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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Kurds storm Israeli consulate

Israel ordered all its diplomatic missions in Europe closed after Kurdish protesters stormed the Israeli Consulate in Berlin. At least three Kurds were killed by Israeli guards at the consulate, and at least 15 others were wounded. The protesters were angered by news reports, vehemently denied by Israel, that Israeli intelligence officials had helped Turkey arrest Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya. [Page 4]

Lautenberg rules out 4th term

Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) announced that he will not seek a fourth term in 2000 due to the heavy fund raising that would be involved. Before his first election to the Senate in 1982, Lautenberg served as national campaign chairman for the United Jewish Appeal. Lautenberg, one of 11 Jewish senators, is known as a strong supporter of Israel, the peace process, gun control and tobacco regulation.

Holocaust museum head named

A search committee formed by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council decided to recommend that Sara Bloomfield be named the next director of the Washington-based Holocaust museum. The full council is expected to approve the decision Friday. Bloomfield has been acting director of the museum since April and a staff member since 1986.

Sharon probed on bribery charges

Israeli police are investigating Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon on charges of bribery. The police are probing allegations that Sharon bribed a former general, Avigdor Ben Gal, to give false testimony in a 1997 libel trial. Sharon lost the suit he brought against the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, which had run an article charging that Sharon had misled the government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin about his plans to launch a full-scale invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

U.S., Palestinian officials confer

U.S. and Palestinian officials met in Washington in an effort to improve the regularity of their contacts. The joint commission was created as part of the framework of the Wye agreement reached last October. The closeness of American ties with the Palestinian Authority are limited by U.S. law because of long-standing concerns about terrorism.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Jewish forces meet in Brussels in effort to forge common agenda

By Douglas Davis

BRUSSELS (JTA) — America met Europe in Brussels this week — and the mix was combustible.

Jewish leaders from 23 European states flocked to the center of the European Union for three days of formal meetings and informal encounters with delegates from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. They also met with European political leaders and NATO officials.

No other single organization, perhaps, could have so galvanized the disparate European communities, each with its own agenda, its own sensitivities, its own imperatives. Conference Chairman Melvin Salberg, acutely sensitive to the perception of this conspicuous display of American Jewish power, was anxious to dispel anxieties of European Jewish leaders that the Presidents Conference was about to muscle in on their territory — or solve all their problems.

"We have come here with an open mind," he said. "We have no agenda other than to dialogue with fellow Jews about issues which affect Jews. We don't have advice or answers. The answers will come from the European communities."

Executive Vice Chairman Malcolm Hoenlein picked up the theme. The meeting, the first by the Presidents Conference in Europe in 27 years, did not presage the establishment of yet another Jewish organization in Europe, he said.

Rather, it was a recognition of the growing importance of the European Union in events affecting the Jewish world and an opportunity for the Americans to "complement existing organizations," to come together and consult, and "to build bonds that will help avert crises in the future."

Jews have power, he said, because the world perceives them to have power: "It's time for us to recognize that history has imposed a responsibility on us — U.S. Jews, European Jews and Israel.

"We don't expect to resolve the issues," he added, "but we do expect to address them."

And address them they did — in both their complexity and diversity.

From Eastern Europe came Jewish leaders beset by problems of desperately scarce resources who seized the opportunity to air some of the most urgent threats to survival.

Those from the wealthier West had different, but no less pressing problems: Islamic extremism, anti-Semitism and terrorism, Europe's pliant relationship with Iran and what they perceive as the European Union's highly partisan approach to Middle East issues and Israel.

Jews from the East expressed concern about welfare for the elderly — double victims who had suffered under the Nazis and then under the communists. They also voiced the need for Jewish day schools for the young and projects to memorialize the Jewish heritage in Europe.

Grigory Krupnikov, who heads the Jewish Cultural Society in Latvia, lamented that before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Latvian Jews were showered with messages of solidarity and pledges of support from Jewish organizations in the West.

But when the Iron Curtain fell, the western voices went strangely silent and aid for needy Jewish pensioners from Jewish organizations in the West now amounts to just \$15 per person per year.

It was not all doom and gloom, however. The president of Poland's Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel planning for more olim

Israel's Interior Ministry announced that it is taking special measures to respond to an anticipated rise in immigration from the former Soviet Union. The ministry said four new centers will be established to review potential immigrants' eligibility.

At the same time, rabbinic courts will speed up the process of verification of Jewish roots from three months to less than a month, the ministry added. The Jewish Agency for Israel recently said Russia's ongoing economic crisis would lead to an increase this year in immigration applications.

Labor Party accused of racism

A Labor Party rally in Israel took an unexpected turn when the party's sole Ethiopian legislator grabbed the microphone and accused the party of racism.

Adisu Massala claimed that ballot tampering from the party's primary earlier in the week had cost him the place on Labor's roster of Knesset candidates that had been reserved for an immigrant representative.

Massala accused Labor officials of selling him out and giving the slot to a representative of the Russian immigrant community, a larger voting bloc than the Ethiopian community.

Labor leader Ehud Barak denied any wrongdoing and ordered a recount of the primary ballots.

Were bodyguards over-cautious?

An Israeli man who tried to shake hands with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a rally was knocked to the ground by a secret service agent.

The guard spotted a rolled newspaper in the man's hand and suspected it concealed a knife.

The premier said he later asked to see the man, "but he was unconscious" and was "being treated and taken away." Witnesses said the man had been kicked repeatedly all over his body by the agent.

communities, Jerzy Kichler, told the delegates that "we have legal problems and budgetary problems, but we have hope."

"A few years ago, we appeared to be heading for destruction, but now the mood is very different," he said. "Today, we are not only concerned about survival but about revival."

Kichler was one of many Eastern and Central European delegates who paid special tribute to the philanthropy of Ronald Lauder, the chairman-designate of the Presidents Conference. Lauder has invested millions in Jewish programs in those regions.

For his part, the president of the Russian Jewish Congress, Vladimir Goussinsky, spoke of the dangers posed by the new anti-Semitism that is emerging from the nationalist and communist movements, coupled with the integration of fascists within the structure of the Communist Party. Still, he said, Jews will remain there.

"Many Jews live in Russia and many will continue to live in Russia," he said. "For them, Russia is the motherland."

From the West, Ignatz Bubis, the head of the German Jewish community and president of the European Jewish Congress, expressed concern about voices, particularly among the intellectuals, that are seeking to close the book on the past and open a new chapter in a new Europe. Enthusiasm for Europe is one thing, he said, "but this should not occur without a memory of the past."

A wider agenda item came from Eldred Tabachnik, who heads the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the umbrella body for Britain's diverse streams of political and religious affiliation.

He was uneasy about the insistence of the European Union — Israel's single-largest trading partner and the Palestinians' single-largest donor — on linking economic cooperation with Israel to progress in the peace process, where "progress" is measured by Israel's willingness to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders.

The 1995 economic accord between Israel and the European Union remains unratified, while Israel's participation in Europe's lucrative \$17 billion, four-year research and development program appears destined for a veto.

"They pay lip-service to Israel's needs for security," he said, "but make few demands on the Palestinians. Until the European Union takes a more even-handed approach, they will lack credibility and simply end up as the bankers of the peace process without the political role they seek."

He also said he found it "dangerous and extraordinary" that the Europeans were prepared to overlook strident opposition to the peace process and sponsorship of terrorism while "cozying up to Iran under the banner of so-called 'constructive engagement.'"

Having aired their problems, fears and concerns, the European Jewish leaders were under no illusion that they would return to their communities any closer to concrete solutions.

And yet, there was a perceptible sense that this week's encounter might be a defining moment in Jewish politics — for both the Americans and the Europeans.

For the Americans, it is clear that the European Union is emerging as a major player on the international stage — not least in the Middle East — and that access and influence would be most effectively achieved via a united Jewish community of Europe.

For the Europeans, it is becoming obvious that the imperative of unity might, after all, outweigh the diversity of their concerns; that their voices would be significantly amplified if they acquired the lobbying skills — and clout — that would flow from close ties to the Americans.

So far, the embryonic Brussels branches of B'nai B'rith, the World Jewish Congress and a home-grown lobby group have had little impact on the European Union. But their time may come — and sooner rather than later.

Whatever direction this week's encounter may take, it has animated and energized many of Europe's Jewish leaders, leaving them a little stunned, and perhaps a little breathless, at the potential of what might be mutually achieved.

They have learned what the Americans already knew: "With the globalization of economics, there is a globalization of politics," Hoenlein had told them, encapsulating both the challenge and the way ahead. "Today, every issue is a world issue." □



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JEWISH WORLD

ADL backs supremacist's rights

The Anti-Defamation League is supporting an avowed white supremacist's attempts to gain a license to practice law. An Illinois state panel that evaluates the "character and fitness" of prospective attorneys denied the license to Matt Hale, the leader of a group called the World Church of the Creator, which advocates racial holy war. The ADL called Hale's views "abhorrent," but said it fears that denying a person the right to practice law because of one's views could set a dangerous precedent.

Supremacist group denounced

U.S. Reps. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) and James Clyburn (D-S.C.) introduced a resolution that denounces the Council of Conservative Citizens as a racist and anti-Semitic organization. The resolution also urges members of Congress to refrain from endorsing the group or its views. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.) came under fire earlier this year when it was disclosed that both had spoken at events held by the group, which openly espouses white supremacist views. Both later distanced themselves from the group.

U.N. spot goes to Israeli

Israel's deputy attorney general won a seat on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The vote that returned Judith Karp to the post she has held since 1995 came after last week's overwhelming General Assembly decision to call for an international meeting on Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israel is excluded from sitting on many U.N. permanent committees because it does not belong to a regional group, but Israelis have been elected to other committees as individuals.

Jewish 'Greens' to meet

The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life is scheduled to host more than 130 Jewish environmentalists from 21 states at its fourth annual Jewish Environmental Leadership Training Institute beginning Friday at a camp near Annapolis, Md.

The group plans to discuss the interconnections between Judaism and ecology before traveling on to Washington for the annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Jewish Web Week set to start

Jewish Web Week99, the second annual celebration of Jewish unity, outreach and culture on the World Wide Web, will be held Feb. 21-26. Details about the various programs Jewish Web Week99 will be showcasing are available at the organizers' Web site: www.jww.org

Thousands could collect from Avis as lawsuit attains class-action status

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A lawsuit accusing Avis Rent-a-Car of denying Jews the benefits of corporate accounts could allow thousands of prospective customers to collect damages.

A federal judge last week granted class-action status to the lawsuit, filed by a Fort Lauderdale man and a Chicago bookstore owner, who claim the nation's second-largest rental car firm deliberately barred Jewish customers from holding accounts and labeled them with the code word "yeshiva." Others were given worthless accounts carrying reduced benefits, the 1997 lawsuit claims.

Avis has said it instituted the policy as a way of flagging unqualified drivers who were trying to circumvent the company's age restrictions. The company said college students were calling and asking for corporate accounts for their yeshiva — a move that would allow drivers younger than 25 to rent cars.

When some of the cars were returned with damage, Avis employees were told to watch out for "yeshivas." Avis said the word yeshiva was not used in a derogatory or discriminatory way, but simply as shorthand for identifying the problem it had encountered.

But the lawsuit alleges that Avis put the yeshiva label on corporate applicants calling from areas known to have heavy Jewish populations or if callers had a name or accent indicating they may be Jewish.

In his order issued last week, U.S. District Judge Alan Gold in Miami said the testimony from former Avis employees showed that "thousands of potential customers" had been turned down after being identified with the code word.

"It is undisputed that Avis employed a 'yeshiva' policy and the 'yeshiva' policy emanated from its World Reservations Center" in Tulsa, Okla., the judge said in opening the way for more than 10,000 Jewish customers of Avis during the mid-1990s to become involved in the suit.

Avis intends to appeal the ruling to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta.

New York Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who initiated an investigation into discriminatory practices by rental car companies in 1997, said he was "gratified that the court found sufficient evidence of a discriminatory Avis policy toward Jewish customers" to permit the case to proceed.

Silver said the assembly's investigation found a pattern of Avis corporate practices that included allegations of preferential rental rates, fuel price gouging and outright refusal to rent. □

U.S. warns Israel to crack down on piracy of music and software

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Clinton administration, under pressure from the high-tech industry, has warned Israel that it must crack down on rampant piracy of music, software and films on disk — or face possible sanctions.

Illegal distribution in Israel of what is known as intellectual property reportedly parallels similar piracy industries in eastern Europe and southeastern Asia.

In 1998, American companies sustained estimated losses of some \$170 million in pirated music alone, Israel Radio reported.

American officials have demanded that the government prioritize the issue through legislation, enforcement and tough punitive measures. U.S. Ambassador Edward Walker said it is in Israel's interest to give top priority to the issue.

One Israeli high-tech executive quoted by the radio estimated that sanctions could deal a serious blow to the local high-tech industry in Israel. He estimated that the software industry in Israel generates some \$2 billion a year, a large portion of which is exported to the United States. □

Kurds storm Israeli consulate after arrest of separatist leader

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israel's growing military ties with Turkey have embroiled the Jewish state in the Kurdish people's 14-year-old separatist struggle against Turkey.

That struggle reached the boiling point Tuesday when Turkey arrested the leader of the Kurdish separatists, Abdullah Ocalan, in Kenya.

Kurdish protesters reacted with rampages throughout Europe, seizing consulates, battling with police and threatening mass suicides.

On Wednesday, Kurds turned their anger on Israel, storming the Israeli consulate in Berlin.

At least three Kurds were killed by Israeli guards at the Berlin consulate, and at least 16 others were wounded, some of them severely.

No Israelis were hurt, according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Israel ordered all its diplomatic missions in Europe closed after the Kurdish assault on its consulate.

Israel's missions in the United States continued to operate normally, but its consulate in New York requested increased security from local authorities, according to a consular official there.

In Berlin, leading Jewish organizations closed their offices after the incident.

The German government said the attack was "shocking" and appealed for calm.

The U.S. State Department, meanwhile, urged Americans traveling abroad to take special precautions.

An Israeli woman who was a relative of an employee at the Berlin consulate was briefly taken hostage, but later released unharmed.

The Kurdish protesters were angered by news reports, vehemently denied by Israel, that Israeli intelligence officials had helped Turkey arrest Ocalan.

The Kurdish separatist leader was flown to Turkey on Tuesday to face trial and a possible death sentence for alleged terrorist activities.

The incident took place on a cold, snowy day in Berlin.

Hours after the shootings took place, all was quiet outside the consulate.

Fresh-falling snow had covered all traces of blood outside the four-story villa that houses the consular offices.

Although the street on which the consulate is located had been closed off, a few curious onlookers could be spotted near the six-foot fence that surrounds the consulate.

A heavy police presence was patrolling the residential, affluent area of southwestern Berlin. Police could also be seen guarding nearby subway stations.

It is "unfortunate" that Israel has been dragged into the situation, said an official with a Jewish organization in Europe.

The official noted that Wednesday's developments were ironic, given Israel's "warm and sympathetic" relationship with Iraqi Kurds.

The official even noted that one of Israel's candidates for prime minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, is of Iraqi Kurdish origin.

But because of Israel's relations with Turkey, there has not been the same relationship with Turkish Kurds, the official said.

In recent years, relations between Israel and Turkey have warmed considerably.

As part of those relations, the two countries have signed military agreements and conducted joint military training exercises.

In Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Israeli guards at the Berlin consulate had fired in self defense when Kurds broke in.

"Israeli security personnel are instructed in such circumstances to act with all force — if necessary also by opening fire in self-defense — and in order to prevent the taking of hostages," Netanyahu told a news conference Wednesday.

"While Israel regrets any loss of life, we are committed to defending Israeli citizens and Israeli missions throughout the world."

Kurds at the scene reportedly claimed that the crowd of 300 demonstrators were proceeding peacefully and were planning to send a delegation inside to meet Israeli officials.

But Netanyahu, describing the incident, said that "at least 10 persons, wielding hammers and bats," broke into the consulate, "passing through the German police responsible for external security."

"Climbing on the barred windows of the first floor of the building, they broke into the second-story windows and entered the consulate."

"Inside the consulate, they tried to seize weapons, resulting in gunfire and the first casualty."

"They attempted to take a woman hostage. She was later released through negotiations conducted by the German police and authorities," Netanyahu said.

He also reiterated that Israel "had no part whatsoever" in the capture of Ocalan.

Israel dispatched security and Foreign Ministry officials to Germany to investigate the incident.

Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani said the response — or lack of one — by German police stationed outside the consulate is one issue that would be investigated.

German police said they were not at the scene at the time of the incident.

They later arrested more than 100 demonstrators.

German officials have been treading carefully since the Kurdish protests erupted Tuesday.

Germany has an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 Kurds and Germans of Kurdish origin living in the country — the largest concentration of Kurds residing in Europe.

Tuesday's protests by the Kurds, which appeared to be a coordinated effort, included demonstrations in London, Paris, Frankfurt, Moscow and Sydney, Australia.

At least three Kurds were seriously injured when they set themselves on fire, including a 17-year-old girl in Germany.

Much of the Kurds' anger was directed against Greece, a traditional enemy of Turkey.

The Greek Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, had been giving Ocalan protection after he was forced to leave Italy last month. Greek officials in Athens and Nairobi denied that they had turned the Kurdish leader over to Turkey. □

(JTA correspondents Regine Wosnitza in Berlin, Deidre Berger in Frankfurt and Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)