world, but in American society — no one had his gift for poetic oratory," said Yoffie.

Although known for embracing dramatic changes, he also embraced tradition, as evidenced by the speech he gave shortly before he stepped down as head of the UAHC.

"I feared, and still do, that we Reform Jews are entirely too lax in our observances," he said at the time.

"Having asserted our autonomy, insisting on our right to choose, too many among us choose nothing at all or, choosing something, we observe it only haphazardly."

Under Yoffie's leadership, the Reform movement has increasingly focused on those issues, turning its attention to Jewish education and making religious services more spiritually meaningful.

But, said Yoffie, that is not a rejection of Schindler's work.

"Alex spoke to needs of his time," said Yoffie. "In his time, outreach and inclusion

MIDEAST FOCUS

Clinton: Mideast biggest regret

President Clinton says his biggest regret as president may be his failure to help Israel and the Palestinians reach a final peace accord. "If it doesn't happen, I'll be profoundly disappointed," he said in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press.

U.N. commissioner 'shocked'

The U.N. human rights commissioner said she does not plan to assign blame for the violence she witnessed during her fact-finding tour of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Just the same, Mary Robinson said Wednesday she was "shocked and dismayed and disturbed" by what she saw.

Lebanon told to control its border

The U.N. Security Council told Lebanon to take control of the portion of its country that Israel withdrew from in May. The council said Lebanon risks renewed conflict unless the government moves troops to the southern border to replace Hezbollah gunmen who have taken up positions there.

2 laborers shot in border incident

Two Palestinian laborers trying to skirt an Israeli checkpoint were wounded by undercover police. The border police had stopped the car to prevent Palestinians from entering Israel during the ongoing closure. Israeli police officials said the pistol of one of the officers misfired. Palestinian security officials said the two laborers were shot intentionally.

Angola to open embassy in Israel

Angola soon plans to open an embassy in Israel, eight years after the two nations restored diplomatic ties. Israel's Foreign Ministry said an Angolan diplomatic mission arrived two weeks ago to resolve logistical issues related to opening the embassy.

Angola broke relations with Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

were appropriately at the top of our priority list because they weren't being addressed."

Now, said Yoffie, while the movement is still committed to outreach, Jewish literacy and heartfelt worship "need to be our priorities."

"The fact that I was emphasizing other things that are exceedingly important was not something disturbing to him," said Yoffie, noting that when Schindler passed the torch to him, his predecessor said, "Be yourself and change everything."

Schindler was also known as an ardent Zionist and strong advocate of social justice, speaking out on behalf of nuclear disarmament and against poverty and the death penalty.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Washington, said Schindler "was gutsy about the political positions he took both about Jewish life and American public life." Schindler enjoyed close relationships with several members of the U.S. Congress, said Saperstein. His views were "rooted in deep knowledge, commitment to Jewish tradition."

Schindler was also a key Jewish leader outside the Reform movement. From 1976 to 1978 he served as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. His tenure coincided with the ascendancy of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Begin's victory, which ended the decades-long control of the Israeli government by the Labor Party, initially alarmed many American Jews, who viewed him as an ideologue. Although Schindler differed politically with Begin, he promptly visited the prime minister — and the two later became good friends.

After the visit, Schindler told American Jews he found Begin to be a man of "peace and integrity, with a profound devotion to the Jewish people and their security," as he later wrote in an article on highlights of his chairmanship.

In recent years, Schindler became a strong advocate of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and in the past few weeks expressed dismay about the outbreak of violence.

"I hope and pray that the peace process will go forward because the return to the status quo is unthinkable," he said a month ago.

Schindler's friendship with Begin was emblematic of his relations to many others with whom he differed on the issues.

Leaders both within and outside Reform Judaism described Schindler as a warm, generous personality who transcended differences.

"We disagreed on so much and yet we were so close," said Julius Berman, honorary president of the Orthodox Union and a past chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

Berman remains fiercely critical of Schindler's positions on outreach to the intermarried and patrilineal descent, and recalls frequently debating him on these issues. But Schindler had an "ability to put aside his parochial interests as leader of the UAHC for the good of the overall community," said Berman. He added that Schindler was an "excellent orator, great thinker and someone who was a tremendous power because of his personality."

Others praised Schindler's warm personality.

Schindler was "legendary in the UAHC for his extraordinary generosity of efforts to help staff and board members when they'd run into personal problems or problems related to their responsibilities in Jewish life," said Saperstein.

"I don't know how he found time to visit so many hospitals when people were ill and speak at so many funerals," said Saperstein. "Everyone wanted him to come and he always somehow managed to help."

Schindler also oversaw publication of the first Torah commentary written from a Reform perspective.

At the time of his death, Schindler was serving as president of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and vice president of the World Jewish Congress.

A Jewish National Fund forest of 500,000 trees in Israel bears his name.

Born in Germany in 1925, Schindler fled the Nazis with his family, arriving in the United States at the age of 12. He was ordained as a rabbi in 1953 at the Reform movement's seminary, the Hebrew Union College.

He is survived by his wife, Rhea, and five children. His funeral is scheduled for Friday morning at Temple Israel in Westport. □



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JEWISH WORLD

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Russian crackdown on tycoon said to fuel anti-Semitic incidents

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The Russian government appears to have won the latest battle in its ongoing struggle against a Jewish media magnate.

Vladimir Goussinsky ceded control of his media holdings this week to the country's natural gas monopoly, which is controlled by the Russian government.

Goussinsky, who left the country in July after being jailed briefly on fraud charges, has no plans to return to Russia to face questioning, his lawyers said Monday.

Goussinsky frequently used his independent media outlets to criticize the government, thereby drawing the ire of President Vladimir Putin.

It is unclear how the move by Goussinsky, the leader and financial backer of the Russian Jewish Congress, will affect Russian Jewry. But after anti-Semitic remarks made last week by Alexander Mikhailov, the newly elected governor of the Russian region of Kursk, some observers are wondering whether Putin's campaign against Goussinsky and another leading Jewish tycoon, Boris Berezovsky, is fueling anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semites "feel that now it has become possible to say anti-Semitic things openly, and they are probing the reaction of society and the Kremlin," said Tanya Freilikh, a Moscow Jewish activist.

Berezovsky also has decided to remain abroad rather than face possible arrest.

Mikhailov accused the former governor, Alexander Rutskey, of being backed by what he called the "All-Russian Jewish Congress."

He also noted that Rutskey is Jewish and linked Rutskey with Berezovsky.

It wasn't the first time in recent years that Russian politicians have made such comments.

During the regime of Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, Communist politician Albert Makashov created an outcry with several similar remarks.

The difference now, say some, is that anti-Semitic officials may feel that Putin's actions against Goussinsky and Berezovsky give them the tacit approval to spout their vitriol.

Anti-Semites knew that their "outbursts were not approved by Yeltsin. They were, in fact, openly defying the Kremlin. This guy is dense and stupid but he apparently thinks it is now OK with the Kremlin to scold and accuse Jews publicly. It is getting normal," said Alexander Axelrod of the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League.

Indeed, Mikhailov also claimed that Putin sent his personal adviser to assist him in his pre-electoral campaigning and is an ally in his drive to "liberate" Russia from "filth."

Putin's administration quickly denied these claims.

Ironically, Rutskey was prevented from running in last month's regional elections after a local court struck him from the ballot, apparently at the Kremlin's request.

The Kremlin wanted its own candidate to win, but got Mikhailov instead.

For his part, Putin has been quick to praise the role of Jews in Russian society and to condemn anti-Semitism. But in the campaign against Goussinsky and Berezovsky — which Putin apparently sees as a way to muzzle the media and thereby increase his government's power — the Jewish roots of the media moguls have become a weapon against them.

The effects, in the short term at least, appear to be clear.

Journalists working for Moscow Jewish radio say that after every attack on the "Jewish oligarchs" — as the two are known — they get lots of angry calls accusing Jews of "robbing Russia and getting away with it."

Meanwhile, Jewish organizations are calling on Putin to speak out in the latest incident.

The RJC called on the Kremlin not to let Mikhailov's statements go "unnoticed," and Rabbi Berel Lazar of the Federation of Jewish Communities said it had sent a letter to Putin expressing its concern in the matter. □

Governor blasted for 'Jesus Day'

Jewish groups criticized South Dakota Gov. William Janklow for his proclamation of a day of prayer that called for people to be "reconciled to the Lord Jesus."

In a letter to Janklow, the groups said government should neither back one set of religious views nor aid religious groups to spread their faith. Governors of several states, including Texas Gov. George W. Bush, have declared such days in their states.

Museum: Genocide in Sudan

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience issued a genocide warning for Sudan and opened a special display in the museum about ongoing ethnic violence in the African country.

"Remembrance of the Holocaust has instilled in us a profound appreciation for the cost of silence," said Rabbi Irving Greenberg, chairman of the museum's Memorial Council.

Smuggled ritual objects displayed

A collection of Jewish ritual objects smuggled out of Syria and then restored in Israel were displayed in Jerusalem on Tuesday at the residence of Israeli President Moshe Katsav.

The objects, including nine biblical manuscripts and 40 Torah scrolls, will eventually be returned to the Syrian Jewish community in Israel.

The manuscripts were restored in a library at Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

Foundation to back camps

A new foundation approved initiatives to build more Jewish summer camps in North America and fund operating expenses of the Israeli equivalent of the United Way.

The Trust for Jewish Philanthropy, a federation offshoot, has not yet raised funds for the camp project, but has received \$5 million to endow Israel's Matan organization.

The new efforts come two months after the trust announced its first project, aimed at recruiting and training more women for senior professional roles in Jewish organizations.

Historians: Reopen war exhibit

A controversial exhibit about atrocities committed by ordinary German soldiers during World War II should be re-opened, a group of historians said Wednesday.

The exhibit was closed last year after some photographs in the display were wrongly captioned. Just the same, the historians said, the exhibit's message that crimes against humanity were not only committed by the Nazi SS is beyond doubt.

Fla. residents angry about ballot — and how they are being portrayed

By Joyce Moed

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (JTA) — Alan David never gave his ballots a second thought after voting in many presidential elections during the decades he lived in New York.

Last week, after moving here two years ago, he voted in Palm Beach County for the first time.

"I looked at the ballot and said, 'What the heck is this?'" recalled David, who lives in the Century Village community of West Palm Beach. "I voted, but I don't know what I voted. It was so confusing."

David isn't the only Palm Beacher who left the polls on Election Day unsure if his vote helped or hurt his candidate, Al Gore. Even before polls closed, voters were flooding the state's elections department with angry calls, demanding recounts and even revotes as they realized they may have voted for the wrong candidate.

Now as the nation awaits the outcome of the legal wrangling and the vote recounts, residents of this heavily Jewish region of South Florida are also angry as being portrayed in the media as older, confused citizens.

Ed Lewis, who lives at the Aberdeen Golf and Country Club in Boynton Beach, said he carefully studied the sample ballot he received in the mail before the election and mapped out his votes. So he was shocked when he arrived at the voting booths and couldn't understand the ballot.

"Even though I'm 66, I'm very bright," he said. "I voted correctly, but I had to spend at least 20 seconds or more reading the ballot."

The confusion for many stemmed from the way the ballot was structured, with the proximity of Gore's name to the punch hole designated for Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan apparently causing many Gore supporters to accidentally vote for Buchanan.

Sheila and Ed Levins of Boca Raton had volunteered to help run the polls at the Kings Point community in Delray Beach, where some of the worst confusion has been reported.

Sheila Levins said many people dissolved into tears after leaving the voting booths there.

"This was very upsetting. People started crying, saying, 'I voted for Buchanan,'" she said. "I think it's a terrible disgrace. Somebody has to stand up somewhere about this. I'm an optimist; I believe the truth will come out."

Some people at Kings Point realized they had made a mistake and asked the site's supervisor for help, Ed Levins said, adding that tempers flared when the supervisor told them there was nothing that could be done.

"I really feel for these people. They find out they voted for the wrong person and nothing can be done," he said.

"Quite a few of the older men who came to vote were so proud that they were wearing their medals and combat ribbons that they earned during World War II," he said. "They were part of the group of people that Tom Brokaw called 'Our Greatest Generation.' To deny these men and women their vote is a great injustice."

Adding insult to the injury, say many residents, is the unflattering media coverage that has focused on Palm Beach County voters, painting them as seniors too sunbaked and dim-witted to

understand a simple ballot. "For the men who put their life on the line and for the women who worked the munitions factories building the ships, planes and tanks for their sons and husbands to be made fun of and joked about by the media is embarrassing and a poor example for our young people," Levins said.

"As far as I am concerned, the people of Palm Beach County have brought to light the problems in using the present antiquated methods of voting. The over 19,000 discarded votes were comprised of people of all ages and races from every walk of life.

"Hopefully, something constructive will be accomplished so that this will never happen again," he said.

Meanwhile, the nation waits for the courts to decide whether Palm Beach County will have to hold a revote before the next president is announced.

Democrats and Republicans are also closely monitoring the absentee ballots trickling into Florida from overseas, which, although traditionally coming from military members who favor Republicans, could swing Florida's vote toward Gore because of the several thousand ballots requested by voters in Israel.

But some here aren't so sure if the confusion warrants a revote.

"I do not believe in rerunning the election," said a senior at the Kaplan Jewish Community Center in West Palm Beach.

"I am for Gore, but I don't think there is any indication of fraud. I think people should have read the ballot better." □

Jewish groups get along to dedicate new Russian shul

By Lev Gorodetsky

CHELYABINSK, Russia (JTA) — A synagogue recently dedicated here is being called an example of a rare cooperation between rival Jewish groups — and local politicians.

Jews first came in large numbers to this city, known for manufacturing nuclear weapons parts, around World War II, when Stalin moved large arms factories here from Nazi-occupied parts of the Soviet Union.

But even though Chelyabinsk's 10,000 Jews have long been active in the economic life of the city, the old synagogue was closed during the Communist era and Jewish religious life in the city was virtually absent until the past five years.

Lubavitch Rabbi Meir Kirsch, who now runs a day school for 50 kids and a yeshiva, deserves some of the credit, say observers.

So apparently does the umbrella Russian Jewish Congress, which managed to mobilize a group of local businessmen who raised money to help the Jewish community.

"It is only the first step," said local construction magnate Yakov Oks, who plans to build a Jewish community center building near the synagogue, which can house 300 worshippers.

The group managed to collect enough local money to build a new synagogue with few funds coming from Moscow.

The director of the Moscow office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, who also supports such projects, praised the RJC for helping to elevate philanthropy, which has little tradition in Russia.

"In many places, they managed to turn donating money for the community into a popular and prestigious activity," said Joel Golovensky. □