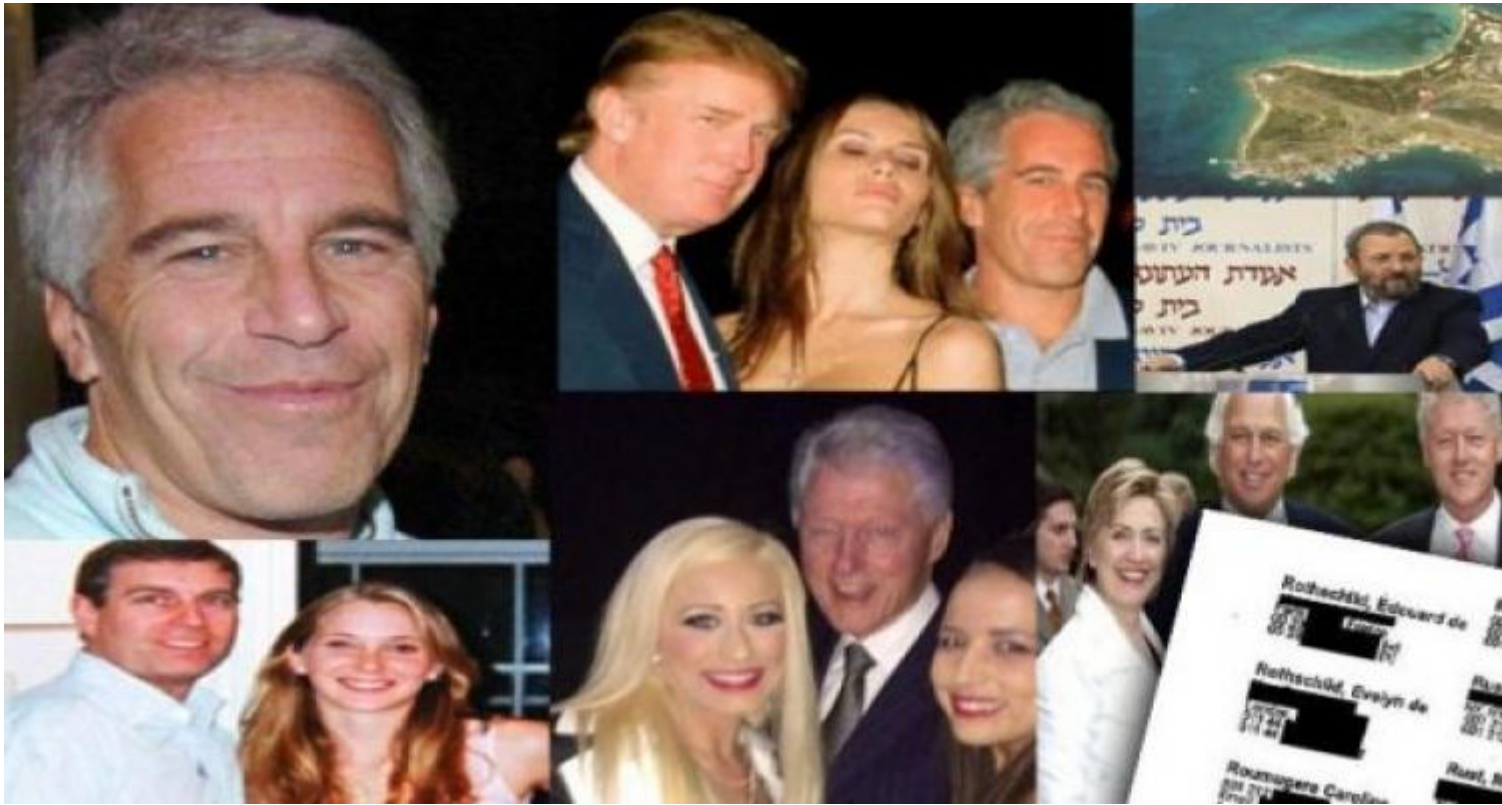


Paris prosecutor opens inquiry into Epstein crimes in France



Paris, August 24 (RHC)-- The chief prosecutor in Paris has opened a preliminary inquiry to determine whether late U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein committed any sex crimes on French territory or against any underage French victims, prosecutor Remy Heitz's office said on Friday.

Epstein was arrested on July 6 in New Jersey after his private jet landed on a flight from Paris, where he had a residence on Avenue Foch, one of the French capital's most exclusive addresses in the 16th District near the Arc de Triomphe.

He pleaded not guilty to U.S. charges of sex trafficking involving dozens of underage girls as young as 14. Epstein died on August 10 in his jail cell in Manhattan at the age of 66. An autopsy report concluded he had hanged himself, although many question whether or not he had "help" killing himself.

The French arm of "Innocence in Danger" -- a movement against sexual abuse of children -- had requested the prosecutor to open a probe against Epstein in July. "Innocence in Danger will reserve for the judicial authority the content of the information and testimonies it has received in recent weeks so as to enable investigators to carry out all investigations necessary to uncover the truth," it said in a statement.

Epstein's death at the federal jail triggered multiple investigations. It prompted U.S. Attorney General William Barr to criticize "serious irregularities" at the facility, and to remove the acting chief of the federal

Bureau of Prisons.

It was revealed by Assistant Attorney General Stephen Boyd that a psychologist at the federal detention center in New York City where Epstein was jailed, had approved his removal from suicide watch before he killed himself, said the U.S. Justice Department, Friday. The letter didn't explain why Epstein had been taken off the watch.

Barr has said that the criminal investigation into any possible co-conspirators of Epstein would continue. Earlier this month, French gender equality minister Marlene Schiappa had called on authorities to open an investigation.

Epstein, a registered sex offender who once socialized with President Donald Trump and former President Bill Clinton along with several other high-ranking U.S. elected officials, pleaded guilty in 2008 to Florida state charges of unlawfully paying a teenage girl for sex. He was sentenced to 13 months in a county jail, a deal widely criticized as too lenient.

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