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SHAMIR OPTIMISTIC ON FORMING GOVERNMENT BY WEEK'S END

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, saying he is confident he will have a new government put together by the end of this week, is vigorously pursuing his options.

There appear to be only two -- a narrowly based Likud-led coalition with the ultra-Orthodox and extreme right-wing parties, or a broader partnership with Labor.

Both present severe difficulties and pitfalls.

Shamir met Sunday with a delegation of the far right Tehiya Party, led by Professor Yuval Neeman and Geula Cohen.

Meanwhile, Labor and Likud negotiators were meeting secretly in Jerusalem. Moshe Arens and Dan Meridor represented Likud and Moshe Shahal and Haim Bar-Lev reportedly were Labor's spokesmen.

Nothing official emanated from the talks, but according to the latest leaks, Likud is now ready for parity, meaning it and Labor would have the same number of ministers in the next Cabinet.

Likud is also reportedly willing to give Shimon Peres a "senior portfolio."

The Labor Party leader would like to retain the Foreign Ministry, but reportedly would accept the Finance Ministry portfolio.

So far, Likud insists on retaining the Treasury. It is said to be willing to let a Laborite be foreign minister, but not Peres.

Even if ministry jobs can be agreed to, government guidelines would have to be worked out on the issue of an international peace conference, which Labor favors and Likud adamantly opposes.

Labor for its part has refused to commit to serving out the full four-year term of the next government. Likud insists on such a pledge.

Likud liberal Yitzhak Moda'i, who would like to be finance minister again, looked dimly on the chances of Shamir quickly forming a government.

Powerful elements in each party could sabotage an agreement.

Shamir must contend with David Levy and hard-liner Ariel Sharon, both adamant against an alliance with Labor.

Sharon covets the Defense Ministry, which would probably be his in a narrowly based right-wing regime.

In a possible Likud-Labor alliance, Laborite Yitzhak Rabin seems favored by Shamir to remain defense minister.

REFORM, CONSERVATIVE JEWS URGED TO LOBBY ISRAEL ON 'WHO IS A JEW'

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements have launched separate campaigns urging their adherents to petition Israeli leaders not to change the legal definition of who is Jewish.

Such a change is being demanded by Israel's Orthodox political parties as the price of their participation in a coalition government led by either Yitzhak Shamir's Likud or Shimon Peres' Labor Party.

"This is not a minor concern that will be pushed aside or soon forgotten," warned nearly 200 members of the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, meeting this weekend in Atlanta.

The warning was contained in a letter sent by the policy-making body of Reform Judaism's lay membership to Shamir, Peres and President Chaim Herzog.

The letter said any attempt to change Israeli law to invalidate conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis, as the Orthodox demand, is "certain to inflict lasting resentment on Reform and Conservative Jews throughout the world and deep divisions between Israel and the Diaspora."

The UAHC is also urging rabbis at each of its 820-member synagogues to circulate the board's statement in a petition to be sent to the Israeli leaders.

Conservative leaders made a similar call to their members at the recently completed convention of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism in Kiamasha Lake, N.Y.

Their petition declares that the Conservative movement in the United States and Israel "will not stand by while political expediency dismantles the tradition of religious pluralism of our people and the democratic nature of the state of Israel."

The Women's League also called for the establishment of a Conservative political party in Israel to offset the Orthodox bloc's strength.

Leaders of both movements will travel to Israel next Sunday to press their demands.

'WHO IS A JEW' DEBATE CONTINUES AS CJF GENERAL ASSEMBLY CLOSES

By Mark Joffe

NEW ORLEANS, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- When a high-level delegation of Jewish philanthropic leaders arrives in Israel on an emergency mission Monday, it will be carrying a powerful message from North American Jewry.

The message is that any attempt to change the Law of Return through Israel's political process could drive a deep wedge between the Jewish state and the Diaspora.

At stake is not merely the fate of a handful of non-Orthodox converts to Judaism living in Israel, but the unity of the Jewish people as a whole, according to leaders of the Council of Jewish Federations, which concluded its 57th General Assembly here Sunday morning.

The drive by Orthodox parties in Israel to deny automatic citizenship to immigrants converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis preoccupied the General Assembly from its opening plenary on.

Passionate discussions of the issue permeated nearly every session of the assembly, occasionally breaking out into white-hot exchanges.

But Shoshana Cardin, a past president of CJF, said anger is the wrong word to describe the depth of feeling here and in many quarters of the North American Jewish community.

Rather it is "pain and anguish that the unity of the Jewish people, Klal Yisrael, could be destroyed, could be shredded," she said.

Israeli leaders must be aware of the "tremendous, tremendous trauma that will take place if we are not understood."

Cardin, as head of a special CJF task force on the "Who Is a Jew" issue, is leading the high-level delegation of philanthropists arriving in Israel on Monday.

She will be joined by 11 leaders representing the top echelons of CJF, the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the United Israel Appeal in both the United States and Canada.

CJF apparently has scrapped plans to include representatives of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on this particular mission.

But these and other constituencies will be represented on subsequent missions in the future.

Last Friday, four members of Congress joined a delegation to Jerusalem which warned Premier Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres that Jewish support for Israel may decline if the definition of who is Jewish is changed.

Rep. Jim Courter (R-N.J.), one of three non-Jewish New Jersey Republicans who made the trip, told reporters the legislators "don't have the right to intervene in the internal politics of Israel."

Nevertheless, he said, they were asked by their Jewish constituents to warn Israel that a change in the Law of Return "may impact eventually on U.S. legislation, appropriations, support and money" for Israel.

Next Sunday, more than 20 organizations will be represented by a delegation to Israel led by Rabbi Daniel Syme, vice president of Reform Judaism's Union of American Hebrew Organizations, and Ruth Popkin, immediate past president of Hadassah.

Meeting With Shamir

The CJF/UJA leadership mission is to hold a news conference Monday evening in Jerusalem and meet Tuesday morning with Shamir. Shamir also has been invited to make a televised address Tuesday afternoon to Jewish communities across North America, via CJF's satellite network.

Cardin received a telephone call on Shabbat from one of Israel's chief rabbis, inviting the leaders to meet with him. She would not identify which chief rabbi, but said the delegation would try to meet with both of them.

But another Jewish leader's efforts to meet with an influential rabbi on this issue were unsuccessful at last report.

Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher rebbe, reportedly declined a request to meet with National UJA Chairman Morton Kornreich, citing health reasons. Kornreich is said to have rejected offers to meet with top aides to the rebbe.

The Brooklyn-based rebbe, 87, who is now the spiritual mentor of Israel's Agudat Yisrael party which won five seats in the recent elections, has been a driving force behind efforts to amend the Law of Return.

During the General Assembly, some delegates demanded that CJF take an active role in reducing the influence of the Lubavitch movement.

Raymond Epstein, a past CJF president, submitted a resolution Friday calling on "all Jews to cease providing funds to organizations anywhere in the world which support the proposed change in the Law of Return."

It also called on the Jewish Agency, which distributes UJA funds in Israel, to cease funding institutions that support the proposed change.

NEW YORK MEETING SET BETWEEN SUNUNU AND JEWISH LEADERS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Jewish Republican leader Jacob Stein will host a meeting in New York Wednesday between Jewish leaders and President-elect George Bush's choice for chief of staff, New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu.

Stein, a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, will bring together several Jewish leaders, including current members of the Conference of Presidents, to meet the 49-year-old Arab-American.

Sununu's relationship with Jews was badly tarnished by his refusal in 1986 to repudiate, at the behest of the World Zionist Organization-American Section, the 1975 U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism.

After Bush announced Sununu as his choice Thursday, the New Hampshire governor told a news conference that he had not signed the U.N. resolution because he thought it was an "inappropriate" step for a governor.

Nevertheless, he said that he opposed the U.N. resolution. "I have no problem saying that (the resolution) should be repudiated, that we ought to take actions in the U.N. to take that off the rolls, so to speak," Sununu said at the news conference.

Sununu, whose father is Lebanese, is a former member of the National Association of Arab Americans.

DEFENSE IMPORTS DOUBLED IN 1987

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Israel is buying more defense materiel and equipment abroad.

Defense imports nearly doubled in 1987, after a 35 percent decline in 1986, according to figures made public here Friday.

Overall defense expenditures rose to 20 percent of Israel's gross national product in 1987, compared to 16 percent in 1986. They include wages and local expenditures as well as defense imports.

The proportion, however, was lower than the 22 percent of the GNP consumed by defense expenditures in the 1984-85 period, the new Israel Statistical Abstract for 1988 revealed.

ISRAEL TO PLAY HOOPS IN MOSCOW

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- What is probably the biggest breakthrough in Soviet-Israeli relations in more than 20 years will occur in the sports arena.

On January 12, Maccabi Tel Aviv, Israel's champion basketball team, will be in Moscow to play the CSKA, the championship Red Army sports club.

Alexander Portnov, the senior Soviet official in charge of overseas tournaments, on Friday informed the European basketball authorities meeting in Munich that his government no longer objects to Israelis and Soviets playing against each other, in either country.

Since the Soviets broke diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967, their respective teams have met, but always in neutral countries.

The Soviet team will go to Tel Aviv for a March 9 rematch in the Yad Eliahu stadium.

ISRAEL STILL UNSURE WHETHER EGYPT RECOGNIZES PNC DECLARATION

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli officials are trying to deduce whether Egypt has or has not recognized the independent Palestinian state proclaimed by Yasir Arafat last week.

They have not had much help yet from the seemingly contradictory statements coming from Cairo this weekend.

The official Egyptian news agency, MENA, reported Sunday that a "senior official" has recognized the new "state."

But the same news agency, on Saturday, denied its own earlier report that President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt had extended recognition.

According to MENA, the transcription of the president's comments was faulty. The word "recognition" was dropped.

The official quoted Sunday was not identified. Some local reports said it was Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmet Abdel Meguid.

He was quoted as saying, "Egypt blesses this constructive step and hopes that it would serve the cause of peace and stability in the region."

Meguid met Sunday with the Israeli ambassador in Cairo, Shimon Shamir.

Meguid made no reference whatever to recognition of a Palestinian state, although the message conveyed by the envoy made clear Israel's objections to the Palestine National Council's Nov. 15 declaration.

The Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, Mohammad Basyouni, said Egypt's support of the PNC proclamation was better than recognition of a state.

Egypt appears concerned that unequivocal recognition would be seen by Israel as a violation of the Camp David accords, the basis of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979.

Top Israeli officials are withholding comment.

IDF SOLDIERS KILL ONE PALESTINIAN; CLAMPDOWN LIFTED IN TERRITORIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli soldiers killed one Palestinian and wounded another Sunday in Baka el-Khatib village near Tulkarm in the West Bank.

The Israel Defense Force is in the process of easing the iron grip it has held in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the past week. But at least 24 Palestinians were wounded in new clashes Saturday.

Most curfews were lifted, but IDF squads continued to raid Arab villages in a show of force. The result was more bitter confrontations with Palestinian youths.

A firebomb was thrown at an army patrol in downtown Ramallah Sunday but caused no injuries or damage.

The unprecedented IDF presence in the territories since last weekend was meant to discourage public reaction to the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers.

But the underground command directing the Palestinian uprising managed to circulate leaflet number 29 over the weekend, hailing the Palestine National Council proclamation of a Palestinian state.

The leaflets criticized Moslem fundamentalists who opposed the declaration of Palestinian statehood.

Meanwhile, as curfews were lifted, a general strike was called in the West Bank to commemorate a Palestinian, Azzadin Kassam, who was killed in a clash with the British army in 1935.

When the strike ended, business returned to normal and Arab laborers left for their jobs in Israel. But precisely at noon, the strike was on again.

ISRAEL'S POPULATION AT 4.46 MILLION; ARABS STILL GROWING TWICE AS FAST

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- The Arab population in Israel continues to grow at twice the rate of the Jewish population, according to the Statistical Abstract of Israel for 1988.

Unveiled at a news conference here Friday by the government statistician, Professor Moshe Sicron, the abstract estimated the total population of Israel at the beginning of November 1988 at 4.464 million.

There were 3.650 million Jews, comprising 81.8 percent; 631,000 Moslems, or 14.1 percent; nearly 150,000 Christians, at 2.3 percent; and 78,000 Druze, at 1.7 percent.

The Jewish population grew by only 1.5 percent in 1987, compared with 3.3 percent for the Moslem population and 2.8 percent for the Druze. The Christian population also grew by 1.5 percent.

The report predicted that Israel's population would rise to 5.37 million by the year 2000, and top 6 million by 2010.

There were nearly 100,000 births in Israel in 1987, of which about 74,000 were Jewish, slightly lower than in the previous two years.

The Moslem birthrate, though still significantly exceeding Jewish births, has declined dramatically in the last 15 years.

Births in the Jewish population fell to 2.78 per woman compared with an average of 2.85 between 1983 and 1986.

Births among Moslem women in 1987 averaged 4.6, a figure similar to 1986. But it was almost half the eight births per woman 15 years ago.

Jewish immigration was up in 1987 over 1986. A total of 13,000 arrived last year compared with 9,500 the year before.

At the same time, the rate of yerida -- Jewish emigration -- declined. The number of Israelis living abroad for more than one year increased by 9,200 in 1987, compared with 13,900 in 1986.

An additional 1,000 persons were deducted from the population to account for the difference between those departing and returning among potential immigrants and others.

OFEK-1 KEEPS CRUISING EARTH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Ofek-1, the first space satellite launched by Israel, has already exceeded its one-month life expectancy.

Its next stop is a re-entry into the earth's atmosphere and a burnout, but that is not likely before January, according to scientists who monitor the solar energy-driven satellite.

Ofek was lifted into orbit Sept. 19 by an Israeli-made Shavit III rocket. Israel's space research agency attributes its longevity to the accuracy with which it was placed in elliptical orbit around the earth.

ISRAEL DENIES VIOLATIONS OF PALESTINIAN WORKER RIGHTS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli officials denounced as groundless charges that Palestinian Arab workers from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are being discriminated against in Israel.

"Israeli labor laws and collective agreements apply to all workers," whether they are Jews, Israeli Arabs or Palestinians from the territories, said Izhak Barak, legal advisor to the Israel Ministry of Labor And Social Affairs.

Barak, testifying before a U.S. government trade panel, was replying to charges made by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

The Arab committee is seeking to have the U.S. trade representative deny Israeli export products duty-free entry under the 12-year-old Generalized System of Preference program.

That law requires that countries in the program be removed if they violate accepted international labor standards.

The hearing was convened by a 10-member committee, made up of representatives of various U.S. governmental departments. It is not expected to render its decision until April 1.

The committee's decision is relayed to the trade representative for recommendation to the president. The current trade representative, Clayton Yeutter, who scheduled the hearing, is not expected to continue in that post in the Bush administration.

"We are dismayed that this hearing was at all necessary," Meyer Eisenberg, chairman of the national law committee of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, told the committee.

He said the charges were made by groups that want to undermine Israel's economy and erode U.S.-Israeli relations.

Superior Labor Practices

Rudolph Oswald, director of the AFL-CIO's department of economic research, also objected to the hearing, saying Israel's labor practices are better than the other countries on which hearings were held, or even countries, such as Indonesia and Thailand, for which petitions for hearings were denied.

Alfred Moses, a vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said that the rights that Palestinian workers have in Israel should be contrasted with Arab countries which also receive preferential benefits -- such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria -- and where workers have little or no rights to organize or strike.

Judith Chomsky, an ADC lawyer, charged that there was "legalized discrimination" against Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

She said they do not receive the benefits Israelis or non-citizen Jews receive, such as unemployment insurance, child allowance, old age and survivor's benefits, seniority rights and severance pay.

These charges were echoed by Maria Segal of the National Association of Arab Americans, who said Palestinians receive only half the pay of their Jewish counterparts, even though they pay dues to the Histadrut.

But Barak stressed that instead of suffering, Palestinians have had full employment since 1967 and their quality of life has improved.

Daniel Bloch, representing the Histadrut, said

the trade union federation is open to Palestinians, but none have applied except for 15,000 people living in East Jerusalem.

"In the meantime, the Histadrut considers the Palestinian workers as if they were full members and defends their rights on equal footing with its full members," Bloch said.

"Since 1967, the Histadrut has succeeded in obtaining equal salaries, social benefits and working standards for the Palestinian workers."

Charge Union Busting

Mohammed Rashid Al-Reshiq, secretary of an East Jerusalem union of taxi drivers and mechanics, and Khalim Tournia, an official of a Palestinian hotel and restaurant workers union, charged that Israel blocks union organizing and harasses, jails and deports union officials.

But Shalom Harari, an advisor on Arab affairs to the Israel Defense Ministry, said most West Bank unions are political groups affiliated with the major Palestinian terrorist organizations.

He maintained that Israel ignores their political activities, but arrests the union leaders when they are responsible for terrorism and violence.

David Twersky of Women's American ORT, representing the Jewish Labor Committee and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said the ILO has sent fact-finding delegations to the West Bank and Gaza Strip every year since 1978 and found that the Palestinian workers receive all legitimate rights in Israel.

He noted that the ILO has confirmed that since 1967, 15 new unions have been registered in the West Bank and Gaza, joining the 38 already in existence.

U.S. EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER ILO MIDEAST MEDDLING

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Nov. 20 (JTA) -- The United States has expressed concern that the International Labor Organization may once again be politicizing itself with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Paul Hilburn, the American delegate attending the meeting of the ILO's governing body here last week, was dubious about a proposed investigation and report on working conditions in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The proposed investigation came from the committee on discrimination and was adopted at the closing session of the governing body meeting last Friday.

It calls on the ILO director general, Francis Blanchard, to prepare a brief descriptive paper on the situation of workers in those territories.

The report would be presented at the ILO's annual conference to be held next June, along with recommendations.

Hilburn warned the governing body that the ILO, a U.N. agency, had in the past overstepped its bounds and responsibilities by addressing political issues.

He said if that were so with the current proposal, the United States would oppose it.

Rafael Walden, the Israeli consul, said earlier that the proposal could lead to a political debate over the territories which has no part on the ILO's agenda.

The United States walked out of the ILO in 1983 over what it considered politically motivated anti-Israel measures.