

IN THE NEWS
E.U. releases funds to Palestinians

The European Union announced it would release \$142 million in emergency funding for the Palestinian Authority.

The announcement Monday came amid reports that the Palestinian Authority could collapse financially within two weeks. In a letter leaked to the media this week, James Wolfensohn, appointed by the "Quartet" of international peace mediators to assess the Palestinian Authority's prospects after last year's Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, urged the Quartet to find a solution to the P.A.'s financial crisis.

Hamas visit to Russia confirmed

Russian officials confirmed that Hamas leaders will visit Moscow on Friday. The Russian news agency Itar-Tass quoted a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Monday saying the visit would go forward.

Russia angered Israel and the United States by inviting the group in the wake of its landslide victory last month in Palestinian legislative elections.

Report: Iran prevents full nuclear inspection

Iran is preventing international monitors from determining whether its nuclear program is peaceful, according to a new report. The report was issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency a week before the agency's board of governors are slated to vote again on whether Iran's nuclear program should be referred to the U.N. Security Council.

The New York Times cited an unnamed official who said the report noted that Iran has only offered "very limited" cooperation with international inspectors. Israel and the United States are pushing for sanctions on Iran, which is believed to be developing nuclear weapons and has called for the destruction of the Jewish state.

WORLD REPORT

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Chicken soup for the Jewish masses: Shabbat program marking 10 years

By SUE FISHKOFF

OAKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — A nationwide Shabbat celebration marking its 10th anniversary has brought unaffiliated Jews back into the synagogue, say rabbis who run the outreach program. However, some movement leaders have expressed discomfort with the program's Orthodox emphasis.

"Shabbat Across America," the brainchild of Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, was conceived in 1996 as one huge beginners' service and Shabbat meal that would take place on the same night across the country.

Since its inception, Buchwald says, more than half a million Jews have taken part in it at more than 1,900 synagogues. More than 65,000 participants have signed up for this year's event, scheduled for Friday at 650 synagogues, from Reconstructionist to Orthodox.

"We want to get people who never experienced Shabbat literally to come in off the streets," Buchwald says.

The evening includes a traditional beginners' service, which people are encouraged to interrupt to ask questions, followed by a festive Shabbat meal, singing, and discussion.

It is the only such large-scale mass Jewish celebration of its kind, which participating rabbis say makes it particularly compelling.

"There's something about the national scale, people enjoy being part of something larger, to say we're doing this the same way in Texas, in Florida and Ohio as in New

York," says Rabbi Elie Weinstock of Manhattan's Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, an Orthodox shul that has been running Shabbat Across America for the past three years.

Weinstock estimates that 20 percent of the 300 people who came to his program last year had never been to the synagogue before.

Shabbat Across America is based on "Turn Friday Night Into Shabbos," a similar program developed 25 years ago at Manhattan's Lincoln Square Synagogue, where Buchwald was educational director.

Synagogues that sign up receive materials including a 21-page guidebook to help them run the evening, as well as promotional materials and sample discussion points.

Follow-up is built into the program. Participating congregations are directed to make sure each dinner table includes one or two longtime members to host the newcomers, and invite them to future synagogue activities.

Names are collected, to enable follow-up phone calls.

Rabbi Camille Angel of San Francisco's Reform Congregation Sha'ar Zahav says that in the five years her temple has been running the program, people have joined the congregation after first stepping in the door for Shabbat Across America.

Some of them celebrate the evening each year as their "anniversary," she says.

By encouraging congregants to invite their unaffiliated friends, the program gives people "permission" to do what many wish they could do more often, she says. "Some-

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ A Friday-night program helps congregations reach out to the unaffiliated

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times we're a little shy to invite our friends or colleagues into our spiritual homes," she says.

Jacques Lurie, executive director of The Congregations of Shaare Shamayim in Philadelphia, considers the program "a phenomenal asset" not only for newcomers, but for members of the congregation "who don't have a deep knowledge of Shabbat, as well as for our more seasoned folks, who have the opportunity to learn new Shabbat songs."

Rabbis and congregational leaders say they also appreciate the free publicity Buchwald's national advertising campaign gives them.

Robin Dern, executive director of Congregation Beth Shalom in Anchorage, Ala., says her Reform congregation "isn't exactly visible," particularly in a state where many people move to escape, not find, their Jewish roots.

When the national ads for Shabbat Across America air on local radio stations, she says many people call the synagogue, and even if they don't sign up for the dinner, they request information on other congregational services.

"We have a small budget, and this allows us to reach a much greater population of unaffiliated Jews than we could on our own," she says.

Despite the praise heaped on the program by participating congregations, the national leadership of the Reform and Conservative movements is more circumspect.

Naomi Gewirtz, assistant outreach di-

rector for the Union for Reform Judaism, says the number of Reform congregations taking part in the program drops by about 25 each year.

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, notes the same phenomenon in his own movement.

While both Epstein and Gewirtz praise the program for its outreach goals, they question whether it really brings in that many new members. They also feel a certain discomfort with the Orthodox service it promotes.

"It's a mixed bag," says Epstein, who says that while many Conservative rabbis and congregational leaders "like it very much," others feel it's "becoming tired."

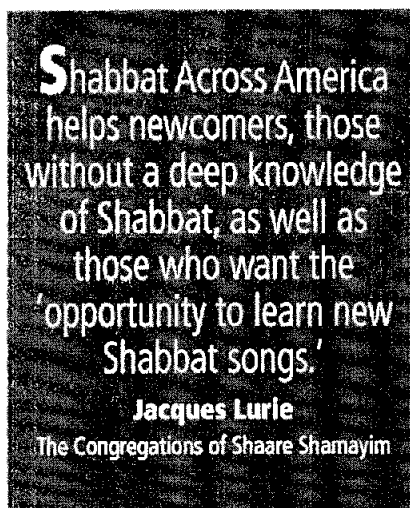
He adds: "The concept is very good, and I've endorsed it. The challenge is to create within the congregations a vehicle to make it more than a one-time thing."

The United Synagogue sponsors its own movement-wide counterpart, Friday Night Live, which takes place monthly and thus offers more regularity than the once-a-year Shabbat Across America, Epstein says. "The congregations I've talked to find it to be more appealing."

The Reform movement posts supplemental materials on its Web site for its congregations taking part in Shabbat Across America, to provide them with Reform-friendly alternative services.

Rabbi Jane Litman of Congregation Beth El, a Reform temple in Berkeley, Calif., says she uses those supplemental services in the Shabbat Across America evenings she's held for the past five years.

It's appropriate, she says, to provide a Reform service for people who come to her temple, just like those who are looking for an Orthodox service will go to one of the nearby Orthodox synagogues that



night.

But she sees this as a strength of the program, not a weakness. And despite Gewirtz's claim that Shabbat Across America doesn't draw many new people to the Reform movement, Litman says it has, at least in her congregation.

And it's wrong to focus on numbers, she says. Referring to the teaching that "if one saves a single life, it is as if he saved the entire world," she says, "If one unaffiliated Jew walks in and feels comfortable in synagogue and becomes active, that's good enough for me." ■

Institute in Russian city launches family archive project

JTA STAFF REPORT

MOSCOW (JTA) — The St. Petersburg Institute for Jewish Studies recently launched an electronic family archive project.

The institute is offering to digitize family photographs, correspondence, official documents and other relevant archival material for Jewish families.

Participants can request short video or audio interviews of aging family members to be conducted and placed in the archive.

Data will be entered into an interactive program and distributed to participants on CD or DVD media.

Digitizing costs range from \$50 to \$150, depending on archive size. According to Irina Bass, coordinator of the project, the main goal is to preserve personal family history by making it less fragile and more accessible.

The project is financially supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County. ■

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Feud over tycoon disrupts European Jewish talks

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — A fight over the role of a Russian tycoon at the recent European Jewish Congress general assembly is threatening to overshadow the organization's political agenda.

The EJC's president, Pierre Besnainou, accused the Russian Jewish Congress' president, Moshe Kantor, of engaging in "blackmail" at the Feb. 19 meeting after the latter said he would give the organization a donation of \$475,000 only if he could have oversight of money that he brought in from donors in his role as chairman of the board of governors.

The vice president of the EJC, Ariel Muzicant, concurred with Besnainou, suggesting that Kantor was trying to thwart democracy. "There can only be one president, and what Mr. Kantor wants is to take over without being elected."

The squabble came as the EJC is trying to have a greater influence on key European political leaders in issues of Middle East policy and anti-Semitism, which have leapt to the top of the European political agenda in recent months.

Some European Jewish leaders privately worry that Kantor, owner of one of Russia's largest fertilizer firms, is seeking to take over the EJC with his large donations. He already claims he is the EJC's largest personal donor, providing the organization with more than \$175,000 annually.

Kantor, 52, made his fortune in the metal business in the first years after the fall of communism, relying largely on connections he made with top government officials under former President Boris Yeltsin. Israeli police recently questioned Kantor in Jerusalem together with several other so-called Russian oligarchs, although an official investigation was not launched.

Kantor and his supporters, mostly delegates from the former Eastern Bloc, counter that Besnainou, who is French, is a Western European on a power trip who is unwilling to recognize what donors want.

"Am I supposed to find donors with mental illnesses? Those are the only ones who would give their money to an organization without knowing from the beginning where their money is going to go," Kantor said in a phone interview following the general assembly.

As for trading his money for influence,

Kantor responded, "Who is the largest donor to the World Jewish Congress? Edgar Bronfman. And he is the president too, right? What do you think would happen if the others at the World Jewish Congress told him to take his money and go to hell?"

Kantor left the meeting early after a new set of bylaws that would have given him oversight of donor money failed to pass among the delegates from the 40 European Jewish community federations the EJC represents.

Despite its internal strife, the organization in the last year displayed newfound success at forging ties with key E.U. commissioners and prime ministers in their lobbying efforts for Jewish and Israeli causes. The 20-year-old EJC, a World Jewish Congress affiliate, was at least partly responsible for helping to stop a major neo-Nazi march in Greece in 2005.

EJC projects for the coming year include establishing a European research and action center on anti-Semitism in Brussels, a colloquium of European intellectuals in Budapest in the spring and an interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews.

The organization, with a proposed budget of roughly \$1.3 million, is still \$475,000 short of the money it needs to fund this year's projects, the exact amount Kantor had been willing to donate, according to Besnainou.

The conflict over Kantor comes just at a time when Besnainou was trying to redefine the EJC and make it more independent of the World Jewish Congress. He has repeatedly stressed that European Jews, not Americans, should be talking to European politicians about Israel.

Instead of elaborating on future projects, however, delegates spent a large portion of the general assembly hashing out the bylaws, a conflict over Kantor's role that began last year after the general assembly elected Besnainou president.

From the start of his term, he made it clear that he disapproved of the move by his predecessor, Italy's Kobi Benatoff, who

rewarded Kantor's generosity to the EJC by making him chairman of the board of governors, a move narrowly approved by delegates.

Kantor earned kudos for spending millions of his own dollars organizing a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, an event attended by 42 heads of state.

"The problem was there were no rules defining Mr. Kantor's post and every functioning organization needs rules," Besnainou said.

Proposed bylaws backed by Besnainou, which made Kantor a fund-raiser who would answer to the president, failed to pass in Vienna. However, a last-minute resolution was passed that gave the EJC executive, not Kantor, the right to appoint the yet-to-exist board of governors.

Stephen Herbits, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress, expressed his annoyance that the dispute, which had also been the main theme of last year's general assembly, was continuing.

"There is this endless discussion of bylaws that takes away from real issues. This has been going on in this organization for years. Meanwhile Europe is facing an entirely new set of challenges — for the first time Europe is playing a decisive role in the Middle East — and this is what the EJC should be focusing on," he said.

Serge Cwajgenbaum, secretary general of the EJC, denied that the dispute over bylaws would harm the EJC's efficacy. "The European Constitution didn't pass but the E.U. is still there, isn't it?"

He acknowledged that the EJC still depends on the WJC for the vast majority of its funding. The whole point of creating a board of governors, really donors, is to help the organization become more financially independent and to raise money at a time when a resurgence of anti-Semitism and the threats of Hamas and Iran require new resources.

In the end, Kantor may still be a key source of funding for the organization.

Last year, he founded the European Jewish Fund with millions of dollars from his own resources.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Kantor compared himself to Edgar Bronfman in explaining why his donations should lead to influence in the EJC.

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Uzbek Jewish leader dies

Jewish officials in the former Soviet Union appealed to Uzbek authorities to investigate the death of the Central Asian country's Jewish leader.

Rabbi Avraham Yagudayev, 33, died Saturday of injuries he received two days earlier in what the authorities have described as a road accident.

Yagudayev was found unconscious and severely injured on a road near his synagogue, but the circumstances of the tragedy remain unknown, local Jewish leaders say.

Yagudayev was a leader of the Bukharian Jewish community of Uzbekistan and chairman of the synagogue in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

The Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union called on the authorities to determine whether Yagudayev was a victim of an anti-Semitic attack.

London's mayor to appeal suspension

London's mayor said he would appeal a suspension he received for comparing a Jewish journalist to a Nazi. Ken Livingstone received a monthlong suspension, which is scheduled to begin Wednesday.

The Adjudication Panel for England, which hears complaints against local officials, found Livingstone guilty last Friday. The three-person panel's ruling comes after Livingstone asked a critical Jewish reporter from London's Evening Standard if he was a "German war criminal" and accused him of acting "like a concentration camp guard."

Livingstone has long courted controversy by censuring Israel and befriending an openly anti-Zionist imam.

Hebrew department opens in Azerbaijan

Baku State University in Azerbaijan opened a Hebrew department. One Azeri student will be sent to Israel to study Hebrew, and will return to teach in the new department.

The president of Baku State University, Abel Maharramov, told Azeri reporters that the department will become a "bridge for the development of Azeri-Jewish cooperation."

Azerbaijan has had diplomatic relations with Israel since the early '90s, but has not yet sent an ambassador to Israel.

Azeri sources have said this is due to the country's complicated geopolitical situation, especially its proximity to Iran and its involvement in international Muslim organizations.

Israel established its embassy in Baku in 1993.

On Monday, the president of Azerbaijan told a group of American Jewish leaders that his country may upgrade its relations with Israel and open a trade mission there.

Arthur Lenk, Israel's ambassador to Baku, told reporters that two Azeri students are already studying in Israel, and the more the two countries know about each other, the wider their cooperation will be.

NORTH AMERICA

Montreal Jews rally for French Jews

Members of Montreal's Jewish community held a vigil to express solidarity with French Jews after the murder of a French Jew.

Sunday's rally came after Ilan Halimi died earlier this month after being tortured.

Youssef Fofana, the alleged leader of a gang suspected of the murder, appeared Monday in a court in the West African country of Ivory Coast, where he fled after the crime was committed.

Citizenship revocation upheld

A U.S. appeals court upheld a ruling revoking the citizenship of a man for his World War II-era activities.

The opinion issued late last week by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit affirms the May 2005 decision against Josias Kumpf, 81, who has admitted to serving at the Sachsenhausen and Trawniki camps during the war. At Trawniki, Kumpf stood guard as mass murders were committed.

Columbia inaugurates Israel institute

Columbia University inaugurated an institute for Israel and Jewish Studies.

The institute, inaugurated Feb. 22, is aimed at serving as a center for teaching about Israel and Jewish studies on the New York City campus.

The establishment of the institute comes after a controversy that centered around claims that some professors made anti-Israel statements in their classrooms, creating an anti-Israel environment on campus.

MIDDLE EAST

Accident at Israeli arms plant injures 12

An accidental explosion at Israel's biggest armaments plants injured 12 workers.

Police blamed Monday's blast at the premises of Rafael, a heavily guarded installation outside Haifa, on a spill of combustible materials. All of the casualties were listed in good condition.

The government-funded Rafael develops advanced weapons systems for Israel's armed forces and for export.

Kosher signs for McDonald's

Two branches of McDonald's in Israel are getting new signs so prospective customers know the outlets are kosher.

Under an initiative championed by the chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, Yisrael Meir Lau, the two branches of the fast-food chain in the city that have rabbinical certification are getting new Hebrew-language signs with "kosher" clearly marked in the national colors of blue and white.

"I feared that tourists or youths from outside Tel Aviv would come for a visit, eat at a kosher branch and assume that all of the McDonald's branches in Israel are kosher," Lau was quoted saying in Yediot Achronot on Monday.

Israeli firm cuts gas supply

An Israeli gas company briefly cut off the Palestinian Authority over an unpaid bill.

Dor Alon cut off fuel pumping to Gaza on Sunday, complaining of \$22 million in arrears. But the Palestinian Authority said Monday that the bill had been paid and fuel supplies resumed. Despite its withdrawal from Gaza last year, Israel remains the chief supplier of fuel and electricity to Palestinians there.

Kadima Party wins school election

Israel's Kadima Party won 36 percent of the vote in a mock election. The Labor Party won 18 percent and the Likud won 12 percent of the votes cast in the election held Monday at Blich High School in Ramat Gan.

The results are in line with polls for Israel's March 28 general election. During the campaign at the school, the Kadima Party claimed that Labor supporters violated regulations by handing out chocolate milk and rolls, Ha'aretz reported.