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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Ukraine threatens Jewish Agency

Ukraine threatened to suspend the Jewish Agency for Israel's operations in the former Soviet republic. Under Ukrainian law, a group can operate freely nationwide if it has licensed offices in 13 out of 25 Ukrainian regions.

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A JAFI spokesman in Israel said the agency was planning to comply with the registration request. **[Page 4]**

Ori Orr stands firm

The Labor politician who made offensive remarks concerning Moroccan Jews earlier this week refused to resign his Knesset seat.

Retired Maj. Gen. Ori Orr turned down a request by the leader of his party, Ehud Barak, to leave the Israeli Parliament. Orr was quoted in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* as saying that Moroccan Jews are the "most problematic ethnic group." He added that Moroccan Jews in Israel "have no curiosity to know what's happening" and that they interpret legitimate criticism as ethnically motivated. Orr later apologized for his remarks.

Sakic's wife to be extradited

Argentina agreed to extradite a woman accused of war crimes at a Croatian concentration camp during World War II.

Esperanza Sakic is accused of committing atrocities while a guard in the women's section of the Stara Gradiska camp.

Sakic's husband, Dinko, was extradited to Croatia in June to face charges that he, too, committed atrocities while he was a commander at the Jasenovac camp between 1942 and 1944. An estimated 500,000 Serbs, Jews and Gypsies died at the camp during the war.

Dinko Sakic was extradited in June after an Argentine television expose aired in April disclosed his whereabouts.

Indyk praises Palestinians

A top U.S. official praised the Palestinian Authority for arresting members of Hamas in recent months.

But the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, Martin Indyk, said the Palestinians need to do more to combat terrorism.

PROFILE

Millionaire Vladimir Goussinsky leading revival of Russian Jewry

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — In order to enter Vladimir Goussinsky's spacious office, you must first pass through an airport-style metal detector and pass a security-guard inspection.

On one wall of the office — which features a panoramic view of Moscow and a caged boa constrictor on display in the corner — hangs an award, bearing the face of Lenin, given to the Russian Jewish mogul for winning a table tennis tournament as a child. Next to this award is a thank-you from Russian President Boris Yeltsin for Goussinsky's work in Yeltsin's 1996 re-election campaign, and an honor the U.S. Congress gave Goussinsky for his contribution to the revival of Russian Jewish life.

Like most of Russia's nouveau riche, Goussinsky, a 45-year-old former theatrical director, made his money quickly and mysteriously. From a modest start in 1986 with a small company specializing in metal works, he expanded his holdings to include a bank and, later, a financial-industrial group called Most.

Today, his empire includes an influential television channel, a satellite television network, a radio station and a company that provides programming and finances for some 50 regional television stations throughout Russia. Goussinsky's media empire also includes a leading daily newspaper and a weekly magazine published in cooperation with Newsweek.

His personal wealth is believed to have topped \$1 billion.

"I have a dream," he said in an interview in the 21st-floor office he shares with Moscow's City Hall. "When I am not in this world anymore or am very old, they will remember the name Goussinsky just as they recall the name of the family who started *The New York Times*."

Like many of his fellow moguls, the publicity-shy Goussinsky rarely gives interviews in Russia, and his face — which he says, with a laugh, is the most important part of his Jewishness — is not familiar to most Russians. Contributing to his shadowy image, Goussinsky rides in a bulletproof Mercedes, usually accompanied by bodyguards.

And like many members of Russia's business elite, Goussinsky is involved in politics. Experts credit much of Goussinsky's meteoric financial rise to his close ties with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov — and when it appeared possible that Communist Party candidate Gennadi Zyuganov would defeat Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential election, Goussinsky and six other key financiers banded together to fund Yeltsin's victorious re-election campaign.

But Goussinsky is more than just one of Russia's wealthiest men. As the president of the Russian Jewish Congress, he is the public figurehead of Russian Jewry and the leading Russian sponsor of Jewish communal projects.

Mikhail Chlenov, president of the Va'ad, the Jewish Federation of Russia, said that what Goussinsky has achieved was an impossible dream just a few years ago.

"He has turned Jewish philanthropy into a prestigious, respectable activity," said Chlenov.

Growing up in Moscow, Goussinsky, like most Soviet Jews, knew little about Judaism. During his student years, Goussinsky joined dozens of Jewish youths who flocked to Moscow's Choral Synagogue on Saturdays "to demonstrate they were proud of being Jewish" — but he never went inside to pray. Indeed, anti-Semitism was the main component of his Jewish identity.

"I had to fight often when someone was calling me a Jew-face," Goussinsky

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel to free Arab prisoners?

Israel's public security minister said he supports the idea of freeing some Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture.

Avigdor Kahalani said the prisoners he wanted released do not have "blood on their hands."

About 100 prisoners are being considered for release, according to the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot.

Syria slams Israeli bill

Syria said a bill before the Israeli Knesset that would require a referendum before Israel withdraws from the Golan Heights violates international law. The motion, which passed a preliminary reading in the Knesset last week, must still pass three more votes before it becomes law.

Meanwhile, Syria's new army chief of staff said Israeli leaders are mistaken if they believe that military strength could insure peace. Maj. Gen. Ali Asslan also condemned the growing military alliance between Israel and Turkey and said his country would continue to modernize its armed forces.

Wives support Pollard

The wives of two of Israel's top politicians urged President Clinton to release Jonathan Pollard. Sara Netanyahu and Navah Barak joined wives of other Cabinet ministers in writing a letter asking Washington to release the man jailed for life for spying for Israel.

Jordanian queen optimistic

Jordan's Queen Noor said King Hussein's cancer has "responded extremely well" to the first round of chemotherapy.

Speaking on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America," she said, "The doctors and all of us are very optimistic." King Hussein recently began his treatment for lymphatic cancer at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.



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recalled. Anti-Semitism was the main component of his Jewish identity.

But he also remembers a positive Jewish connection: When he watched the Olympics in the 1970s, he rooted for both the Israeli and Russian teams.

As he made his fortune, Goussinsky did not actively participate in Jewish causes. The bank he founded, Most, has been very involved in philanthropy, but has mainly donated to ballet, theater and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Then, in 1995, Russian Jewish religious leaders asked Goussinsky to support a new group originally created to help Jewish religious institutions survive.

While Goussinsky was considering whether to make a contribution, he was targeted by then-President Boris Yeltsin's security chief and confidant, Alexander Korzhakov, who, reportedly jealous of Goussinsky's success, launched a raid on Goussinsky's offices.

Afraid for his safety, Goussinsky moved his family to London.

It was there, a source close to the Russian Jewish Congress said, that he decided to get involved. In part, he did so because he had become convinced that the international community would care about his safety if he were known for supporting Jewish projects.

Goussinsky also persuaded a number of other wealthy Jews to contribute to the congress as well.

Founded in early 1996, the RJC distributed \$1.3 million in grants to schools, synagogues, social services and cultural projects during its first year. According to Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi and a close friend of Goussinsky, the 1998 budget of the Russian Jewish community will be about \$30 million, and the budget of the RJC will be \$6 million.

Some Jewish activists reproach Goussinsky for the low profile that the RJC, which claims to be strictly non-partisan, has been keeping in the Russian public arena. They also say the congress — which has set up some 50 regional branches — has failed to establish close ties with Jews outside Moscow and St. Petersburg.

"Goussinsky has created a club of Jewish nouveau riche seeking new business connections and influence. They are giving some of their wealth to the community but are not aware of local needs and have little understanding of where their money goes," said one activist, who wished to remain anonymous.

Whatever pushed him into Jewish philanthropy, Goussinsky is no longer using it as a personal shield, says Michael Steiner, the director of the Moscow office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

"Our task is to help people identify themselves as Jews," explained Goussinsky. "If we succeed, the number of Jews living in Russia will increase."

His involvement in Jewish philanthropy has partially backfired. He says some of his rivals have used his involvement in the RJC against him.

"My competitors don't make it a secret that they have been and will be using Jewish themes in attacks on me," he said.

These attacks have intensified since Goussinsky adopted dual citizenship by obtaining an Israeli passport earlier this decade.

Goussinsky, who admits that he hasn't been able to devote much time to Jewish learning, is hoping the congress' largest project to date — a memorial synagogue in Moscow — will help them achieve this goal.

The synagogue, inside the World War II national memorial park on Poklonnaya Gora, is scheduled to open this September next to a Russian Orthodox church and a mosque.

Construction costs, Goussinsky says, will top \$10 million — more than the total cost of RJC's regular projects during the past two years.

With the same optimism and drive that propelled him to the top of Russia's business world, Goussinsky hopes that Jewish life will enjoy enough of a renaissance that it will no longer have to rely on the contributions from abroad.

But even being a Russian media baron and the country's leading Jewish philanthropist does not fully satisfy his ambitions.

Upset with Israel's treatment of Russian immigrants, Goussinsky said he would like to play a more visible role in the Jewish state.

Indeed, he recently outbid cosmetics heir Ronald Lauder to purchase a 25-percent share in Ma'ariv, Israel's leading evening newspaper.

"I am always tempted to interfere," he said. □

JEWISH WORLD

House to vote on sanctions

The U.S. House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on an amendment that would prevent government funds from being used to block states and municipalities from imposing sanctions against Swiss banks. The measure comes in anticipation of a ruling by the World Trade Organization that such sanctions are illegal. As a member of the WTO, the United States would be obligated to compel states and municipalities to abide by the organization's ruling.

Swiss preparing for sanctions

Switzerland's President Flavio Cotti set Sept. 7 to meet with leading Swiss companies to discuss how to react to sanctions being imposed on the Swiss banks.

Meanwhile, Thomas Borer, Switzerland's point man on Holocaust-era restitution issues, criticized the World Jewish Congress and the Simon Wiesenthal Center as impossible to please.

Israel calls for Russian action

Israel said it expects Russia to prevent companies from selling missile technology to Iran. The comments came a day after President Clinton signed an executive order that penalizes seven Russian companies and institutions accused of selling missile technology to Iran.

Firm pressed on compensation

Representatives of former slave laborers for a German chemical firm said they would seek a settlement similar to one reached earlier this month with Volkswagen.

The advocates said they would continue public action against I.G. Farben until the modern-day versions of the company, which produced the Zyklon B used to gas concentration camp victims, agreed to pay compensation.

Christians in Russia cry foul

An evangelical Christian group said local prosecutors in Russia were using a controversial law on religion to shut down the group's activities.

A spokesman for the Word of Life Church said the Magadan district prosecutor had accused the church of using hypnosis to induce hallucinations among worshippers. U.S. officials and human rights groups have criticized the law, which imposes restrictions on religions that have not been operating in Russia for at least 15 years.

Polish leader speaks out

Poland's prime minister criticized a recent attack on a Jewish cemetery near Warsaw. At least 30 Jewish tombstones at the cemetery were defaced last weekend.

Knesset member finds no proof that Falash Mura are persecuted

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Are Ethiopia's Falash Mura being persecuted as Jews by their gentile neighbors? A recent visitor to the African nation, Israeli Knesset member Adisu Massala, says they are not, disputing reports last month from activist groups.

In June, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry charged that the Falash Mura — who consider themselves Jewish and want to immigrate to Israel but are not recognized as Jews by the Israeli government — were being subjected to "pogroms."

After visiting Ethiopia in June and interviewing Falash Mura from 10 villages, leaders of the North American Conference said hundreds of the Falash Mura were being persecuted as Jews, burned out of their homes by their gentile neighbors and screamed at to "go to Israel."

Their reports were backed up by an Israeli activist group called South Wing to Zion, which also sent travelers to the East African nation.

But Massala, an Ethiopian immigrant himself, said upon his return to Jerusalem last week that he found no evidence that Falash Mura were being persecuted as Jews. He called on the Israeli government to concentrate instead on rescuing some 1,000 Ethiopians in the remote Kwara region whose Jewishness is not in dispute.

The Labor Party Knesset member, who was accompanied in Ethiopia by representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Israel's Interior Ministry, said he did see two tukuls, or huts, that had been burned. But he said that the arson appeared to be the result of a quarrel among neighbors.

And when he checked into reports that a girl had been burned alive, he was told by the child's father that the incident happened seven years ago, when she was hit by a shell that fell on the village.

Ami Bergman, the JDC representative who accompanied Massala on the trip, said in a telephone interview from Jerusalem that the delegation had heard conflicting reports about the circumstances of the child's death, with the mother maintaining that she died in late 1996 when their tukul was set on fire.

But Bergman backed up Massala's conclusion about anti-Jewish persecution. "We found there were no pogroms in the villages," he said.

Officials of the JDC and of NACOEJ — the two leading providers of social services to Jews and Falash Mura in Ethiopia — have for weeks been warring over the reality of what is happening there.

The answer to that question is important now, because the Israeli government and the JDC are the process of closing down their operations in Ethiopia — 14 years after the historic Operation Moses rescue mission began.

The last official planeload of Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel at the end of June, and JDC has virtually shut down its compound in Addis Ababa, where thousands of Ethiopians waiting to make aliyah once lived. Currently some 60 to 150 Ethiopians remain in the compound, and they have already been cleared for immigration to Israel.

NACOEJ maintains that it, too, wants to close up shop in Ethiopia, so that it can concentrate on the absorption needs of Ethiopians already in Israel. Its board voted last week to shut down its program as soon as the JDC compound has been emptied of the remaining Falash Mura. But the organization believes that Israel has a moral obligation to assist Falash Mura if they are being persecuted as Jews.

Debate over the extent of trouble in Ethiopia is "happening now because we brought back news from Ethiopia that no one wants to hear," said Barbara Ribakove Gordon, NACOEJ's executive director. "Because if it is true, then people have to do something about it."

"There are Jewish people and Beta Israel in terrible, terrible trouble in Ethiopia," said Ribakove Gordon, using the Hebrew term some Falash Mura have used to describe themselves. "Pretending they are not in trouble is a way to give yourself permission to do nothing about it." □

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

Ukraine gives Jewish Agency deadline to comply with laws

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Ukraine has threatened to suspend the Jewish Agency for Israel's operations in the former Soviet republic.

The move, if implemented, could adversely affect Ukrainian Jews emigrating to Israel.

The Ukrainian Justice Ministry sent a letter to the agency's representative in Kiev earlier this week, charging that some of the agency's offices were operating illegally.

Under Ukrainian law, a group can operate freely nationwide if it has licensed offices in 13 of 25 Ukrainian regions. The agency has licensed offices in only four regions, according to the ministry.

The ministry has given the agency until the end of September to register its other offices. The ministry has also demanded that the agency renew its accreditation.

Jewish Agency officials in Kiev could not be reached for comment, but Yossi Shturm, a JAFI spokesman in Israel, said lawyers in Kiev and Jerusalem were examining the letter and that the agency was planning to comply with the registration request.

"We hope to continue working as usual," he said in a telephone interview.

Much of that activity involves assisting Jews who want to emigrate to Israel. In recent years, Ukraine has accounted for some 60 percent of Jews moving to Israel from all of the former Soviet Union, which is currently the largest supplier of aliyah to the Jewish state. JAFI maintains offices to help prospective emigrants in more than 50 Ukrainian cities.

Ukrainian Jewish officials said the ministry's letter does not mean that the government intends to curb Jewish emigration.

But one Ukrainian Jewish leader said the government's threat could reflect the discontent of the country's authorities with some of the agency's youth programs.

Naaleh, for example, is a program that recruits 15-year-olds and 16-year-olds to finish high school in Israel. Most of the participants move to Israel and adopt Israeli citizenship. Some 7,000 youth from the former Soviet Union are currently enrolled in the program.

"Local officials in several regions have repeatedly expressed indignation that [the agency] in fact recruits teen-agers for emigration under the pretext of cultural work," said one Ukrainian Jewish official who wished to remain anonymous.

In Ukraine, as in most of other states in the former Soviet Union, the Jewish Agency operates in accordance with bilateral agreements that allow it to promote Jewish culture and support Jewish life. Israel and Ukraine also have an agreement on the exchange of students.

An official with the Ukrainian Education Ministry, reached by telephone in Kiev, said the ministry was aware of the difficulties that the agency has in some regions with the Naaleh program.

But the official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, also said that earlier this year authorities in at least two regions had proposed launching criminal investigations into the agency's youth programs.

This is not the first time the agency's activities have drawn the attention of Ukrainian authorities. In 1994, Kiev demanded that the

agency stop its operation. That dispute was settled when then-Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres intervened during a visit to Ukraine.

The latest controversy in Ukraine bears some resemblance to difficulties the Jewish Agency faced two years ago when Russia canceled its accreditation. The conflict was settled after months of negotiations when the agency agreed to set up a new organization, the Jewish Agency in Russia, with Russian citizens among its founders. □

(JTA staff writer Julia Goldman contributed to this report.)

Alleged Hezbollah activist disappears before U.S. trial

By Harry Kirsbaum

Detroit Jewish News

DETROIT (JTA) — A suspected Hezbollah activist who was slated to appear in a U.S. federal court has disappeared.

Fawzi Mustapha Assi may have fled the country, committed suicide or been murdered by Hezbollah, said his attorney, David Steingold, after he failed to arrive at the courthouse Tuesday.

Assi, the first person charged in Detroit under a 1996 federal anti-terrorism statute, is accused of attempting to provide global positioning equipment, night-vision goggles and a thermal-imaging camera to a terrorist organization, trying to export night-vision equipment without a license and exporting thermal-imaging cameras without a license.

If convicted, Assi could face a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison and a \$750,000 fine.

Steingold maintained that the suspect items "were not articles of war." The global-positioning equipment is "one step above what you see in a Cadillac today," he said.

According to an affidavit, Assi was detained at Detroit Metro Airport on July 13, when U.S. Customs agents confiscated the equipment as he prepared to leave for Lebanon.

He was then placed on 24-hour surveillance by the FBI and questioned several more times until his arrest July 23, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Lynn Helland.

Steingold maintained that Assi had been under surveillance since Feb. 2, and that the FBI tapped his home and work phones. After more than 1,300 recorded hours of phone conversations, "not one item suggested he was a member of, or sympathetic to, Hezbollah," Steingold said.

Federal agents said Assi admitted involvement in smuggling during questioning after his arrest and discussed his contacts with the agents. That Assi may have discussed his contacts in Lebanon with federal agents leads his family to believe that he may have been killed, Steingold said.

Assi, 38, immigrated to the United States from Lebanon 20 years ago. A Ford Motor Company engineer for the past 11 years, he is legally divorced but was still living with his wife and three children in a Detroit suburb.

"Every member of his family lives in the United States. He has an outstanding work record, and there's nothing to indicate that he would flee," said Steingold.

On Monday, Assi denied under oath that he had anything to do with Hezbollah, said Steingold. □