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JEWISH AGENCY PLANS PROGRAM TO URGE SOVIET JEWISH ALIYAH

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency adopted a special program Thursday to encourage Soviet Jews in Ladispoli, Italy, to emigrate to Israel.

Some 7,000 Soviet Jewish emigrants are in Ladispoli, awaiting clearance to settle in the United States and other Western countries. Of Jews leaving the Soviet Union over the past year, some 90 percent have chosen to live in countries other than Israel.

Under the new program, Soviet immigrants who now live in Israel will serve as emissaries, or shlichim, and short-term workers in Ladispoli in an attempt to motivate Soviet Jews to identify with Israel and to make aliyah.

The program, to be implemented with the cooperation of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, will focus on educational and cultural activity and on information about absorption opportunities in Israel, including housing and employment.

The noshrim, or drop-out, problem is a source of frustration for Jewish Agency officials. Even though Israel offers safe and immediate haven for Soviet Jews, most emigrants nonetheless wish to enter the United States as refugees.

On Wednesday, Uri Gordon, head of the agency's aliyah department, said the Ladispoli "facility" should be closed down to "stop the embarrassment."

Gordon's comments were based on the hope that the Soviets will change their emigration policy to allow emigrants to apply from the Soviet Union, and not Italy, for entry visas to countries other than Israel.

What the impact of a pro-aliyah educational campaign would be on Soviet Jews is unclear.

Last month, Sylvia Hassenfeld, president of the Joint Distribution Committee, estimated that a pro-aliyah campaign would encourage only an additional 10 percent of Soviet Jewish emigrants to settle in Israel.

In New York, Karl Zukerman, executive vice president of HIAS, said a pro-aliyah effort is important beyond numbers.

"First, it takes away some of the disinformation about Israel that the Soviet Jews have been fed over the years," he said. "In addition, it says to all that world Jewry is deeply committed to Israel and wants Jews to live there."

The Jewish Agency hopes to establish a school for Jewish studies and a clubhouse for dialogue about life in Israel.

"We have an historic opportunity to reach thousands of our Soviet brethren with a positive message about Israel. We must do this efficiently and rapidly," said Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the Agency's Board of Governors.

Kaplan did not provide details of the costs of the new program.

Meanwhile, State of Israel Bonds announced that bond buyers will be asked to buy additional bonds to assist the Israeli government in providing absorption opportunities for Soviet emigrants.

The call is a response to a request by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

CARMELITE NUNS LIVING AT AUSCHWITZ UNLIKELY TO MOVE BY DEADLINE
 By Yossi Lempkowicz

BRUSSELS, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The removal of a Carmelite convent from the grounds of the former Auschwitz death camp appears unlikely by Feb. 22, the target date agreed to two years ago by Jewish representatives and officials of the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Albert Decourtray of France, who headed a delegation of four cardinals which signed the agreement with a Jewish delegation in Geneva in 1987, has apologized for the delay and asked for forbearance.

But Theo Klein, who led the Jewish delegation, told a news conference here Thursday that "We Jews consider that Jewish-Catholic relations will be suspended until the Carmelites leave the place they are occupying in the former concentration camp, which is considered by Jews as the symbolic place of the Shoah," the Holocaust.

Klein, who is president of CRIF, the representative body of major French Jewish organizations, said "the Jewish delegation will meet within the next few days to study the situation and make its response known."

Klein displayed a letter he received from Decourtray several days ago, in which the cardinal cited administrative difficulties in Poland and problems linked to Catholic public opinion in that country as reasons why the move could not be implemented on time.

The occupants of the convent were to have transferred to an interreligious information, study and education center near Auschwitz, but not on its grounds.

The Carmelites have agreed to move, but the new site apparently is not ready, according to the cardinal.

His letter also stressed a new element, that the superiors of the Carmelite order in Rome have affirmed in writing that the removal would have to take place in conformity with the agreement.

'Necessary, But Not Sufficient'

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of inter-religious affairs of the American Jewish Committee in New York, said the statement that the nuns will move was "necessary, but not sufficient. There must be a final time for them to leave."

Rudin chairs the International Jewish Committee on Religious Consultations which deals with Vatican-Jewish relations.

Its members met in New York Thursday to discuss Decourtray's letter and the affirmation it contained from Rome.

The Catholic delegation which went to Geneva in 1987 has asked for more time to build the new center. It has proposed an interim installation to serve the Carmelite nuns temporarily until their new convent is built.

The delays stemmed from relations between church and state in Poland, said Klein.

"What we want now is to get out as quickly as possible from this deadlock which is blocking relations between Jews and Catholics," he said.

Klein maintained the issue is as important for the church as for the Jews. "It is the church's credibility which is concerned," he said.

WORLDWIDE PANEL TO DETERMINE FINAL FATE OF WALLENBERG

By Michael Solomon

MONTREAL, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- A five-nation commission that will try once and for all to determine the fate of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg expects to present its findings next May to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, human rights activist Samuel Pizar said at a news conference here Thursday.

The commission consists of Sweden and the three countries that have awarded Wallenberg honorary citizenship -- the United States, Canada and Israel.

In addition, Mikhail Chlenov, president of the Jewish Cultural Association in Moscow, will assist the commission with his historian's expertise.

According to Pizar, an international lawyer who is an adviser to French President Francois Mitterrand, three Western European leaders, Mitterrand, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany, have each told Gorbachev they personally want to see the mystery surrounding Wallenberg solved.

Gorbachev responded by giving orders to have light cast on the subject, Pizar said.

Pizar, an American Jew who was also an adviser to the late President John Kennedy, will represent the United States on the Wallenberg investigation commission.

Irwin Cotler, a professor of law at McGill University in Montreal, will represent Canada, and Gideon Hausner, the Israeli lawyer who prosecuted Adolf Eichmann, will represent Israel.

Wallenberg is credited with saving some 100,000 Jews in Hungary from deportation to Nazi death camps in the final year of World War II, by sheltering them in the Swedish legation in Budapest and providing Swedish documents.

He was arrested by the Red Army when it entered Budapest in 1945 and has not been heard from since.

The Russians first disclaimed knowledge of his whereabouts. Later they said he died in a Soviet prison in 1947.

But persistent reports over the years from reliable sources said Wallenberg had been seen alive. His family and others believe he is.

VANESSA REDGRAVE TO SPONSOR ANTI-ZIONIST YIDDISH THEATER

By Susan Blinbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Vanessa Redgrave, the British actress whose vehement pro-Palestinian views have made her a figure of controversy, is bringing to London a production of a Moscow-based Yiddish theater company associated with the government-sanctioned Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public.

Redgrave will serve as narrator for the Shalom Theater when it is presented next week in London, as part of a season of Russian plays at the West End's Lyric Theater, according to the London Jewish Tribune.

Shalom and a second Russian theater group are both making their first visits outside the Soviet Union.

The Shalom Theater is rival to the Jewish Musical Theater of Mikhail Gluz, who is now director of the newly-opened Solomon Mikhoels Jewish Cultural Center.

Gluz's theater is expected to provide Jewish-themed plays that, unlike the Shalom productions, are accepted by the Soviet Jewish activist community.

Among recent Western observers of Shalom's production were Rabbis Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. They had time to attend the last scene of the play during a visit to Moscow this past week.

Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center, described the Shalom's Yiddish as "poor" and the play as lacking in Jewish context.

Cooper said he "used the opportunity of glasnost to tell the officials of the Shalom Theater what to expect from world Jewry when they find out that Vanessa Redgrave is bringing this play to the West."

ISRAEL'S GENEVA AMBASSADOR ASKS FOR HELP ON SYRIAN JEWS

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The names of six Jews, arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado in Syria, were read out loud here Wednesday to the U.N. Human Rights Commission by Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Pinhas Eliav.

The envoy named the prisoners and asked for international help to get them released in the course of a detailed report on the conditions endured by Syria's 4,000 Jews.

Eliav was speaking at a session on "protection of minorities," part of the commission's annual conference on human rights.

It was one of the few presentations by Israel, which has maintained a low profile at this year's conference even though it has been mercilessly pilloried by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab states.

"This small group is still subject to harassment and discrimination and in dire need of protection as a minority," Eliav said with respect to Syrian Jews.

He said they are under constant surveillance and intimidation by the Syrian intelligence service, "Mukhabarat."

Their agents are present at all meetings between Jews and foreigners, Eliav said.

"Jews are not allowed to leave the country and, if they are permitted to leave for medical treatment, they must deposit financial guarantees and leave their families behind as hostages," according to the Israeli envoy.

There is also the question of separation of families -- parents from children, including very small children, brothers from sisters and husbands from wives.

"The extent of the suffering caused by this inhumane state of affairs is self-evident," Eliav said.

Another problem he mentioned was the dearth of Jewish males of marriageable age.

Hundreds of Jewish women cannot find Jewish husbands in Syria, and, with very few exceptions, are not permitted to leave the country to find a matrimonial partner, he said.

Eliav asked the Human Rights Commission to intervene on behalf of the Jewish prisoners in Syria who have not been allowed family visits.

They are Zaki Mamrout, 36, Salim Soued, 50, and Eli Soued, 31, arrested in November 1987; Alber Lahan, 43, and his son, Yeheya Lahan, 19, arrested in December 1987; and Jack Lalo, 50, arrested in July 1988.

FAISAL HUSSEINI: FROM PRISONER TO NEGOTIATING PARTNER IN 2 WEEKS

By Gili Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Despite serving two six-month terms in administrative detention within the last 13 months, Palestinian activist Faisal Husseini has become the favorite negotiating partner of the left-leaning wing of the Israeli political and military establishments.

Husseini attended meetings with key Israeli figures Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and still another meeting is scheduled for Thursday night.

Observers question whether these developments will condition Israelis to accept as "normal" a dialogue with an avowed supporter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, or, as many fear, further aggravate the deep divisions in the country.

Vice Premier Shimon Peres, the Labor Party leader, told reporters Thursday that he approved wholeheartedly of the meetings.

Though he said he hadn't known of them in advance, Peres said he thought them worthwhile. "Let them meet and talk, by all means," Peres said.

But he distanced himself personally from the dialogue. "I myself am preoccupied with Treasury affairs," said Peres, who is finance minister.

While Likud Knesset members were furious and the far right-wing Tehiya Party apoplectic, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir remained calm and seemed studiously bored by the events.

His aides dismissed the meetings as "a pathetic pilgrimage" that would "lead nowhere. No good can come of them."

But others in Likud, including Binyamin Begin, son of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, warned that the meetings furthered the "legitimization of the PLO, especially abroad."

They charged that the Labor Party as a whole was swinging to the left.

Urges Prosecution

Rabbi Eliezer Waldman of Tehiya demanded that the Knesset members who met with Husseini be stripped of their parliamentary immunity and prosecuted for violating the law banning contacts with the PLO.

Likud and the far right-wing are not alone in denouncing the private meetings key Labor and Mapam politicians and others had with Husseini this week.

They were reviled by rightist elements in the Labor Party as well.

Labor Knesset Member Micha Goldman argued that the meetings undermined the national consensus, setting back rather than advancing state efforts to engage in dialogue with the Palestinians.

Husseini, along with other prominent Palestinians, met for two hours Tuesday night with the Labor Party's Knesset whip, Haim Ramon, Laborite Haim Zadok, a former justice minister, and two Mapam leaders, Knesset Member Yair Tzaban and former Knesset Member Elazar Granot.

Wednesday night, Husseini met with another group of influential Israelis associated with the leftist Shiluv circle of the Labor Party.

They included Deputy Finance Minister Yossi Beilin, a close associate of Peres, and Labor Knesset Member Avrum Burg.

Husseini was accompanied by Palestinian journalists Ziyad Abu Ziyad and Mamduh Alakat. His Israeli political circle may expand fur-

ther at a scheduled Thursday night meeting with Center-Shinui Party activists headed by Professor Amnon Rubinstein, Knesset Member Avraham Poraz and former Likud-Herut activist Moshe Amirav, who was drummed out of the party for advocating a dialogue with the PLO.

Two former Israel Defense Force chiefs of military intelligence, Gen. Aharon Yariv and Gen. Shlomo Gazit, are expected to join in the dialogue.

Detainees may be held for up to six months at a time without trial or charges.

The question has been raised why Husseini is now perceived by many high-ranking Israelis to be more a potential negotiating partner for peace than a security risk.

Burg, who participated in Wednesday night's meeting with the 48-year-old Husseini, said the relationship began when the Palestinian was visited in prison by Shmuel Goren, coordinator of government affairs in the administered territories, shortly before his release.

Goren is said to have acted on behalf of Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Burg said the expanding dialogue with Husseini was partly intended to get Israelis used to the idea of talking with Palestinian activists and partly to counter the PLO's peace offensive, which has been notably effective abroad.

RABIN SAYS INTIFADA RANKS ONLY THIRD IN THREAT TO ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Despite all the attention and headlines the intifada has generated, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin still rates the Palestinian uprising third among the threats to Israel's security.

The first and most serious threat is posed by the Arab armies, and the second is terrorism, the defense minister told volunteer workers for the Soldiers Welfare Association.

But according to Rabin, all three have the same goal -- the elimination of Israel.

He said three Arab states -- Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia -- possess surface-to-surface missiles that can reach Tel Aviv from their own territory, with warheads containing between a half-ton and a ton of explosives.

He said the Arab states are investing \$30 billion to \$60 billion a year to maintain and equip their armies, and, in addition, have weapons such as poison gas, which they did not have at the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

"We'd better have the answers to everything they've got, even if the defense budget keeps getting cut without regard to the tasks incumbent on the IDF," Rabin said grimly.

He said the uprising is unlike confrontations between students and police in Paris or Seoul.

"The Palestinians are not fighting for human rights or more freedom as individuals. Their aims are the same as those of the Arab armies and the terrorist organizations," he said.

"Whether you want Greater Israel or territorial compromise, we just can't fold up and go away because the situation is unpleasant," Rabin added.

He called for less criticism of the Israel Defense Force and more activity for soldiers' welfare to help the troops deal with the tensions and demands of their active or reserve duties.

The Soldiers Welfare Association runs IDF canteens and recreation centers.

SHEVARDNADZE PLEDGES 'NEW IDEAS' DURING 10-DAY TOUR OF MIDEAST By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to Syria this weekend is expected to highlight differences between Soviet and Syrian attitudes toward peace negotiations with Israel, Bush administration officials said Wednesday.

Syria is the first stop on Shevardnadze's 10-day tour of the Middle East, beginning Friday. It is the first by a Soviet foreign minister in close to 10 years, and will also include stops in Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Iran, Soviet Embassy spokesman Boris Malakhov said.

Israel is not on the itinerary, as it has not been for top Soviet officials since the Kremlin severed full ties in 1967.

The trip is apparently long overdue, and may be timed to get a head start on the Bush administration in regional diplomacy.

According to one administration official, Syria wants Israel to return the Golan Heights as part of a regional peace settlement, and not in direct Syrian-Israeli negotiations, one official said.

By contrast, the Soviets may be more willing than the Syrians to support an international peace conference allowing for direct negotiations, the official said. As a result, Syria fears being isolated by a more flexible Soviet negotiating stance.

In addition, there has been a recent shake-up in relations between the two countries with the assignment of a new Soviet ambassador to Damascus, Aleksandr Zotov.

Zotov, who had been part of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's Middle East policy team, presented his credentials to President Hafez Assad this week. His assignment may signal new flexibility in the Soviet position.

A second administration source said the Syrian "rejectionist front is chipping away, as the Israelis are apparently taking a moderate stand in line with Jordan and Egypt."

No Dramatic Effects

Shevardnadze has said he will carry "new ideas" with him on his Middle East swing. But he does not expect any "dramatic effects," Tass reported Wednesday.

The new ideas for promoting peace, the Soviet news agency quoted Shevardnadze as saying, are "intended for the near and more remote perspective."

But according to the second administration source, Shevardnadze "has not shared details" of his new ideas with the administration.

Saudi Arabia is also not on Shevardnadze's itinerary, apparently because they do not have full diplomatic relations with the Soviets.

Curiously absent as well are visits to various Persian Gulf states with whom relations were recently restored, including the United Arab Emirates.

Besides paying "due attention" to improving relations with the five countries, Shevardnadze told Tass he hopes to work toward a "lasting peace for the benefit of the peoples in the Near and Middle East.

"Of course, the nature of these conflicts is such that no dramatic effects can be expected in the course of the 10-day visit," Shevardnadze said. "But nonetheless, we are convinced that it is time for more vigorous actions."

COST OF LIVING JUMPS 4.7 PERCENT IN JANUARY By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The cost-of-living index soared by a hefty 4.7 percent in January, one of the highest monthly increases in the past three years.

While not unexpected, the figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday touched off partisan recriminations.

Two former Likud finance ministers, Yitzhak Moda'i and Moshe Nissim, blamed the inflationary surge on the "inept devaluation" of the shekel by incumbent Finance Minister Shimon Peres, a Laborite.

Devaluation was one of the first orders of business when Peres took office in December, and economic and industrial experts appear to be not disappointed with the results.

But it was not the only factor in the rise of the January price index.

Food prices rose about 10 percent because government price subsidies were slashed for budgetary reasons.

But the prices of fruit and vegetables were up because of heavy rain and wind storms and freezing temperatures.

DIRECTOR GENERAL QUILTS TREASURY By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Victor Medina resigned Thursday as director general of the Treasury. He gave no reason for quitting, but apparently was angered over being left out of the decision-making process by Finance Minister Shimon Peres.

The first signs of friction developed shortly after Peres took office last Dec. 22, when he ordered a 5 percent devaluation of the shekel without consulting Medina.

The director general was not consulted when the government adopted the new national budget nor during the Treasury's recent cost-of-living negotiations with the Histadrut.

Medina, a highly respected civil servant, formerly headed the monetary department at the Bank of Israel, Israel's central bank.

He left that post over differences with Bank of Israel Governor Michael Bruno.

JAPAN ENVOY PRESENTS CREDENTIALS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Japan's new ambassador to Israel presented his credentials to President Chaim Herzog on Wednesday and expressed his government's "deep appreciation" of Israel's decision to send Herzog to Tokyo for the funeral of Emperor Hirohito of Japan on Feb. 23.

That decision has been widely criticized by Israelis because Hirohito ruled Japan when it was allied with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in World War II.

But those arguments were overridden by Japan's potential economic importance to Israel.

Israel's trade with Japan has lagged mainly because of Japan's greater economic interest in the Arab world.

To Our Readers: There will be no JTA Bulletin dated Feb. 20 due to the Presidents' Day postal holiday.