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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Rabbi convicted in murder trial

A New Jersey rabbi was convicted for arranging the murder of his wife.

Rabbi Fred Neulander could receive the death penalty for hiring two hit men to kill his wife, Carol, in 1994. Wednesday's verdict came nearly a year after the first trial ended in a hung jury.

UJC debates Birthright funding

The umbrella group of North American federations is considering a resolution to pay \$39 million to Birthright Israel.

At the General Assembly in Philadelphia, the United Jewish Communities' Board of Trustees debated a resolution Wednesday to pay a share of the program to send 18-26 year olds who have never been to Israel on an organized trip. Currently, 20 percent of federations have not paid for the program, according to Stephen Hoffman, UJC's president.

The proposed resolution would require all federations to increase their donations to Birthright by 33 percent over last year.

The resolution will be voted on within 30 days, Hoffman said. The Jewish Agency for Israel would share in the cost.

Israeli justice speaks at G.A.

Israeli Supreme Court Justice Dorit Beinisch said a recent ruling placing restrictions on the interrogation of Palestinian terrorists upholds Israel's democratic foundations.

Speaking at the opening plenary of the United Jewish Communities' 2002 General Assembly, Beinisch admitted that rulings limiting the use of force in interrogating terrorists and approving non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism may "not always be popular," but reflect the court's need to uphold Israel's democratic values, which are based on fundamental human rights. "A democracy that defends itself is a democracy that values life," she said.

Terrorism insurance bill passes

The U.S. Senate passed a bill that would shift most of the insurance costs of terrorist attacks onto the federal government.

The bill is expected to be a boon for Jewish federations and other groups that have faced skyrocketing premiums since the Sept. 11 attacks.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

For Mitzna, now comes the hard part: reviving party before January's vote

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna hopes to become Israel's next prime minister, he faces a daunting challenge: resuscitating a moribund Labor Party in a little more than two months.

A day after the dovish newcomer to national politics won a sweeping victory in Labor's leadership primary, political observers warned Mitzna that he had only passed the easy part.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz noted that Mitzna has an extraordinarily short time to consolidate his position in Labor, neutralize potentially hostile camps within the party, win the loyalty of senior party members, organize a national election campaign and inject new life into a dispirited party.

Even then, his chances of winning the Jan. 28 national elections are considered slim: Polls show the Likud Party with a daunting lead over Labor.

Essentially, one commentator noted in Wednesday's edition of the Jerusalem Post, Labor members chose Mitzna to be the next opposition leader, not the next prime minister.

If Labor loses in January, Mitzna might be asked to step down as party chairman. If he refuses to do so, he might face another challenge for the party chairmanship next summer.

The final results of Tuesday's primaries bore out the predictions of exit polls: Mitzna received 54 percent of the vote, incumbent chairman Benjamin Ben-Eliezer won about 39 percent and legislator Haim Ramon won slightly more than 7 percent.

The soft-spoken Mitzna immediately extended an olive branch to his two Labor rivals in a bid to unite forces in preparation for the national campaign.

Mitzna said his first task would be to unite the party "as one big beehive, a joint staff, in order to lead the Labor Party in the most important of all confrontations, with the Likud," the Ha'aretz newspaper reported.

Critical to this undertaking will be reconciliation with Ben-Eliezer, whose withdrawal from Sharon's unity government — Ben-Eliezer had been defense minister — precipitated Sharon's decision to call elections.

A longtime party veteran, Ben-Eliezer still has a formidable political machine within Labor.

Mitzna offered Ben-Eliezer the No. 2 position on Labor's Knesset list for the elections, but Ben-Eliezer said he needed time to consider the offer.

Mitzna, 57, is a former general who clashed with then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon during the 1982 Lebanon War and commanded Israeli troops in the West Bank during the first intifada in the late 1980s.

His tenure as mayor of Haifa generally is considered successful — the northern port city is seen as a model for Arab-Jewish coexistence — but opponents accuse him of being too close to business interests and allowing for virtually unchecked real estate development.

Continuing an Israeli tradition of placing their faith in white knights with little political experience — Ehud Barak and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak were two other ex-generals seen briefly as political saviors whose stars quickly burned out — Mitzna burst onto the national stage just several months ago and instantly became the leading candidate for Labor's chairmanship.

Described as aloof, somewhat stiff and yet open to counsel, Mitzna galvanized a left

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hijack suspect wanted

Israeli officials are planning to seek the extradition from Turkey of an Israeli Arab who tried to hijack an El Al flight Sunday. According to Israel Radio, attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein said Wednesday the extradition request is being drawn up for Tawfik Fukara, who allegedly wanted to crash the plane into a Tel Aviv high-rise.

Security officials aboard the Tel Aviv-Ankara flight tackled him when he rushed the cockpit and turned him over to Turkish authorities when the flight safely landed.

Turkish television reported that Fukara told authorities he wanted to "make the voice of the Palestinian people heard." Israeli authorities have said Fukara was inspired by the Sept. 11 hijackers.

Pollard for Knesset?

A right-wing Israeli legislator reportedly offered Jonathan Pollard the No. 2 spot on his Knesset list. Michael Kleiner said Pollard's chances of being freed from prison would improve if he is elected to the Knesset in the January elections, Army Radio reported Wednesday.

Kleiner has not yet received a response to his offer, the report said. The offer also would be subject to approval from election officials and the attorney general, the report added. Pollard has been serving a life sentence since 1987 for passing secret U.S. military information to Israel.

A tolerance center for Jerusalem

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is slated to unveil plans for a new \$150 million tolerance center in Jerusalem. Rabbi Marvin Hier, the center's founder and dean, will be joined Sunday in Jerusalem by architect Frank Gehry, where they will discuss the goals and design of the Center for Human Dignity-Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem.

wing thrown into disarray when the peace process collapsed in the terrorist waves of the intifada.

The national unity government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Ben-Eliezer, who served as defense minister, refused to negotiate with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat or even contemplate any sort of diplomatic process while violence continued.

Mitzna, however, said he would be willing to negotiate under fire, and would talk with any Palestinian leader, including Arafat.

If negotiations fail to produce an agreement, he said, Israel would withdraw unilaterally from most of the West Bank within a year.

Mitzna also pledged to uproot Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip immediately upon taking office.

On the economy, Mitzna advocates less spending on settlement and more on retirees, students and poor development towns.

Such positions provide voters with a stark contrast to the Likud. Mitzna's stance toward the Palestinians — and his insistence that disengaging from the Palestinians will allow Israel to focus on its own domestic problems — is likely to appeal to left-wing voters who complained that their voices weren't heard during the 19 months of national unity government.

Whether such positions will win over the mass of Israelis in the center — whose votes have proved crucial in the last three elections — is far less clear. Most public opinion polls show Israeli public opinion moving to the right since the intifada began.

The national election will come into greater focus after the Nov. 28 primary in the Likud, when Sharon faces off against Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Writing in Ha'aretz, political commentator Yoel Marcus wrote that Mitzna will stand a better chance if the Likud is led by Netanyahu, who espouses a harder line than Sharon.

Using Netanyahu as a foil, Sharon has presented himself as a responsible elder statesman committed to an eventual peace with the Palestinians and to maintaining close ties with the United States.

Mitzna's situation will be far worse if the Likud leadership remains with Sharon, whose popularity only grows as the intifada intensifies and who has the ability to "eat naive politicians for breakfast," Marcus wrote.

Amid the cautionary tales, a supportive voice was found in former Labor legislator Eli Goldschmidt. Writing in the daily Ma'ariv, Goldschmidt said Mitzna possesses two important characteristics of a good politician: "a successful sense of timing and civilian courage."

Goldschmidt lauded Mitzna's willingness to stick to his convictions, including his commitment to speak with Arafat, despite the public controversy it might spark.

Goldschmidt also said the test of Labor's senior members will be their willingness to rally behind Mitzna. If they do, he wrote, the party could again offer voters a real alternative.

"It will probably not happen in the coming elections, but it can definitely happen in the not-too-distant future," he wrote.

With the primary behind him, Mitzna on Wednesday set to the immediate task of seeking agreement on the method for selecting Labor's list for Knesset.

Representatives from Mitzna's and Ben-Eliezer's camps met to discuss the issue ahead of Thursday's Labor Party convention, which was expected to make a decision on the matter.

Mitzna, who favors an open primary system, said Tuesday night that "all candidates will have to be elected."

Ben-Eliezer wants to leave the decision to the 4,700 members of the party convention, which is heavily stacked with his supporters. Mitzna realizes this could impede his efforts to assert his authority over the party.

In addition, other senior Labor members — whose places on the list might be adversely affected — have warned that they might bolt the party if convention members are allowed to set the list.

One possible compromise would have the list's national representatives chosen in open primaries, while the spaces reserved for district representatives would be determined by the party convention, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Tax-free bonds for federations?

The umbrella group of North American federations intends to administer a tax-exempt bond pool for member federations.

The resolution for the national pool won initial approval Wednesday from the United Jewish Communities' Board of Trustees. James Tisch, UJC's board chairman, called it a "very momentous step for UJC." The resolution could save federations "millions of dollars" and make bond purchasing simpler, UJC officials say.

The resolution still must clear the Delegates Assembly on Friday and gain approval from banks, where the UJC inherited a \$90 million debt for expenses related to immigration to Israel for Jews from the former Soviet Union. In addition, the UJC must hammer out technicalities of the pool. The pool is projected to be implemented in the first 45 days of 2003, according to Ken Brown, UJC's CFO.

Liberal-extremist alliance blasted

Canadian leftists and liberals are aligning themselves with Islamic extremists to delegitimize Israel and promote an atmosphere of anti-Semitism, a leader of the World Jewish Congress said.

"What is really shocking is that you have here today an unholy alliance between liberals, intellectuals from the left and the most extremist forces of Islam," Secretary-General Avi Beker was quoted as saying at a WJC board meeting in Ottawa on Monday. "It's very hard to comprehend how people who are liberal, people who are intellectuals, are going together with representatives of cultures" that have such a different attitude toward human rights in their countries.

Faith group presses carmakers

An interfaith alliance of religious leaders is calling on the top three U.S. automakers to create more fuel-efficient cars.

Along with pressing Ford, General Motors and Chrysler, the leaders are calling upon their congregants to weigh fuel efficiency more heavily when they buy a car. The campaign is a partnership between the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the National Council of Churches.

Astronaut may vote from space

Most Israelis living abroad are unable to vote in general elections, but an Israeli in outer space may get different treatment. Col. Ilan Ramon, Israel's first astronaut, is expected to lift off Jan. 16 on a two-week NASA shuttle mission.

The Israel Space Agency asked Ramon if he was interested in voting, on condition that his vote be kept secret, the Jerusalem Post reported. An Israeli official is looking into the logistical and technical issues.

ARTS & CULTURE

Internet site uses photos to tell European Jewry's past, present

By Mica Rosenberg

NEW YORK (JTA) — Judit Kinszki is describing a cracked passport photo of a handsome man, stamped and aged with time.

"My father was taken from me when I was just a child, so when I talk about him, I feel that I somehow get closer to him," says Kinszki, 68. "My father, Imre, was born in 1901."

These words about Jewish life in prewar Central Europe are not being spoken in a living room in Hungary, Kinszki's home country, but have been recorded for posterity on the Internet.

A visit to Centropa.org, a new Web site, lets people explore the histories of Jewish families before, during and after the outbreak of World War II.

Witness to a Jewish Century, one of the site's sections, is a searchable online database of family photos. It is accompanied by oral histories collected by more than 40 Centropa researchers working in Central and Eastern Europe.

The site currently has 65 family archives.

By December, 80 more will be available, and ultimately the site hopes to post 1,500 family stories and more than 65,000 photographs or precious family documents.

The site appears to be resonating with Internet surfers: The site received over 30,000 hits in the month after it debuted Sept. 15.

The project is the brainchild of writer, photographer and filmmaker Edward Serotta, who since 1985 has specialized in Jewish life in the region.

"What I find so exciting is to look at a picture of a 12-year-old girl dressed up in a silly costume, and next to it hear her tell me, in her own words, when the picture was taken, why she was wearing the costume and what happened to the other children in that picture," says Serotta, who in the past has written and taken pictures for JTA.

Serotta was inspired by a desire to capture the richness of prewar Jewish life, not just to focus on the horror of Jewish death during the war.

"In order to understand the tragedy of the Holocaust, one must also know about the greatness that existed before the Shoah, as well as the Jewish world that is struggling to rebuild itself since the fall of communism in 1989," he said.

A section called Contemporary Jewish Life depicts this Jewish renaissance.

Silvia de Swaan — an artist, photographer and Romanian-born Jew — explores "the terrain" of her early childhood in a slide-show project she calls "Return."

Ephemeral photographs from her travels through Eastern Europe over the past 12 years trace a journey through her memories as a refugee at the end of the war.

"Return" has been a way for de Swaan to reconcile the world her family "left behind" — the world of bombed out cities and trains and refugee camps, its smells and sounds and cultural values" — with the world she entered when she came to the United States as a 10-year-old.

Returning is a theme for Centropa.org.

The site has resources for travelers; tips from a veteran journalist in the area, JTA correspondent Ruth E. Gruber; and Eastern European recipes for those who want to invoke the Old World in their kitchens.

According to Serotta, by 2008 some \$2 million is expected to be spent on the site, which is funded by private donors and foundations.

Next month Serotta is organizing a conference in St. Petersburg, Russia.

There, Centropa researchers, historians, archivists, and interviewers will meet with academics to brainstorm future ideas, including possible educational projects.

Meanwhile, on the site there's a scanned image of a weathered postcard written by Kinszki's aunt, Gyongyi Pollak, in 1944.

"She sent it when they were being deported. She threw it from the train," Kinszki says.

The text reads, "After lots of trouble they are taking us to Germany. God will take care of us. I will bring you something from Germany. We are 65 together, there is a lot of noise and I can't write. Millions of Kisses, Gyongyi. 3rd of October, Sunday." □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Ukrainian students help Hillel train peers to lead holiday fetes*By Daniel MacIsaac*

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Osik Akselrud got a little help from his friends in staging a recent workshop designed to teach students how to teach others about the history and traditions of Chanukah.

That's because the head of the Hillel office responsible for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova was able to use, as instructors and assistants, students who'd already completed the first two installments of the program.

"We had two instructors from Hillel in Israel as well as the Hillel students who'd gone through the first and second generations of seminars — and they know everything," he said. "I say, 'Hey, you guys have become professional Jews.'"

Some 140 students took part in the weeklong workshop, which wrapped up Nov. 10.

They came by train to the Ukrainian capital from cities across the country — Lvov, Odessa, Kharkov, Simferopol and Sevastopol — as well as Minsk, Belarus, and Kishinev, Moldova.

And it's to those regional Hillel centers they'll return to pass along what they've learned, both to their fellow Hillel members and then out to Jews in communities across the three countries.

Speaking at Kiev's Sunflower Community Center following the seminar, Akselrud said such education is sorely needed.

He said that despite the efforts of the past decade following the break up of the Soviet Union, more time is required to make up for the 70 years of suppression that alienated most Jews from their culture and religion.

"Only about 15 percent of Jews are involved in Jewish community programs," he said. "Sunflower has about 400 or 500 regular visitors, but there are between 80,000 and 100,000 Jews living in Kiev."

Hillel is banking on a combination of education and outreach to make those numbers rise. And it is using a hands-on approach to education to get the message across.

The Chanukah seminar opened in a traditional way — with a song performed by instructors from each regional Hillel office. That was followed up by presentations by the regional groups themselves — through songs, dances or performances. First-time participants were taught the Chanukah and Israeli songs that would be sung together throughout the week.

The following days followed a similar pattern — a combination of learning and fun.

"Our seminars are not only religious but also holiday-oriented for people who've lost their traditions," said the seminar's coordinator, Yulia Belilovska. "The idea is to provide the education and, after that, if some want to go to synagogue, they can."

In a novel approach to learning about Chanukah, Hillel also arranged public relations and advertising training for the students. Belilovska explained that the idea was to get the students thinking about imaginative ways to present the meaning and traditions of Chanukah — and how to attract community members to attend workshops on the topic.

Half the group focused on video presentations and the other half on dramatic presentations.

"One group presented a commercial containing 'positive and negative P.R.,"' Belilovska said. "One girl explained that candles

should be lit during Chanukah because they're beautiful, amazing, a miracle and a good tradition while one boy countered by saying, 'Yes, but on Chanukah there are a lot of house fires.'"

Needless to say, the positive argument won the day.

Dennis Bainkovsky said he felt like a winner, too. The 21-year-old economics student at the International Solomon University in Kiev was attending his third Chanukah seminar — but serving as an instructor for the first time.

He said he enjoyed the opportunity to teach others who had taught him previously.

"The most important part of the seminar for me was acting as a madrich. I felt like a leader," he said, using the Hebrew word for guide or counselor. "I was helping teach some students who'd taught me at other seminars in the past — and while that was difficult, I was ready and it worked out well."

His schoolmate at Solomon University, 19-year-old Yevgenia Soloviyova, was also attending her third Chanukah seminar.

But Soloviyova's experience of Chanukah goes well beyond that, since she grew up as an active Jew in her native city of Khmel'nitski.

She said she also enjoyed the opportunity to share her knowledge with the approximately 70 percent of the seminar participants who were learning about the details of Chanukah for the first time. She said it was interesting to compare and contrast the styles and attitudes of various Hillel members.

"The Hillel organizations are a little different and have different feelings of spirit," she said. "For example, the group from Kishinev seemed to be a little more religious," while in "Kiev we have our own place and maybe consider ourselves to be a little more independent."

But now that the seminar is complete, it will be up to all the participants to pass on what they've learned. That begins with workshops within their regional Hillel organizations and then with the start of Chanukah, out to communities in their regions and beyond. Members of the Kiev Hillel, for instance, will travel to Hased community centers around the region, including in the city of Zhitomir, before heading farther west out to major centers like Ivano-Frankivsk.

"It can be challenging when you've got a mixed group of older people and children and have to find a way to keep them all interested and entertained," Soloviyova said.

"But sometimes it's great where there are older people who remember what Chanukah was like during their childhood and want to tell you about it."

Soloviyova said enlightenment can also work both ways — as was the case when Kiev Hillel traveled to the Western border city of Uzhgorod last year.

"We met a group of younger people who were telling us that life wasn't very interesting for them because they didn't know what kinds of things they could do together in their community," she said. "So, of course, we told them all about what we do in Hillel and the programs we're involved in."

It is just such interaction, education and growth that Akselrud said the Chanukah seminar was designed to encourage. He said that makes the effort and the \$20,000 cost of the initiative — funded in part by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee — worth it.

"For me, the most important part of the seminar was that I saw many, many new faces," he said. "And that means more students involved in Jewish life — and more potential." □