The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Billionaires Backing 'Jewish Nobel Prize'

By The Moscow Times

June 27, 2012



Mikhail Fridman, one of the billionaire sponosors of the Genesis prize **Andrei Makhonin**

The billionaire founder of one of Russia's largest privately owned investment groups is helping fund a $1 million "Jewish Nobel Prize" together with the Israeli government.

Mikhail Fridman, head of Alfa Group and a partner in Russia's third-largest oil company TNK-BP, will fund the Genesis prize through the Genesis Philanthropy Group, which he co-founded along with a string of other billionaires including TNK-BP executive director German Khan, Bloomberg reported.

The Genesis prize will be awarded for significant achievements in arts, sciences and beyond and will highlight Jews' contribution to global milestones.

The timing of the award is set to coincide with the Passover holiday, a seven- or eight-day festival falling in spring.

"The prize symbolizes Jews' great contribution in human development and will be a source of pride for young Jews around the world," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement, according to the news agency. Netanyahu has been involved in the Genesis project for several years.

The announcement of the prize comes just a day after President Vladimir Putin met with Netanyahu in Jerusalem.

More than 1 million Russian speakers live in Israel after rules prohibiting emigration from the Soviet Union were relaxed.

But Stan Polovets, who also co-founded Genesis, denied the prize has anything to do with cementing political ties between Russia and Israel, instead stressing the involvement of the Israeli government.

"It's only appropriate that the prize to recognize outstanding Jewish achievement is awarded by the head of state of Israel," Polovets said by e-mail, Bloomberg reported.

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