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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gore addresses Jewish activists

U.S. Vice President Al Gore called on the Jewish community to support the Clinton administration's plans to save the social security system because "the Torah tells us to honor thy father and mother."

In a warmly received 30-minute speech at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs' annual convention in Washington, Gore placed a heavy emphasis on domestic issues.

He also pledged continued support for an additional \$1.2 billion in aid to Israel to help offset the costs of redeployments from the West Bank called for under the Wye agreement. [Page 3]

Burg to step down early

The chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel was expected to announce that he is stepping down early during a meeting in Jerusalem of the agency's Board of Governors.

Abraham Burg was recently elected to the Labor Party's list of candidates for the May Knesset elections. Burg was originally going to give up the agency post next January, but the calling of early elections necessitated advancing that date.

Legislators lash out at incitement

The Palestinian Authority should reign in incitement against Jews and Israel in their media before the United States sends more aid, several members of Congress said at a Capitol Hill news conference on the eve of a meeting of the U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian committee on incitement.

Rep. Matt Salmon (R-Ariz.), who has authored a resolution opposing a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood that now has 170 co-sponsors, promised to oppose U.S. aid to the Palestinians "unless they clean up their act."

An Israeli member of the anti-incitement committee told supporters that he stayed away from the news conference at the State Department's request.

Kurdish marchers accuse Israel

Thousands of demonstrators marched through the streets of Berlin behind hearses carrying the three people killed when Kurdish protesters stormed the Israeli Consulate there last week.

Many of the marchers chanted, "Israel — Terrorist." [Page 4]

Jewish leader again in spotlight, this time over deal with Serbians

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — A top Jewish organizational leader is back in the glare of the media spotlight after news reports said one of his business deals may have violated U.S. sanctions against Serbia.

Ronald Lauder's plans to provide long-distance telephone service to and from Yugoslavia are under review by the Clinton administration, which in June banned all investment in the Serbian republic of that Balkan nation.

Lauder has strongly denied any wrongdoing, saying that no deal has been concluded and that any agreement would be conditioned upon U.S. government approval.

And, at least at this point, few Jewish organizational leaders say they are concerned that the matter will diminish Lauder's ability to serve effectively as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations — a post he was elected to earlier this month.

The umbrella group of 55 Jewish organizations historically has represented American Jewry to the White House.

Most leaders who were questioned focused on the legal aspects of the issue, rather than the moral implications of doing business with the Serbians, who have been accused of perpetrating atrocities in Bosnia and the Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

The executive vice chairman of the group, Malcolm Hoenlein, defended Lauder and said the issue has "no relevance to the conference."

The current wave of newspaper coverage is the second time this year that Lauder has been the subject of media scrutiny.

His nomination for the conference chairmanship was awash in controversy stirred by U.S. and Israeli news reports suggesting that he had political and financial ties to Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu.

In the end, no proof of such ties was brought forward.

After Lauder successfully defended his record to conference leaders, he was elected head of the group overwhelmingly.

Lauder, who serves as president of the Jewish National Fund, is slated to replace the current chairman of the conference, Melvin Salberg, for a two-year term beginning in June.

Whether the latest news reports occasion a new round of interviews at the conference remains to be seen.

If the news accounts of the deal prove to be true, they raise "serious issues for the community, which we will have to discuss with Ronald Lauder," said Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

But Hoenlein, the conference's executive vice chairman, said the matter had already been clarified.

The New York Times said that the telecommunications deal had been signed in August, two months after President Clinton banned all investment in Serbia, one of two Yugoslav republics.

The sanctions aim to stem the violent repression of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by the government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

A spokesperson for Lauder refuted reports that an agreement had been signed with Telekom Serbia.

"There is no deal in operation between RSL Communications and Serbia. And there will never be any deal over U.S. government objection," the spokesperson wrote in a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Yad Vashem unveils project

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem unveiled its project to computerize millions of names of Holocaust victims.

Some 3 million victims' names are expected to be entered on the massive computer database by March, according to Yad Vashem's director, Avner Shalev.

Jerusalem council fails to meet

The Jerusalem religious council failed to meet for a third consecutive time, after Israel's High Court of Justice ordered it to convene with Conservative and Reform representatives.

The council's fervently Orthodox members have been boycotting the meetings, prompting the council head to cancel the sessions because of a lack of a quorum.

Israeli court ponders extradition

An Israeli court is considering whether to honor a U.S. request to extradite a Chasidic man charged with defrauding U.S. federal and state grant programs out of millions of dollars. Chaim Berger was arrested in Israel at the request of American authorities earlier this month. He was indicted in 1997 along with six other residents of the predominantly Chasidic community of New Square, N.Y., on charges of using the grant moneys for personal purposes. Four of the defendants were convicted recently on fraud charges. Two others remain fugitives.

Ethiopian political party sought

An Ethiopian member of the Israeli Knesset called for the creation of a party to represent his community's interests. Adisu Massala said he no longer supported the idea of having one of the major political parties represent those interests.

Last week, he claimed that the Labor Party had cheated him out of a choice spot on its roster of candidates for the May Knesset elections.

statement responding to JTA's questions.

In a separate statement, the spokesperson said Lauder's company "has essentially applied for permission from the U.S. government to provide the same kind of telecom service in the area already offered by AT&T, MCI Worldcom and others."

But even if Lauder's firm is cleared of any legal violation, there might still be cause for the Conference of Presidents to re-evaluate Lauder's chairmanship, said Rabbi David Saperstein, the executive director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, whose two parent organizations are members of the conference.

The group, Saperstein said, is "left with the moral dilemma of a major leader seeking to engage in activity that so clearly violates the spirit of the strong U.S. action that the Jewish community has sought in the face of repeated violations of human rights."

Lauder has said that he was offered the business venture while visiting Serbia on behalf of the Jewish community there. He said he presented his plans to the State Department for evaluation and is awaiting its reply.

The cosmetics-company heir is heavily invested in the region's media market. RSL Communications, a publicly traded company based in Bermuda, operates in more than 20 countries.

He is also heavily involved in supporting the revival of Jewish life in the region. The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation supports schools, camps and community centers in a dozen countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

His involvement with the Yugoslav Jewish community goes back to the early 1990s.

The New York Times reported that Lauder met with a Milosevic protégé, Zoran Lilic, at a telecommunications conference last year in Belgrade.

A spokesperson for Lauder was quoted as saying the two men discussed the local Jewish community.

"Mr. Lauder meets with local leaders literally everywhere he goes," his spokesperson told JTA. "It would have been very odd indeed if he had not met with a local leader when he was in Belgrade for a regional telecommunications conference. The Times was told about that fact; they chose not to report it."

The Times did report that RSL Communications had signed a separate deal in May to provide international telephone services in the Republic of Srpska, the Serbian-controlled part of Bosnia.

Bosnian Serb leaders were indicted in 1995 by an international tribunal on war crimes charges.

Their political leader, Radovan Karadzic, was charged with genocide and crimes against humanity.

But Lauder's spokesperson warned against equating business negotiations with support for such regimes.

"Providing a dial tone for international calls is fundamentally different from providing bullets for guns," the spokesperson said.

"It's ridiculous to the point of insult to ask whether Ronald Lauder supports the atrocities committed in that blood-soaked land."

The spokesperson pointed out that Lauder, a former ambassador to Austria, had campaigned to expose Austrian Chancellor Kurt Waldheim's Nazi past.

"The times he may have lost business opportunities by standing up for his Jewish heritage in a region where anti-Semitism is well-known, no one wondered darkly about his ability to lead," the spokesperson said in the statement to JTA.

Some Jewish leaders also drew a strong distinction between the legal and moral issues that Lauder's Serbian business deal raises.

"Does Milosevic rise to the level of a Nazi war criminal?" asked Foxman of ADL. "Listen, our secretary of state deals with him."

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently adjourned peace talks between Serbia and the Kosovo Albanians.

Lauder is not "doing anything to relieve guilt or immunize Milosevic from prosecution," said Phil Baum, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

Lauder's only clear obligation as an American Jewish leader, Baum said, is "to stay within the confines of the law." □

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

High court backs deportations

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that federal authorities may deport seven Palestinians and a Kenyan that the government says are linked to a Palestinian terrorist group.

Members of the group, known as the "L.A. 8," whom the government has been trying to deport for 12 years, had argued that they are victims of selective enforcement of U.S. immigration laws, and that they are being persecuted for political beliefs and fund-raising activities that should be protected by free-speech rights.

But in an 8-1 decision that overturned an earlier appeals court ruling, the justices ruled that aliens unlawfully in the United States have no constitutional right to assert selective enforcement as a defense against deportation.

Indyk criticizes Israeli charges

The U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs admonished Israeli officials to stop making unsubstantiated charges that the Palestinian Authority has freed known murderers and terrorists.

In an exchange with Lenny Ben-David, the No. 2 official at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, Martin Indyk told him to "be very careful about making those kinds of charges unless you're on sure ground."

Did Russian call for pogrom?

A hard-line Communist lawmaker who created controversy last fall with repeated anti-Semitic statements has made yet another speech targeting Jews.

This time, his comments prompted some newspaper commentators to say that Albert Makashov is calling for pogroms.

In a speech in a largely Cossack mining town in southern Russia, Makashov said there are "good Jews" and "bad Jews" and that those whom the nationalists consider good "will continue to live," while the bad "will have a hard time."

Greek minister accuses Israel

Greece's justice minister charged during a televised interview that a Greek army major who accompanied Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya is an agent for Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

When asked by a reporter if he could prove the charge, Evangelos Yianopoulos backed off, saying, "Let's wait and see what the investigation will prove."

Numerous political observers subsequently attacked Yianopoulos, saying it was not the first time that he had made an unsubstantiated allegation.

His comment prompted another round of statements from Israeli officials that the Jewish state had nothing to do with Turkey's capture last week of Ocalan.

Umbrella group kills resolution on funding for Jewish education

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A move to call for increased local Jewish spending on Jewish education has collapsed amid concerns over turf.

Delegates at this week's annual conference of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs killed by a wide margin a resolution that would have called on local Jewish community relations councils to convene special task forces with an eye toward urging local federations to increase their allocations to Jewish schools. JCPA is the umbrella group of local Jewish community relations councils and national Jewish groups.

Among the highlights of the 4-day conference was a speech by Vice President Al Gore.

The education resolution, sponsored by Reform, Conservative and Orthodox groups and supported by the JCPA leadership, was intended to put some teeth into JCPA's long-standing policy supporting Jewish education.

But the delegates voted Monday to pull the measure from consideration because of concerns that it was telling local federations what to do with their money.

"There was some concern, especially from those who felt it was not appropriate for one institution to tell another how to spend its money," said Lawrence Rubin, JCPA's executive vice chairman.

Some expressed concern, he said, that such a move would draw the ire of local federations, which fund the local councils.

The issue of Jewish education recently has exploded on the communal scene, with many believing that it should be a given priority status as a way to keep Jews Jewish.

Last year the JCPA in a more general way reaffirmed its support for funding local Jewish day schools and after-school education programs.

This week's decision drew sharp criticism from the Orthodox Union's delegate, who had spearheaded the effort to pass the measure.

"It's extremely disappointing that in this day and age, where we have study after study showing that funding Jewish education is critical for Jewish continuity, that the JCPA shouldn't manage to pass a resolution in support of Jewish schools," said Nathan Diament, director of the Institute for Public Affairs of the Orthodox Union.

The JCPA conference brought delegates from around the country. University students and environmental activists convened for simultaneous gatherings.

In his speech Tuesday night, Gore called on the Jewish community to support the Clinton administration's plans to save social security because "the Torah tells us to honor thy father and mother." In a warmly received, 30-minute speech, Gore placed a heavy emphasis on domestic issues. He also pledged continued support for an additional \$1.2 billion in aid to Israel to help offset the costs of redeployments from the West Bank called for under the Wye agreement.

In other action this week, JCPA:

- called on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to use "creative diplomacy" to resolve the permanent status of Jerusalem. JCPA officials insisted that the group is not calling for a shared Jerusalem and has not weakened its support for a united Jerusalem under Israeli control, as opponents charged during a brief debate on the measure.

Instead, JCPA wants Israel and the Palestinians to simply think creatively as they discuss their concerns, officials said.

- sided with Holocaust survivors who have criticized the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany for representing Holocaust survivors in negotiations with European companies over Holocaust-era assets. The JCPA said "Holocaust survivors must play a direct role" in these efforts.

- voted down a measure calling on Israel to allow relatives of the Falash Mura still in Ethiopia who have family in Israel to emigrate. The Falash Mura are not recognized as Jewish by the government of Israel.

Instead, the group called on Israel to accept or reject their applications in a fair and timely manner. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Kurdish attack at Berlin consulate marks low point in ties with Israel***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Last week's storming of the Israeli consulate in Berlin by Kurdish demonstrators marked a low point in the Jewish state's little-known history of relations with the Kurdish people.

The demonstration — which resulted in the shooting deaths of three protesters by Israeli guards at the consulate — was prompted by Kurdish anger over reports that Israeli intelligence officials had helped Turkey arrest the leader of the Kurdish separatists, Abdullah Ocalan.

Israel has repeatedly denied those reports, as has the United States, which over the weekend acknowledged it played a role in the arrest of Turkey's most-wanted terrorist.

Anger over the killings prompted weekend demonstrations at the Israeli consulates in Berlin and Montreal. In Berlin, the demonstrators shouted, "Israeli murderers." In Montreal, a police officer was seriously wounded and 14 people were arrested when protesters tried to charge the Israeli Consulate. There was another demonstration in Berlin on Wednesday, when thousands of Kurds marched behind the hearses carrying the three victims of last week's shootings. Many marchers chanted "Israel — Terrorist."

In a sign of how seriously they took Kurdish threats of reprisals for the killings at the consulate, Israeli officials have made a point of referring publicly to the many years that Israel maintained friendly relations with the Kurdish people.

Some pointed in particular to a 10-year period when Israel secretly trained and armed Kurdish rebels fighting for independence from Iraq. But Kurds in Turkey, as well as in neighboring Iraq, have still not forgiven Israel for having turned its back on the Iraqi Kurds in the mid-1970s, after a decade in which the Jewish state gave direct support to their cause.

"The Kurds in Turkey appreciated the Israeli alliance with their Iraqi brethren," said Professor Jacques Yakar, an immigrant from Turkey who is a senior lecturer at Tel Aviv University's Archaeology Department.

"They said that what we had started was good, but that we ruined it by stopping the aid."

Some analysts believe that Israel cannot afford to ignore Kurdish sensibilities. There are some 24 million Kurds living in five Middle Eastern countries, none of which has shown a willingness to give them any form of national rights.

The largest Kurdish population — about 13 million — is found in Turkey, followed by 5 million in Iran, 4 million in Iraq, and between 1 million and 2 million in Syria and Armenia.

Iraq's Kurds, under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, approached Israel in the early 1960s, as part of their worldwide effort to recruit support for their ongoing fight with the Iraqi regime then in power.

The first senior Israeli emissary to Iraqi Kurdistan was Dave Kimche, a senior Mossad agent who later became director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry. Kimche visited Kurdistan in May 1965. Upon returning to Israel, he recommended supporting their cause. The ensuing military alliance with the Iraqi Kurds reflected a policy molded by Premier David Ben-Gurion, who sought closer

ties with non-Arab entities in the Middle East — Iran and Turkey in particular — as a counterweight to Israel's ongoing conflict with the Arabs.

For the next 10 years, Israeli delegations trained the Kurdish freedom fighters and extended medical and agricultural assistance.

"This provided us with an important window into a hostile Arab state," said Eliezer Tzafrir, author of the recently published book "Ana Kurdi," which recounts Israel's involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan. "It was an opportunity to keep Iraqi forces busy, away from Israel," Tzafrir said. "It enabled us to smuggle out some 2,000 Jews who still lived in Iraq, and it gave us an opportunity to strengthen ties with the Iran of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi."

Israeli cooperation with Iran was essential, as Tehran — a close ally of Israel during the shah's reign — served as the rear command post of the Israeli operation in Kurdistan.

The Iraqi Kurds won one of their biggest victories over the Iraqis on May 12, 1966, under the command of Tzuri Sagui, a young Israeli paratrooper officer.

After an entire Iraqi brigade was annihilated, Sagui wanted to press on with further offensives against the Iraqis. But Barzani refused, wanting to maintain at least some channel of dialogue with the Iraqi authorities — a decision that perhaps helped extend the Kurdish conflict with Baghdad until the present day.

By March 1975, Israel's involvement with the Iraqi Kurds was over. The shah of Iran had signed an agreement with Saddam Hussein, then vice president of Iraq, under which Tehran withdrew its support from the Kurds in exchange for Baghdad's willingness to define the international border between the two countries.

"The shah had sold the Kurds out, like Chamberlain in Munich," said Tzafrir.

Iran immediately moved its troops out of Iraq — and Israel followed suit.

"We were forced to desert them because we had no other choice," Tzafrir added. "But the Kurds have never forgiven us."

Israel has had no direct involvement in the Kurdish struggle for self-determination since that time.

Despite its increasing military ties with Turkey, where Ocalan led the Kurdistan Workers Party's separatist struggle for the past 14 years, Israel has repeatedly refrained from taking sides — at least publicly.

Which explains why last week's storming of the Berlin consulate came as a particular blow to Israeli officials. Suddenly Israel was being drawn into a conflict that was not theirs — as if they did not have enough troubles of their own in the region.

Suddenly Israel found itself the target of terrorist threats from a new quarter. And it took those threats seriously: In the aftermath of the incident at the consulate — whose precise circumstances are still being disputed — Israel beefed up security at its diplomatic missions, on El Al planes and at Ben-Gurion Airport to prevent possible reprisals by Kurdish militants.

Israel now has a new set of concerns — and there is not even a specific Jewish angle to the Kurdish situation.

The majority of the some 50,000 Jews who had lived in Iraqi Kurdistan left in the early 1950s, after Israel's War of Independence. The remains of that community made aliyah after the 1991 Gulf War. Israel's Kurdish community now numbers almost 200,000. The pride of the community is former Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who was born to Iraqi Kurds and is now seeking to become Israel's next prime minister. □