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EGYPTIAN ENVOY ARRIVES IN ISRAEL, ISRAELI AMBASSADOR LEAVES FOR CAIRO

By Yitzhak Shargil

TEL AVIV, Feb. 24 (JTA) — The first Arab envoy to Israel and the first Israeli envoy to an Arab nation met briefly at Ben Gurion Airport this afternoon and wished each other well on their respective missions. Ambassador Saad Mortada, of Egypt, arrived in a private jet to be greeted by Israeli Ambassador Eliahu Ben-Elissar who took off for Cairo shortly afterward.

The formal exchange of Ambassadors between Israel and Egypt will take place Tuesday. Ben-Elissar will present his credentials to President Anwar Sadat and Mortada will present his to President Yitzhak Navon, the Israeli head of State. Today, the two men shook hands as representatives of the news media watched and spoke of their mutual task to further peace between their countries. They also referred to issues over which Israel and Egypt are in sharp disagreement — Jewish settlements in the occupied territories and the Palestinian problem.

Calls Settlements A Hurdle

Mortada said he was happy to be the emissary of peace from the Egyptian nation to Israel. "We are closing the page of suffering and struggle and opening a new page of peace," he said. However, he foresaw difficulties. He said the settlements on the West Bank are one hurdle. He also said he has come here to start solving the Palestinian issue which, he called the core of the Middle Eastern crisis. Mortada said he would not initiate meetings with West Bank Arabs but would gladly see them if they asked to meet with him.

Ben-Elissar said he was bringing the message of peace to the Egyptian people. "It is a great day for Israel and Egypt, a great contribution to the tranquilization of the region and to universal peace, when the first Egyptian Ambassador comes to Israel and when the first Israeli Ambassador leaves for the Arab Republic of Egypt," he said. Ben-Elissar added, "I do believe that more Arab countries, neighbors of Israel, will join the peace. Peace in the Middle East is inevitable. Peace with Egypt is the first and there will be more to follow."

Ben-Elissar said the settlements are very important to Israel but they should not be regarded as hurdles or a difficulty on the road to a final settlement. "We are divided on this issue and we shall talk about it," he said.

The Egyptian Embassy will occupy the 12th floor of the Tel Aviv Hilton Hotel until more suitable quarters are found. The Israeli Embassy in Cairo, which was opened formally last week, is also located in temporary quarters in the fashionable Doki district. An Israeli team is looking for permanent premises.

REPORTER WHO FILED NUCLEAR STORY LOSES ISRAELI PRESS CREDENTIALS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) — Dan Raviv, the Israeli correspondent for the Columbia Broad-

casting System (CBS) who flew to Rome last week to file a story alleging Israeli nuclear cooperation with South Africa, had his press credentials revoked today. Zeev Hefetz, director of the Government Press Office, took the action on the recommendation of the chief military censor, Col. Yitzhak Shani.

Raviv's story, broadcast by CBS in the United States Thursday night, claimed that Israel and South Africa jointly tested a nuclear device in the South Atlantic last September. This was flatly denied by Israel. "Nonsense, there was nothing of the kind," Defense Minister Ezer Weizman declared Friday. Raviv based his report on an as yet unpublished book written by two Israeli journalists, Eli Techer and Ami Dor-On. The book is currently under examination by the censor because it contains material of a classified nature. Raviv flew to Rome to avoid the Israeli censor to which all security sensitive material must be submitted.

Hefetz informed CBS news chief William Leonard and the Foreign Press Association in Israel of his action. He sent an official letter to CBS Bureau Chief Charles Wolfson requesting that Raviv's press card be returned to the GPO by March 7. It is understood that Raviv is still in Europe. (See related story on Page 2.)

CABINET AGAIN DEFERS DECISION ON HEBRON ISSUE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) — The Cabinet meeting in regular session today, once again postponed a decision on the controversial issue of resettling Jews in Hebron. It was the second time in two weeks that the government avoided acting on its February 10 declaration in principle that Jews have a right to live in that West Bank Arab town.

According to observers here, Premier Menachem Begin prefers to wait until after the exchange of ambassadors with Egypt, scheduled for this Tuesday, before reviving discussion of the matter which has drawn strong criticism from the U.S. and Egypt. The government is under heavy pressure from nationalist and religious militants to take over buildings in Hebron that belonged to Jews more than 50 years ago and prepare them for occupancy by Jewish families from nearby Kiryat Arba.

Opinion in Israel is sharply divided over the wisdom of such a move at this time. Informed sources said that a compromise proposal advanced by Minister-Without-Portfolio Moshe Nissim of Likud's Liberal Party wing, is the course most likely to be favored by Begin and urged by him on his Cabinet colleagues. Nissim suggested that, instead of settling Jewish families in Hebron, the government establish institutions of learning in two of the available buildings there. They would, in effect, be branches of Kiryat Arba's Hesder Yeshiva whose student body is organized on para-military lines and performs guard and patrol duties.

Advocates of that proposal argue that it would implement the principle of a Jewish presence in Hebron without introducing a Jewish residential population in the densely Arab-population town.

Yehoshua Sloma, the 23-year-old yeshiva student who was murdered in Hebron on January 31 was a Hesder student. The murder brought the long-simmering Hebron issue to a boil and prompted the Cabinet's declaration in principle.

BLUM HITS SECURITY COUNCIL FOR CALLING DEBATE ON HEBRON SETTLEMENTS ISSUES

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 24 (JTA) --

Denunciations of Jewish settlements in occupied territories during a United Nations Security Council session Friday drew a comment from Israel's chief delegate Yehuda Blum that whenever tangible progress toward Middle East peace took place, the Arab states rushed to the Security Council for support for their "diversionary and belligerent" goals.

The 15-nation Council was called into session at the request of Jordan and Morocco, which hold the presidency of the Islamic group of countries. Abdellatif Filali, the Moroccan delegate, said "world Zionism" was trying to establish 46 new "settler colonies" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 1983, a policy he said, was accompanied by "ill treatment" of the Arabs of the occupied areas. Hazem Nuseibeh of Jordan charged there had been "an unprecedented and staggering acceleration" of Israel's "colonization" of the territories.

Esmat Abdel Meguid, Egypt's chief delegate, sided with the Arab critics, saying that the settlements issue was of "great concern" to the maintenance of peace and security in the area. He said the "decision" of the Israel government to allow Jews "to settle in Al-Khalil (Hebron)" was viewed by Egypt with "great concern."

Explains Cabinet Stand

In criticizing Arab calls for Security Council sessions, Blum recalled that when President Carter went to Cairo and Jerusalem "to negotiate personally the last delicate stages" of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, "Jordan reacted by staging a debate here." He said that at the opening of the autonomy talks last summer, "the Security Council was mobilized to try to frustrate the peace process" and "this is precisely what is happening now." He described the Israeli Cabinet's stand on Hebron as only a re-statement of Israel's "position of principle that Jews have the right to live in any part of the land of Israel." Blum declared that "this mere reiteration of a position of principle has been turned into a flimsy and dubious excuse to call for an urgent meeting of the Security Council, based on an exclusivist — I dare say racist — proposition."

STUDY OF ALLEGED NUCLEAR BLAST INCONCLUSIVE, WHITE HOUSE SAYS

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- A White House investigation by "outside scientific experts" was unable to reach a conclusion whether an explosion sighted off South Africa's Atlantic coast last Sept. 22 was or was not caused by an atomic bomb, the State Department said Friday.

Department spokesman Tom Reston, said that "there was a panel convened under Dr. Frank Press of outside experts" who "went over every shred of evidence" regarding the explosion and "came to the conclusion they could not come to a conclusion" that a nuclear device had been exploded. Press is scientific advisor to President Carter.

Israel was named in a CBS report Thursday

night as having exploded a small atomic bomb. The report quoted "informed sources in Rome" that the test had been carried out with the "help and co-operation" of South Africa. CBS also said that Israel had called the report "complete nonsense" and quoted Defense Minister Ezer Weizman to that effect. CBS also said South Africa had termed the report ridiculous.

CIA Points To Israel

Reston told reporters Friday when he was asked about the bomb story, "these stories come up from time to time." After reporting what the press panel had concluded, Reston said "in the absence of firm belief that something of such nature occurred, I would only note statements in the past by Israeli officials that they will not be the first to introduce a (nuclear) bomb in the area." Reston added that "part of Frank Press's study group conclusions was that further work had to be done about what happened down there. Those efforts are continuing."

While the White House and the State Department indicated doubts both about the nature of the explosion and its origin, Central Intelligence Agency officials told a key Congressional committee that if there was a test near South Africa last September, Israel was the CIA's leading candidate as the source. In addition, the CIA said, South Africa was its second candidate and that it could be possible such a test could have been a joint undertaking.

ADMINISTRATION VAGUE ON SUPPLY OF ADVANCED JETS TO EGYPT

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Administration sources gave vague and sometimes conflicting indications Friday of the U.S. position toward supplying Egypt with the latest U.S. warplanes, the F-15 and the F-16. In line with the unfolding "Carter Doctrine" for the Middle East which seemingly calls for buildup of military strength in Egypt and Pakistan, the Administration is reported prepared to include both types of warplanes for Egypt but on a schedule of deliveries designed not to upset Israel unduly, but keeping President Anwar Sadat's government satisfied that Egypt will be a prime factor of U.S. strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The State Department spokesman refused to discuss the sale of F-15s to Egypt, pointing out that the U.S. military mission that is now in Israel and was in Cairo earlier this week, has been discussing military matters with the governments. Shortly after the American mission, headed by David McGiffert, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs, left Egypt for Israel, the authoritative Egyptian newspaper, Al-Ahram quoted Egyptian Defense Minister Kamal Hassan Ali as saying that Egypt could choose whatever weapons it wanted from the U.S.

Sees Egypt on "Equal Footing" With Israel

According to Al-Ahram, new U.S. military credits to Egypt would "open the doors" for Egypt to obtain the supersonic combat aircraft and America's best tank the M-68-3. Ali was further quoted in Al-Ahram as saying that the new weaponry "will place Egypt for the first time on an equal footing with Israel, as far as arms are concerned."

The Cairo paper said that President Carter had written Sadat that he was ready to provide Egypt with F-15s and would send it 38 F-16s this year.

SHEKEL REPLACES POUND AS LEGAL TENDER IN ISRAEL; NEW MEASURES AIMED AT TAX DODGERS ANNOUNCED

By David L. ...

Jerusalem, Feb. 24 (JTA) — Israel had a new currency as of this morning, the Shekel, named for the silver coin of the Bible that was last in use some 2000 years ago. The change-over from the Pound, which has been Israel's official currency since the State was founded, was announced by the government Friday. At the same time, the government announced tough new measures to crack down on tax evasion with severe penalties for violators.

Israelis will be required to trade in their Pounds for "Shkalim" at the rate of ten to one, beginning today. The Pound will be phased out over the next few months but will remain legal tender along with the Shekel until then. Arnon Gafni, Governor of the Bank of Israel, told reporters that the government had been preparing for the currency switch for more than two years, on orders given by Premier Menachem Begin shortly after he took office and by the then Finance Minister, Simcha Ehrlich. According to some reports, the government decided to introduce the Shekel sooner than intended because of leaks.

Reaction In The Money Market

The change-over was greeted with some nervousness. There was a significant drop in stock prices today although cost-of-living linked bonds held their ground. Foreign exchange rates rose in response to a surge of demand for foreign currencies. This occurred in Arab villages and East Jerusalem yesterday and in the rest of Israel today. Israeli banks were closed yesterday. The U.S. dollar soared from a rate of IL 38.8-\$1 to IL 42-\$1 and the German mark also rose against the Pound. But the government made it clear that the change of currency was not a new devaluation. The Shekel will be pegged at 3.80-\$1.

The reappearance of the ancient currency, used according to the Bible by the Patriarch Abraham, is intended to have a psychological impact on Israelis who associate the Pound with triple-digit inflation. Hopefully, it will engender a new respect for the national currency. Finance Minister Yigal Hurwitz went on the radio and television Friday to exhort the public to "save more" and "guard the Shekel" which, he promised, will become a strong and stable currency. He also announced the new tax law aimed against tax evaders who he denounced as a "cancer" eating away at the economy. He said the rate of inflation is already declining and the new measures would play a major role in accelerating the decline.

One Hurwitz Measure Rejected

The new tax law will require a one-time declaration of assets by all citizens except low to moderately paid wage-earners. The deadline for filing the declarations is May. Persons who earned less than IL 660,000 during fiscal 1979-80 are exempt but all others will have to fill out detailed forms specifying whatever income sources they have, whether cash, real estate, shares of stock or other securities or property. Hurwitz indicated that his staff will be enlarged by transferring civil servants from other departments to make random examinations of the declarations. Yaacov Neeman, Director General of the Finance Ministry said failure to comply on time could bring

stiff fines of up to IL 25,000 per month and other punitive measures such as barring the violator from traveling abroad.

Hurwitz sustained a setback Friday when the Cabinet, meeting in special session, rejected an even tougher proposal requiring that safe deposit boxes in bank vaults be opened in the presence of an income tax official as a means of tracing large hoards of "black money." But the Cabinet majority, led by Begin, opposed this as an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Hurwitz acknowledged that the currency change-over and the new tax measures were not linked. But he sought to portray them as part of the government's determined effort to "root out this evil plague of black money," meaning money that passes through the economy without being taxed. Hurwitz is also pressing for another tax measure that will require all cash deals above IL 15,000 — or 1500 Shekels — to be reported to the Treasury. Until now, cash transactions have been the principal means of avoiding taxes.

Bank notes presently in circulation will be translated into Shkalim with no change in their appearance. The IL 500 note will become a 50 Shekel note but will continue to bear the portrait of David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister. The IL 50 note will become a five Shekel note with the portrait of Chaim Weizman and Theodor Herzl's portrait will continue to mark the 10 Shekel note, previously IL 100. The long anticipated IL 1000 Pound note bearing the portrait of Revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinski will be issued next fall as a 100 Shekel note, Gafni said. New coins will be minted to replace the current IL 1 and IL .50 coins, but much lighter metal will be used saving the government IL 130 million in the current year, Gafni said.

JOSEPH CUMMINS, ANGLO-JEWISH PUBLISHER, DEAD AT 85

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 24 (JTA) — Joseph Jonah Cummins, editor and publisher of the B'nai B'rith Messenger, an English-Jewish weekly since 1929, died Thursday at the age of 85, after a long illness. Funeral services will be held tomorrow.

Often called the dean of American Jewish publishers, he came to Los Angeles in 1923 and acquired the California Jewish Review which he merged into the B'nai B'rith Messenger in 1929. He expanded the Messenger to be the largest independently-owned Anglo-Jewish newspaper in the U.S. In the 1920s he published Jewish papers simultaneously in Los Angeles, Detroit, Toledo, St. Louis and Kansas City, directing the publications from his office here.

He was believed to have been the first publisher in the U.S. to organize a boycott against Nazi Germany's exported products in 1933. Throughout his career, he managed to practice law. In 1924, at the request of the State Department, he visited a number of Eastern European nations on a special diplomatic mission to investigate reports that conditions of Jews in those countries were deteriorating.

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Israel Government Tourist Office announced that a record 300,000 Americans visited Israel in 1979, a two percent increase over 1978. Tourism Commissioner Israel Zuril said this was significant in view of the overall decline of American-tourist travel last year.

REFORM RABBIS DEMAND RIGHT TO REGISTER MARRIAGES IN ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- The World Union for Progressive Judaism, representing Reform Jewry in the United States and around the world, has asked Religious Affairs Minister Aharon Abu-Hatzeira for recognition of its rabbis, under law, as registrars of marriages. Abu-Hatzeira, a member of the National Religious Party, is expected to reject the request, in which case the Progressive movement said it would appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court.

Marriages and all other Jewish religious functions relating to family life in Israel are the exclusive domain of the Orthodox rabbinate. The Progressives announced their request to the Ministry of Religions and their intention to go to the high court, at the opening here last week of the 21st Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. About 1000 delegates from abroad and from the growing Reform movement in Israel are attending. The conference was preceded by the ordination of the first Israeli Reform rabbi in Israel, Mordechai Rotem, last Tuesday. The movement also plans to found a second kibbutz, following the success of its initial kibbutz, Yehel in the Arava region.

Exceptions To Rabbinate Authority Cited

In its request to Abu-Hatzeira, the Reform movement noted that several bodies other than the Chief Rabbinate of Israel are recognized by law as registrars of marriages. These are, apart from the Christian, Moslem and Druze denominations, the Rabbinical Council of the Agudat Israel — which does not recognize the Chief Rabbinate — and the court of the Eda Haredit in Jerusalem which does not recognize the legitimacy of the State of Israel in many respects.

Another registrar, not within the Chief Rabbinate framework, is Rabbi Menahem Hacohen, a Labor Party MK and rabbi of the moshav movement. The Reform movement has asked that two Reform rabbis be similarly recognized according to regulations that the Minister of Religions is empowered to issue.

"We will never agree to a situation in which the Jewish State, for coalition considerations, gives exclusivity to one stream in Judaism," declared Rabbi Richard Hirsch, Secretary General of the World Union. Hirsch, who has lived in Israel for several years, represents the world Reform movement on the World Zionist Organization Executive. He and other Reform rabbis cited the recent marriage of Karen Dickenstein and Howard Levine, both of Kibbutz Yehel, which was solemnized by a Reform rabbi, Adi Assavi and then duly registered by the Chief Rabbi of Eilat, Moshe Hadaya. They said that later, Hadaya was pressured into announcing that he would not register such marriages in the future.

Certain Marriages Would Be Precluded

For this reason, the Reform leaders explained, they felt they could no longer rely on the good will of the Orthodox registrars and must demand the right for Reform rabbis to become "register authorities." Hirsch and the World Union's legal aide said they would not perform marriages that are not recognized by Israeli law, such as between a Jew and a person of illegitimate birth or between a Jew and a non-Jew.

But they gave no commitment regarding marriages that Orthodox rabbis refuse to perform, such as between a Cohen and a divorced person, but which, if performed abroad, are recognized ex post facto by the Israeli courts.

Hirsch said that the issue of which marriages would be performed could be included in the "dialogue" which he hoped would develop between the Religious Affairs Minister and the Reform movement in connection with its request for recognition. Hirsch maintained that the non-recognition of Reform and Conservative rabbis as marriage registrars is "more than any other problem a factor that injects divisiveness and friction between Israel and world Jewry." He said he "could speak for the Conservative movement too" on this matter.

He asked, how could the State of Israel, which solicited Reform and Conservative Jewry's moral, political and economic support refuse to permit Reform and Conservative rabbis "to function in Israel as they do in every other country?" He said that "several" couples living in Israel are waiting to be married by a Reform rabbi and intend to be married in the next few weeks. Therefore, the Reform movement's demand for recognition is urgent and immediate, he said.

Premier Menachem Begin, who addressed a dinner of the World Union Thursday night, avoided any mention of the marriages issue, which is politically explosive.

JDC ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT TO ASSIST HUNGARIAN JEWS

NEW YORK, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Donald M. Robinson, president of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) announced here that the JDC had recently concluded an agreement with the Hungarian government and the Jewish community of Hungary to provide welfare services for Hungarian Jews. JDC executive vice president, Ralph T. Goldman, who recently returned from Hungary after concluding an agreement with the Secretary of State of the Office of Religious Affairs, Imre Miklos, and representatives of the Central Board of Hungarian Jews, described Hungarian Jewry as "a vital, vibrant Jewish community."

Noting that there are an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 Jews in Hungary today, he said that "JDC is contributing to the establishment of a new Kosher kitchen in Budapest which will provide 350,000 kosher hot meals a year." JDC, he added, "will also be active in the provision of geriatric support services for the elderly members of the population as well as a full range of social welfare concerns."

Eighty percent of Hungarian Jewry lives in Budapest, the capital. The Jewish population of Hungary in the late 1940s was estimated at 800,000. The Central Board of Hungarian Jews supports the only Rabbinical Seminary in Eastern Europe. In making the announcement Robinson said, "we welcome the opportunity to be of help to the Jewish people of Hungary with the cooperation of the government."

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- A group of American labor lawyers and trade union officials from the West Coast wound up a visit to Israel under Israel Bonds auspices over the weekend with a pledge to become "missionaries for Israel" back home. "I return to America with a feeling that it is not just Israel's fight, but our fight," said Al Schultz, Grand Lodge representative of the International Association of Machinists.