

FIRST YESHIVA IN 60 YEARS OPENS IN THE SOVIET UNION

NEW YORK, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- The Judaic Studies Center, the first institution of its kind in the Soviet Union in 60 years, opened officially in Moscow on Wednesday.

Its founding father, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a world-famous Talmudic scholar from Jerusalem, welcomed the first class of 80 students enrolled in the three-year course of study.

Messages were read from Israeli President Chaim Herzog and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

"We welcome the changes in the Soviet Union which have led to this center being established," Baker said, "and we will look forward to hearing of your further progress."

The center, located in a facility of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, is affiliated with the Academy of World Civilization, established by the academy's vice chairman, Evgeny Velikhov.

It is, however, an independent institution, funded by the New York-based Aleph Society, a private, non-profit organization that supports Steinsaltz's worldwide educational activities.

The center, located at 16 Kropotkinskaya Street, will train a new generation of rabbis, scholars and teachers to minister to the needs of Soviet Jews.

It is the first rabbinical seminary in the USSR since formal religious education was banned by the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Steinsaltz credited the historic policy changes in the Soviet Union for the center's existence.

He stressed that the Soviet authorities have affirmed the sole responsibility of the Aleph Society to select students and faculty and prescribe curriculum and study materials.

"The tremendous interest among Soviet Jews in the opening of the Judaic Studies Center is like the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled: 'The children you thought you had lost shall say to you . . . make room for me to enter,'" Steinsaltz said.

The initial student body, selected by Steinsaltz, will attend day and evening classes for the next seven weeks.

Four American and Israeli rabbis and scholars comprise the faculty for the first semester.

NEW MIDEAST 'DYNAMIC' COULD LEAD TO ARAB-ISRAELI TALKS, SAYS BAKER

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- President Bush met separately in Tokyo on Thursday with Israeli President Chaim Herzog and the heads of two Arab countries, and all agreed that there is a "new dynamic" that could lead to direct negotiations in the Arab-Israel conflict.

This was the assessment of Secretary of State James Baker, who briefed reporters after Bush met with Herzog, King Hussein of Jordan and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the eve of the funeral of Japanese Emperor Hirohito. A transcript of the briefing was made available by the State Department here.

"I think that there's a genuine sharing of views that it is, in fact, direct negotiations that

will ultimately lead to peace, and that somehow we must find a way to get to direct negotiations," Baker said.

But he rejected a suggestion that the current visit to the Middle East of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze played a major role in creating the new dynamic.

"I think the dynamics were there," Baker said. "I think that they are affected in large part by the intifada and the results that that has had on public opinion around the world."

He said that also providing opportunities for a new approach are the U.S. talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the State Department's recent human rights report, which criticized Israel for human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and "the fact that the conflict there has dragged on for as long as it has."

Baker outlined the Bush administration's approach to the Middle East, which was basically the same view he expressed on his recent visit to Europe.

Affirms Need For Direct Talks

He said that while there are perhaps new opportunities, they "ought to be explored very carefully." As he did in Europe, Baker stressed "that there ought to be an extensive amount of practical groundwork before we rush off to have a big high-visibility conference under the television lights."

Asked directly about an international conference, Baker stressed that the United States continues to be willing to participate if it is "properly structured." He said this means that it "must lead to direct negotiations between the parties."

Baker said that Bush made these points to Herzog and the two Arab leaders, stressing as well that "the United States would be active in the Middle East peace process."

Baker said that Bush did not go into specifics with Herzog, but would do so when Israeli Premier Yitzhak Shamir comes to Washington in April. Shamir is expected to lay out his own proposals for seeking negotiations.

The groundwork for this is expected to be laid when Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens meets with Baker in Washington on March 13.

Baker said he also would discuss the Middle East with Shevardnadze next month in Vienna, where the two will be attending the opening of the East-West conventional arms negotiations.

But he indicated that he did not as yet see any "concrete contributions" by the Soviets to the Middle East peace process, just "rhetorical exercises."

Baker continually avoided any indication that the PLO should be included in negotiations with Israel. Instead, he said he was talking about the "Palestinian people" as a negotiating partner, as well as Jordan.

He also would not reveal whether Hussein, who withdrew from the peace process last year, said he is now willing to return. "I think the position of King Hussein is well known in terms of being interested in doing whatever he can to forward the peace process in the Middle East," Baker said.

SHAMIR'S REFUSAL TO TALK TO PLO CONVEYED BY MITTERRAND TO BUSH

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- The deadlock between the Israeli and French positions on the Middle East peace process was echoed in Tokyo on Thursday, where heads of state from all over the world are gathering for the funeral of Emperor Hirohito.

It was there that the full force of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's absolute refusal to have any contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization or agree to the creation of a Palestinian state was conveyed by President Francois Mitterrand of France to U.S. President George Bush.

Mitterrand was exposed to Shamir's tenacity on the issue at their three-and-a-half-hour meeting at the Elysee Palace here Wednesday.

According to reports from Tokyo, the French leader told Bush what to expect when he meets with the Israeli premier in Washington on April 3.

The information imparted may give the new American administration a better grasp of Israel's position and presumably help it formulate its own.

As far as France and the rest of the European Community is concerned, the Israeli positions are clear. Shamir summed them up at a news conference here Thursday.

His government will never accept a Palestinian state. It will never negotiate, directly or indirectly, with the PLO.

However, Shamir said, Israel is prepared to make an exceptional effort to reach a peaceful solution with the Arab world through direct negotiations.

It would negotiate with the neighboring Arab states and with Palestinians living in the Israeli-administered territories, the prime minister said.

Pressure From French Conservatives

Shamir pressed those same points at his meetings with Mitterrand, with Prime Minister Michel Rocard, Foreign Minister Ronald Dumas and a half dozen other Cabinet ministers.

He reportedly urged Mitterrand to use his influence to bring King Hussein of Jordan to the negotiating table.

French officials said that sounded like the "Jordanian option" often ridiculed by Shamir when it was advocated by Labor Party leader Shimon Peres, who was foreign minister in the previous Labor-Likud coalition government.

Mitterrand was to meet with Hussein in Tokyo on Friday for a review of the Middle East situation. But French officials said he has made no undertaking to raise Israel's issues with the Jordanian monarch.

Meanwhile, Shamir came under strong pressure from French conservative as well as Socialist leaders to find a political solution to the Palestinian uprising.

At a state dinner in his honor Thursday at the Paris City Hall, the Israeli leader was told by Mayor Jacques Chirac that Israel must recognize the new reality.

The uprising "is not a bush fire which can be put out with ease. It represents the deep aspiration of the Palestinian people. If this situation is not remedied," Chirac warned, "there is the danger of a rise of extremism on both sides."

The Gaullist leader, who is much closer politically to Shamir's Likud party than Mitterrand, spoke at a gathering attended by many

prominent French Jewish leaders.

Moreover, it was held on the eve of nationwide municipal elections in which the Jewish vote plays a relatively important role.

Prime Minister Rocard was even more outspoken at a banquet in Shamir's honor Wednesday night.

He warned that Israel was losing time and wasting rare opportunities for peace. He hinted that Europe will have to act to restore calm and stability in the Middle East.

Shamir was the guest of the Jewish community Thursday night at a reception which more than 2,000 people attended. He was to return to Israel on Friday.

MUBARAK OUTLINES PEACE CONFERENCE PLAN IN TALKS WITH JEWISH LEADERS

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak told a delegation of visiting American Jewish leaders last week that he would like to see an international peace conference on the Middle East that would shift quickly to a set of separate, bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of its neighbors.

Mubarak indicated to members of the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee that his plan would allow Israel to negotiate separately with Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese and Syrians, with no party having veto power over any of the individual agreements.

The AJCommittee delegation met with Mubarak at his office in Cairo on Feb. 16, following a series of meetings with top Egyptian officials. The meetings were arranged by Frank Wisner, the U.S. ambassador to Egypt.

The hour-long meeting with Mubarak was described as an opportunity for the Jewish leaders to size up the Egyptian president's commitment to the peace process and for Mubarak to gain support for various initiatives aimed at Washington and Jerusalem.

One of those messages, according to Ira Silverman, executive vice president of AJCommittee, was that Mubarak wishes to play a key role in bringing about an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

"We were impressed with Mubarak's strong personal interest in playing a personal role," Silverman said in New York this week. "He has a strong ego investment in the process."

Arafat Can't Be Eliminated

Mubarak told the delegation that he hoped Shamir would drop his opposition to an international conference that would include all parties to the conflict and the United States, Soviet Union and perhaps Britain and France.

The Palestinian delegation, he suggested, would be a mix of West Bank and Gaza Strip residents and "outside" Palestinian exiles.

The outsiders would not necessarily have to include Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat, he indicated. But he warned that the "elimination of Arafat," either from the process or by the PLO's own rejectionists, would yield only more radical Palestinian positions.

Mubarak left the AJCommittee delegation with a request of his own, that they support Egypt's efforts to obtain more debt relief and a speedier dispersal of foreign aid from the U.S. government.

Egypt is the second largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, after Israel.

JEWISH GROUPS REGRET FAILURE TO REMOVE CONVENT AT AUSCHWITZ

By Susan Blrbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- International Jewish groups expressed their disappointment this week over the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to meet an agreed-upon deadline to move a convent of Carmelite nuns out of their home at the Auschwitz death camp.

This failure has further postponed an inter-religious conference that was planned on the history of Church anti-Semitism, the Jewish representatives say.

On Thursday, members of IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, met in New York to discuss the passing of the Feb. 22 deadline for the nuns' move.

Following several recent church statements admitting an alternative site to the camp was not ready, IJCIC noted "with deep regret that the commitment undertaken by leaders of the Roman Catholic Church to representatives of the Jewish communities in Europe and solemnly spelled out in the 'Geneva II' accord of Feb. 22, 1987, remain unfulfilled."

"We gave them the full time allowed them according to the agreement they signed two years ago," Rabbi A. James Rudin, chairman of IJCIC, said Thursday. "We waited till a full two years had expired."

Reports from Europe on Thursday said that one of the agreement's signators, the archbishop of Krakow, had sent a pastoral letter indicating the nuns would move. He gave no date for the move, the problem the Jewish leaders have been citing all along.

The nuns were supposed to have been relocated by Wednesday to another site away from the camp, according to the agreement signed exactly two years ago in Geneva by nine European Jewish officials and nine Catholic officials, including four cardinals.

'Profound Disappointment'

"We are profoundly disappointed that the promised closing of the Carmelite convent at the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp, and the construction of a study and research center which would also accommodate the Carmelite sisters, has not taken place within the agreed-upon two-year period," the IJCIC statement said.

Lionel Kopelowitz, president of the European Jewish Congress and a member of the British Board of Jewish Deputies, issued a statement from Brussels expressing "profound disappointment at the failure of the Roman Catholic Church" to honor the agreement.

Rudin emphasized that not a spade had been struck in the ground to build the new site for the approximately 10 nuns in the last two years.

But in a more encouraging vein, Rudin, who is director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said "the full and speedy implementation of 'Geneva II' will ensure a mutually satisfactory solution to this problem."

"Once this is achieved," he said, "my IJCIC colleagues and I look forward to the renewal of our fruitful and important dialogue with the Vatican."

The signed agreement said "there will be no permanent Catholic place of prayer on the site of the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. Every person will be able to meditate as his heart, his religion and his faith may dictate."

The IJCIC statement of Thursday acknowledged "with appreciation recent positive initiatives to resolve the problem on the part of Albert Cardinal Decourtray, archbishop of Lyon and the president of the French Bishops' Conference," who co-chaired the Geneva meetings.

Kopelowitz also acknowledged "positive initiatives on the part of high-ranking Catholic prelates."

Said Rudin succinctly, "This is a problem that has a solution."

IJCIC member organizations are the AJCommittee, B'nai B'rith International, Israel Interfaith Association, Synagogue Council of America and the World Jewish Congress.

RABIN DENIES RECKLESS KILLINGS OF INTIFADA CHILDREN BY THE IDF

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Defense For Children International blames the Israel Defense Force for the deaths of 70 Arab children -- from teen-agers to youngsters under 6 years old -- during the first year of the Palestinian uprising which began in December 1987.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin disputed the figure.

"Only 22" minors were killed, Rabin wrote in response to a complaint by the president of the Israeli branch of the organization, former Supreme Court Justice Moshe Etzioni.

Rabin said he took a "grave view" of Etzioni's allegations, and maintained that most of the 22 youths killed had participated in disturbances.

Speaking at a Labor Party municipal election rally in Haifa on Wednesday, Rabin insisted that the IDF does not kill innocent people.

He said that when there were deviations from the norms of conduct, the guilty parties were put on trial and their offenses publicized to prevent a recurrence.

But a Defense For Children International source in Jerusalem questioned Rabin's figures.

The organization has compiled a report on child deaths related to the intifada, which it says it will release officially soon.

According to the source, 35 of the 70 Arab children died from gunshot wounds, 31 from tear gas inhalation, one from beatings and three in other incidents.

One of them was crushed to death by a gasoline drum while dismantling a barricade on army orders.

Another was electrocuted when ordered to remove a Palestinian flag from an electric pylon, the source said.

He said the vast majority of tear gas-related deaths were of children under 6.

The source said he wondered how many of those youngsters had indeed threatened the lives of soldiers.

He said their protest actions were not all stone-throwing but included demonstrations and flag-waving.

Rabin, meanwhile, told his Haifa audience that 370 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF and 8,000 wounded in the 14 months of the uprising.

Arab sources claim a much higher number of dead and wounded.

Rabin said 6,200 Palestinians are presently being held in IDF detention centers for offenses related to the intifada or terrorist acts. Another 4,000 have had trials and are in prison, he said.

STUDENTS PROTEST AT JUSTICE DEPT. ASKING FOR RELEASE OF POLLARDS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- The North American Jewish Students' Network has begun a movement demanding the release from prison of Jonathan Jay Pollard and his wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, because they feel that Jewish leaders have failed to act.

"The students started the Soviet Jewry movement when the Jewish community was silent," Rabbi Avraham Weiss, chairman of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, told some 80 college students demonstrating on the steps of the Justice Department Tuesday.

"We are starting a national Pollard movement, and we are demanding in front of the Justice Department, 'Free Pollard Now.'"

Anne Pollard, who was convicted in 1987 as an accomplice with her husband in supplying classified U.S. documents to Israel, suffers from a rare gastrointestinal disorder and has lost an estimated 60 pounds since her incarceration.

Weiss led the students from the Justice Department to the Washington Hilton, where a National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council lunch was ending.

He urged the 100 NJCRAC delegates present to help free the Pollards and led the students in cheers and Hebrew song.

The students carried placards that read: "Bush: The Blood of Anne is on Your Hands," and "The God of Israel is a God of Truth and Vengeance." Most of the students were from the New York City area.

At the Justice Department, Jacob Davidson, the network president, urged his fellow students to contact their colleges, Jewish communities, synagogues and rabbis to do more for the Pollards.

Leaders Cannot Be Silent

"It is the same thing that happened in World War II," Davidson said. "But it is our responsibility to say that Jewish leaders cannot be silent."

However, some major U.S. Jewish groups have apparently been following the case.

Jess Hordes, Washington representative of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said his group is "continuing to monitor the situation," particularly Pollard's health.

In addition, one Jewish leader said a strategy group, under the umbrella of the NJCRAC, met with a dozen representatives of the Justice Department a few weeks ago, mainly from the Bureau of Prisons.

The focus of the meeting was a "thorough-going discussion of her treatment," the source said.

The groups raised "all of the issues" related to her health, and came away with the sense that the "government had made a very credible case."

He said the groups believe that the "prison system had made a major effort to help her out but that she is being uncooperative."

The source said NJCRAC will shortly issue a report on the status of Pollard's treatment in prison.

Kenneth Bandler, a NJCRAC spokesman, confirmed that an ad hoc committee was created "to look into this matter what the Jewish community's response should be."

At Tuesday's rally, Davidson, saying that he

represents 20 percent of the U.S. Jewish community, asked:

"What about our own parents? What about our own Jewish organizations that have said nothing, that have abandoned Jonathan, that have called him a political liability because of questions of dual loyalty?"

The Pollard case is "the American Dreyfuss affair," Weiss said. "Anne Pollard should not be in prison for a day.

"She is not permitted to shower, she is not permitted to go to the bathroom without someone standing by. Is this Russia or this America?" Weiss said.

"And while it is true that Jonathan Jay violated the law as well . . . he should have been given about two years," he said.

Weiss led them up the steps to the entrance of the Justice Department, where they asked to see Attorney General Richard Thornburgh or one of his representatives.

A security officer responded that no one was available, but that he would forward any letter or petition. The students left a few of the posters on the steps of the building.

Davidson said he had requested a meeting with Justice Department officials a few weeks ago but was turned down.

KOOR CREDITORS DEMAND LIQUIDATION

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Foreign creditors of Koor Industries refused Wednesday to withdraw their demand to liquidate the giant Histadrut-owned conglomerate.

Koor's managing director, Benny Gaon, has appealed to the government for a \$50 million cash emergency bailout. But he got a cool response from Finance Minister Shimon Peres.

Peres said he would agree only if he is convinced significant progress has been made in Koor's recovery program. That entails large-scale dismissals and the sell-off or closure of a number of Koor subsidiaries.

A Tel Aviv district court proposed to the creditors seeking relief that they hold off on bankruptcy proceedings.

The attorney for Bankers Trust Co. of New York told the court he could not agree to withdraw or postpone the liquidation demand without the consent of all of his principals.

Bankers Trust represents American banks holding millions in defaulted loans to Koor. It initiated the liquidation action.

MASSIVE SEARCH FOR SOLDIER CONTINUES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- A massive search for an Israeli soldier missing since Feb. 16 continued for the sixth day Thursday.

Nearly 5,000 soldiers, border police and civilian volunteers are combing southern Israel from the coast to the Judean hills.

So far, they have not found a clue to the fate of Sgt. Avi Sasportas of Ashdod. The para-troop medic was last seen a week ago at a road junction near Gaza, trying to hitch a ride home.

His family met Wednesday with Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff Dan Shomron and Gen. Amram Mitzna, commander of the central region, which includes the search area.

The family was assured the search would continue undiminished.