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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Khatami speaks out on arrests

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said he is personally responsible for the protection of religious minorities in Iran.

Khatami's comments were his first on the case since the Iranian judiciary warned last week that 13 Jews arrested on charges of spying for Israel and the United States could face the death penalty.

Bank fined for anti-Israel boycott

The U.S. Department of Commerce imposed a \$5,000 civil penalty on the New York branch of Deutsche Bank for allegedly complying with a Lebanese boycott of Israel.

The department charged that in a 1998 transaction with Lebanon, Deutsche Bank paid a letter of credit that contained a condition stating that the goods covered contained no Israeli materials.

U.S. provisions prohibit U.S. companies and individuals from complying with unsanctioned boycotts of countries friendly to the United States.

Alleged war criminal leaves U.S.

An alleged Nazi-era war criminal left the United States for his native Lithuania on Sunday to avoid a trial about his wartime activities.

Vincas Valkavickas, 78, is accused of having lied during his 1950 visa application to the United States about his actions during World War II, when he was a member of a Nazi-allied police battalion in Lithuania. He was accused of having participated in a 1941 killing operation during which 3,700 Jews were executed. Valkavickas, 78, is the third alleged war criminal who has left the United States in the past month.

Israeli general could be freed

An Israeli general who has been in jail for an arms scandal involving the United States could be released later this month.

An Israeli army spokesman said Sunday that Rami Dotan, who has served nine years of a 13-year sentence for fraud, bribe-taking and breach of trust, would be freed on June 27 if no other Israeli authority blocks the decision.

In 1997, Israel's High Court of Justice prevented Dotan's release. As part of his plea bargain when he was sentenced, Dotan returned more than \$10 million to Israel's Defense Ministry.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jewish groups help prepare Kosovars to rebuild their lives

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — As NATO's air war against Yugoslavia ends, the American Jewish community's overseas relief agency is taking "a longer look" at providing aid to Kosovar refugees in Albania and Macedonia.

Together with the World ORT Union, a Jewish international training and education agency, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has developed a program to give the refugees training they can use after their return home.

"We feel one of the best things we can give them is the semi-professional skills with which they can do repair work" in their home communities and "perhaps their own homes," said Michael Schneider, executive vice president of the JDC.

The New York-based rescue and relief agency is also enhancing its emergency assistance by opening full-service facilities offering training, education and medical care at sites in Albania and Macedonia.

Since fighting intensified between the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav army and Kosovar Albanian rebels in March 1998 — and NATO forces began bombing in an effort to end Serbian aggression in March 1999 — nearly 1 million refugees have fled the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia.

Of those refugees, some 400,000 arrived in Albania and 247,000 in Macedonia. Most are gathered in refugee camps, but some are being hosted by families.

From the earliest days of the refugee crisis, the JDC has provided emergency supplies, such as food, health care, mattresses, roofing materials, toys and children's activity kits to refugees in the camps.

In May, the JDC opened a full-service center in Elbasan, Albania, and within weeks it will open a medical clinic in Macedonia, which the agency has leased in partnership with the International Rescue Committee.

Through these activities, the JDC can "plant a Jewish flag next to the Saudi Arabian flag, the Turkish flag, the French and Italian flags," said Schneider in a telephone interview with JTA.

"It is our way to show that we know how to treat others when they suffer what we once suffered."

Through an emergency "mailbox" appeal, the JDC has collected \$3.25 million for Kosovar relief. In addition, the JDC, together with a coalition of 42 Jewish organizations, has raised about \$550,000 — from one newspaper advertisement.

"The Jewish community is responding in a very generous way," William Recant, JDC's director of special programs, said in a telephone interview days after he returned from the region.

The JDC works in conjunction with the United Jewish Communities, the organization formed by the merger of the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal. Through its own special funding appeal, the UJC has raised \$1 million for the relief activities of the JDC and the Jewish Agency for Israel, which has provided emergency relief packages and has helped evacuate Yugoslav Jews and Kosovar Albanians to safe havens in Israel and Budapest.

American Jewish groups and local Jewish communities have rallied to action, raising funds, collecting basic supplies such as towels and toothbrushes for refugees, and sending missions to refugee camps.

The American Jewish Committee, for example, has raised \$1.1 million for Kosovar

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel to aid Ethiopian Jews

Outgoing Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon was appointed coordinator of Israeli efforts to bring some 3,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

At a special meeting of ministers, Israel also decided to send food and medical aid to the Jews in the Kwara region. Israel closed down its operations in Ethiopia last year.

Poll: Settlers won't leave

Only 26 percent of Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be willing to move to communities within Israel if peace is reached, according to a poll commissioned by the Israeli group Peace Now. Some 55 percent of the 414 settlers polled said they would not move even if offered money.

Dalai Lama meets chief rabbi

The Dalai Lama met with Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The Tibetan Buddhist leader also met with the head of the Greek Orthodox church, but did not meet with any Muslim leaders.

Arafat makes Kosovo comparison

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat called over the weekend for international intervention if necessary in the Middle East similar to the action that led to the Yugoslav withdrawal from Kosovo.

"The Palestinians hope that all the parties which interfered in the Kosovo crisis would not hesitate to act in a similar manner to put an end to Israeli occupation," Arafat said in a statement.

Israel hits Hezbollah positions

Israel attacked suspected Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon on Sunday night. The attack came after a clash on Saturday between members of the fundamentalist Islamic group and an Israeli para-trooper unit.

relief. In turn, the AJCommittee has donated funds for education and recreational programs for children, who account for roughly half of the refugee population. The group is also supporting the work of other international relief agencies, including a recent gift of \$100,000 to Catholic Relief Services.

Much of the \$850,000 raised by the American Jewish World Service, a non-sectarian relief agency, was used to provide emergency shelter, food, water and sanitation facilities for Kosovar refugees. Now the group is determining how additional funds will be used for their resettlement.

On June 8, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that if peace is secured, 400,000 to 500,000 Kosovar Albanians could return home by the end of September, according to a Reuters report.

Recant said JDC's activities to date have focused on temporary emergency measures, which include the new facilities.

"Everything is being set up with knowledge that the refugees should go home, and we hope they will go home quickly."

Recant said, in the meantime, the JDC's refugee camp in Elbasan will provide for the needs of all the refugees in the area.

Housed in an unused factory, it will offer housing for at least 1,000 people — the first 150 of whom have already arrived — as well as programs for host families, an educational component for children, two health clinics and the vocational training JDC is providing through ORT. The training program will focus on the field of construction: teaching refugees how to rebuild homes, repair roofs and electricity, and make bricks.

Recant said the JDC is reserving funds to continue the programs when the refugees return to Kosovo.

A special envoy to the Balkans from the UNHCR estimated that up to 50 percent of the houses in Kosovo are damaged or destroyed, according to the recent news report.

Recant said the JDC has signed a lease for a clinic in Macedonia, together with the IRC, a leading nonsectarian refugee relief and rescue organization.

Planned as a "full-service" facility, the clinic will serve both Kosovar refugees as well as host families and residents of Chair, a poor neighborhood with a majority Albanian population in the Macedonian capital of Skopje.

The urgency of the refugee situation has forced the JDC to work quickly.

"The whole center in Elbasan was put up in the past three weeks," Recant said.

The lease for the clinic in Macedonia was signed on May 30, and Recant said it should be open by mid-June. Maintaining positive relations with municipalities and governments is crucial to the success of relief efforts, relief officials added.

Schneider explained that the JDC chose Elbasan as the site of its refugee center because the mayor of the town gave his full cooperation to the project, including the offer to help with the financing for the physical facility.

Recant said one of the ancillary results of the fighting in Yugoslavia has been the devastation of local economies in the surrounding countries.

In Macedonia, he said for example, the major trade routes through Serbia into Hungary and Bulgaria have been closed.

For this reason, the JDC has, from the beginning of its work in the Balkans, taken as an imperative the need to purchase emergency goods and services locally whenever possible as part of its work with local communities.

Presently, the JDC has four staff people working in Albania, including a doctor and a social worker.

In addition JDC is working with Israeli medical personnel.

Wherever possible, however, the JDC tries to enlist the services of Albanian nationals and Kosovar refugees in support positions: as teachers, nurses, secretaries and drivers. In Macedonia, this philosophy takes on a deeper significance.

With JDC's assistance, Jews in Skopje received the advice of the Jewish community of Sarajevo in forming La Benevolencija, a nonsectarian aid society.

During the Bosnian civil war from 1992 to 1995, the group served as a key conduit of aid to Jews and non-Jews alike: it ran a clinic, pharmacies, a post office and a soup kitchen throughout the conflict.

La Benevolencija is now an independently registered Macedonian organization, Recant said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Sheinbein delay irks Maryland

Top Maryland prosecutors attacked their Israeli colleagues for delaying this weekend for a second time the arraignment of Samuel Sheinbein, a U.S. teenager who fled to Israel after allegedly committing murder in September 1997.

Douglas Gansler said Israeli prosecutor Hadassah Naor told Maryland officials that she "hasn't really focused on the case" and that "it's not been at the top" of her pile.

Sheinbein is being tried in Israel after the country's Supreme Court accepted his argument that he was a citizen because his father was born in pre-state Palestine. In making this ruling, Israel turned down requests from the state of Maryland that he be tried in the United States.

S.F. group to aid non-Orthodox

The San Francisco Jewish federation recently decided to give up to \$100,000 in grants to the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel.

The move by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco puts it in line with Jewish federations in other major cities, including Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, that already fund the non-Orthodox movements in Israel.

Family feuds over reparations

An Israeli man recently filed a lawsuit in a U.S. court accusing his brother of wrongfully obtaining Holocaust reparations in his name.

But papers filed in the case before the U.S. District Court in Ohio by Sam Feig, who lives in the United States, argue that his brother, David, knew as long ago as 1955 that he was collecting the money in his brother's name from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

High court to hear case

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday agreed to decide the constitutionality of a federal law that permits public schools to lend library books, computers and other instructional items to religious schools.

The justices said they will consider in the court's next term, which begins in October, a decision by a New Orleans-based federal appeals court that struck down the law.

The Clinton administration asked the court to hear an appeal, arguing that the law does not violate the separation of church and state.

Russian conductor dies

A Russian conductor who became a celebrated teacher after his career was thwarted by anti-Semitism died June 6 in St. Petersburg.

Ilya Mushin was 95.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Jackson's appeal for Iranian Jews signals a long way from 'Hymietown'

By Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Those who remember the Rev. Jesse Jackson referring to New York as "Hymietown" in 1984 or embracing Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 1979, taboo at the time, may be surprised to see the African American leader taking up the cause of 13 Iranian Jews facing possible execution on charges of spying for Israel.

But the Jesse Jackson of 1999 looks back on two decades of activism on behalf of the Jewish community, whose leadership last week turned to Jackson for help on behalf of the Iranian Jews.

Jackson himself reminded Jewish leaders of this work before a news conference Sunday in New York, where he reiterated his commitment to lobby the Iranian government for the Jewish prisoners' release.

Introducing Jackson, Ronald Lauder, the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella organization of 55 Jewish groups, highlighted examples of the pro-Jewish advocacy by the Baptist minister and former Democratic presidential candidate.

Jackson stood with Jews in Skokie, Ill., in 1978, when neo-Nazis marched, Lauder said. He went to Geneva to confront Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev about the plight of Soviet Jewry. And when President Ronald Reagan laid a memorial wreath at a SS cemetery in Bitburg, Germany, in 1985, Jackson led a protest at Dachau.

At the Park East Synagogue on Manhattan's Upper East Side, Jackson, the president and founder of the Chicago-based ecumenical Rainbow/PUSH Coalition committed himself to a new interfaith partnership on behalf of the "moral issue" of the Iranian Jews.

Jackson said he had already started to set up a network of contacts to the religious leadership in Iran. Surrounded on the pulpit by the heads of leading Jewish organizations, Jackson said "the world needs to know" of the Iranian Jews' plight.

On Monday, Jackson sought to meet with the Iranian representative to the United Nations as a first step to "mobilize world opinion." But at an ecumenical prayer vigil near the United Nations on Monday, he conceded that the meeting had not yet been arranged, although "we hope that one day it will be granted."

Although there are still disagreements between Jackson and the Jews — including a lingering sense by some that he has failed to sufficiently renounce anti-Semitism and to distance himself from controversial figures such as Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan — there appeared to be no opposition to approaching Jackson on this issue.

Since word of the Iranian arrests reached U.S. shores over two months ago, a task force of American Jewish organizations — working together with the prisoners' relatives living in the United States — has launched a campaign of quiet diplomacy to bring about the release of the prisoners, who were being held without being charged.

Last week, however, the Iranian government announced that the prisoners — including rabbis, religious teachers and community activists aged 16 to 49 — would be tried as Zionist spies.

Espionage is punishable by death in Iran.

At that point, the American relatives of several of the prisoners decided to go public with their appeal for clemency, and Jewish leaders responded.

While the task force continues to pursue formal diplomatic channels, Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, approached Jackson, who has a record of softening hard-line regimes and the proven ability to get media attention.

Although Foxman himself has never shrunk from criticizing Jackson's controversial actions and statements, he said Sunday that opposing Jackson's involvement on the basis of his controversial past would be "unproductive."

"There is no greater commandment" than "saving a Jewish life," Foxman said. In this case, Foxman said, one has to ask, "Who is most capable of saving someone's life?"

Jackson said he plans to make an appeal based on humanitarian and religious rather than political grounds.

"This is a great moment for Iran as it makes a step toward its rightful place in the family of nations," Jackson said. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Retracing 'Freedom Summer': Organizers hope to renew bonds

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — To the outside world, they seemed to be an unlikely trio: a black Catholic from Mississippi and two Jews from New York.

But their fates were drawn together in the summer of 1964 by a common commitment to the struggle for equality and social justice. James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were among hundreds of students who volunteered to work on the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, aiding voter-registration campaigns and desegregation efforts.

They disappeared on June 21 after traveling to Neshoba County, Mississippi, to investigate the burning of a black church. Their disappearance prompted national search and a wave of outrage that helped secure passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Their bodies were found 44 days later buried in an earthen dam, shot and savagely beaten by the Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Thirty-five years after their deaths, civil rights activists are seeking to honor their memories and celebrate the progress that has been made in the struggle for social justice by re-enacting the freedom rides of the early 1960s.

By focusing on the sacrifice blacks and Jews made together to advance the cause of freedom, activists are also hoping to recapture a bit of the spirit of "Freedom Summer" and rebuild the historically strong ties between the two communities.

The commemoration, slated to begin Tuesday, is being organized by the Chaney Goodman Schwerner Unity Coalition, which includes an array of civil rights groups, religious leaders, academics and lawmakers.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and Julian Bond, chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, are serving as co-chairs of the coalition.

In addition to the commemoration, organizers have set a legislative agenda to address issues such as police brutality, sentencing disparity, voter participation, health care, affirmative action, hate crime prevention and the disproportionate use of the death penalty against African Americans. In addition, Jewish and black members of Congress will meet June 16 in Washington, where Reps. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Bob Filner (D-Calif.), both of whom participated in Freedom Summer, will be given awards presented by Carolyn Goodman, the mother of Andrew Goodman, and Ben Chaney, the brother of James Chaney.

That event is being sponsored by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, the NAACP and the World Jewish Congress.

Saperstein said the events are not only intended to remind America of what he called a "moment of extraordinary moral achievement," but to inspire young people to work for social justice and to remind people of the special relationship between the black and Jewish communities.

"We share the bitter history of being the two quintessential victims of Western civilization, the two classic outsiders," said Saperstein, a longtime member of the NAACP's board.

"But over and above that, we share a common set of values and vision about what this country can be that has linked us together at the forefront of so many battles for social justice."

Jay Greenfield, a retired Jewish attorney from New York, was at the forefront of that battle during Freedom Summer.

He sees this month's freedom ride re-enactment as commemorating not only a significant event in American history, but a significant event in American Jewish history in light of the heavy Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement.

Greenfield, now 66, was a young civil rights lawyer who volunteered to work in Louisiana following the disappearance of the workers in 1964. That summer, seeking to integrate a rural Louisiana restaurant, he obtained the first civil injunction in a private case under the Civil Rights Act.

To be sure, bridging the divide that has separated the black and Jewish communities stands as no small task.

Since the peak of the civil rights movement, blacks and Jews have collided about as often as they have cooperated on issues from affirmative action to race-based districting.

Recent years have seen tensions flare between the two communities, most notably during the 1991 riots in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, N.Y., when local African Americans unleashed a wave of violence against Jews after a car accident killed a young African American boy.

Black support for Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who has made anti-Semitic slurs, has also been a source of tension.

While most observers see this month's commemoration as a useful reminder of a time when blacks and Jews worked together to change America, some question whether it will ultimately be anything more than an exercise in nostalgia.

Murray Friedman, the Middle Atlantic states director of the American Jewish Committee and author of "What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance," said anything that brings blacks and Jews together in conversation serves as a positive force.

But he said organizers appeared to be advancing the "old agenda" and that if blacks and Jews are to come together again, it has to be along "lines of newer thought" that address problems with the education system and issues such as the role of faith-based groups in providing social services.

"Freedom Ride 1999," as it has been dubbed, will begin in New York City with an ecumenical service on June 15 and a send-off ceremony hosted by the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust on June 16.

It will include stops at predominantly black universities and sites such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Ala.

Four or five busloads carrying more than 200 people are expected to arrive at Chaney's gravesite in Philadelphia, Miss., on June 21 — 35 years to the day after he and his two companions were murdered. The activists are planning to discuss legislative proposals crafted by the organizing coalition aimed at turning the symbolic journey into a call for concrete action.

A contingent is slated to head to Washington at the conclusion to lobby on the coalition's legislative agenda.

Ben Chaney, the head of the coalition, said galvanizing young people to continue working at the grass-roots level to promote civil rights and black-Jewish understanding remains an overriding goal.

While there may still be strong ties between black and Jewish leaders, "on the basic grass-roots level, young people are overwhelmed with stereotypes about each group," Chaney said, adding, "I think this is an opportunity to create a dialogue for young people on a one-on-one basis." □