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SOVIETS SAID TO BE PREPARING FAR-REACHING EMIGRATION REFORMS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, June 11 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union is readying a far-reaching reform of its emigration laws that would permit Soviet citizens to travel and emigrate without going through the complicated channels currently necessary, according to a ranking official of the World Jewish Congress who recently saw a draft of the new legislation.

This information was corroborated by New York City Councilman Noach Dear, who recently returned from the Soviet Union with a translation of the draft legislation.

Dear has been visiting the Soviet Union regularly in the last few months as co-chairman of the Joint Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage.

The legislation reportedly is in its final stage of preparation. The Soviets hope to have it ready by July, although this is not definite.

A major change in Soviet emigration law could have a decisive influence on the willingness of American Jewish groups to consider a relaxation of trade sanctions against the Soviet Union.

Jewish groups have said repeatedly, for instance, that they would contemplate a waiver of Jackson-Vanik Amendment sanctions if the Soviets codify long-promised emigration reforms. The amendment denies most-favored-nation trade benefits to the Soviet Union until it improves its record on emigration.

A Jackson-Vanik waiver is expected to be a prime subject of discussion Tuesday at the Board of Governors meeting of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry in Washington.

Changes In Secrecy Rule

The new Soviet legislation is expected to relax existing restrictions on emigration for those privy to "state secrets."

It is also expected to eliminate the requirements that prospective emigrants obtain waivers of financial obligation from their parents and that they receive invitations from close relatives abroad.

Short-term visits would no longer require any invitation from abroad. And for long-term visits or emigration, invitations from any person, or even an institution, would be sufficient.

The secrecy rule would be modified so that there would be a five-year limit on the amount of time a prospective emigrant could be barred from leaving.

An exception would allow certain governmental agencies and industries to bar those privy to state secrets from emigrating for up to seven years.

In the past, the state secrecy rule has been used to deny Soviet Jews permission to emigrate for a dozen years or more after they left jobs said to be classified.

Under the new law, those refused permission to emigrate would have the right to appeal to an administrative commission of the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body that handles day-to-day policy matters.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the

World Jewish Congress, said the proposed emigration reforms are, in part, "the result of our various meetings in the Soviet Union in the last several months, ranging from those involved in drafting the legislation in the Foreign Ministry to Politburo members."

The most recent meeting of this kind occurred last week, when WJC President Edgar Bronfman met with Alexander Yakovlev, a powerful Politburo member considered to be a senior ally of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

In addition to the emigration law, the Soviet Union is preparing a regulation that for the first time would enable those under the age of 18 to study religion, Councilman Dear reported. The law would also permit the teaching of religion by adults.

Dear said both the religion regulation and the emigration law are being formulated by commissions appointed by the new Soviet Congress of People's Deputies. He said that even before the new laws are promulgated, emigration for refuseniks may be eased.

Steinberg of WJC predicted Soviet Jewish emigration this year would hit or possibly exceed the record 1979 level of 51,320. The 1990 figures could be at least 70,000, he said.

New Religious Affairs Minister

Dear, who returned Thursday from Moscow, also announced two significant personnel changes.

The Soviet minister of religious affairs, Konstantin Kharchev, has been replaced by Ivan Kristorodnov, former speaker of the Supreme Soviet and previously first secretary of the Communist Party in Gorky.

Kristorodnov, said Dear, assured him "that he would follow the ways of Kharchev, to continue the religious life and to help religious organizations."

Dear also reported that Boris Gramm, the longtime president of Moscow's main synagogue, has been replaced by Vladimir Federofsky, 41.

Federofsky, said Dear, has "asked the religious community to partake in the Choral Synagogue."

He wants to make the Choral Synagogue as important to religious Jews as the Marina Roscha Synagogue, the center for Orthodox Jews in Moscow and the site of a Lubavitch yeshiva.

Unlike his predecessor, Federofsky is working with ultra-Orthodox Jews, including refuseniks and those involved with the new yeshiva established by Israeli Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.

Dear said Federofsky has agreed to kasher the synagogue kitchen using a mashgiach (kashrut authority) selected by the Joint Committee, an Orthodox Jewish group based in New York.

In another development, Steinberg reported that delegates to the recent Jewish conference in Riga, Latvia, formally proposed the establishment of a Soviet Jewish Congress that would serve as the representative body of the WJC in the Soviet Union.

The Lithuanian Jewish Cultural Society has asked for formal membership in the WJC. Its chairman, Emmanuel Zinger, who is visiting New York for the second time in less than a month, presented the WJC with a petition for membership last Wednesday.

ISRAEL DELIGHTED BY SENATE LETTER URGING U.S. BACKING FOR PEACE PLAN

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- Israeli officials expressed delight this weekend at the boost Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's peace plan has received from the U.S. Senate.

Likud officials were euphoric over news that 92 senators had sent a letter Thursday to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, urging him to express strong public support for Shamir's plan to advance the peace process by holding Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"This is a great achievement for Shamir's initiative," said Foreign Minister Moshe Arens.

He was echoed by Shamir's media adviser, Avi Pazner, who said over the weekend that the letter was an almost "unprecedented demonstration of political and public American support for Israel and the initiative of the prime minister."

According to Pazner, "the letter is a reaction of the Senate to the speech of Secretary of State Baker and the premier's initiative."

Israeli leaders were upset at Baker's May 22 speech in Washington, in which, among other things, he urged the Jewish state to abandon ideas of territorial expansion.

In their letter, the senators warned that the United States "must be fully supportive, both in fact and in appearance," if Shamir's proposals are to receive "the consideration they deserve" by other parties to the Middle East conflict.

The lawmakers called the prime minister's initiative "both sincere and far-reaching" and said the United States has "a vital role to play in convincing others of the merit of Israel's plan."

Pazner called the letter "an expression of deep congressional support for Israel. All those who have talked about erosion of public support for Israel in the United States will have to reassess their views," he said.

ISRAEL WELCOMES AMERICAN VETO OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, June 11 (JTA) -- The U.S. veto Friday of a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israel "shows once again that the U.S. and Israel are allies," a spokesman for Israel's U.N. mission said Sunday.

The spokesman, Barukh Binah, said he was not surprised that the other 14 members of the Security Council all voted in favor of the resolution or by the statement's strong language.

"The United Nations is not a healthy environment for Israel," Binah said.

The Security Council resolution harshly condemned Israel for actions "which violate the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territory."

The 14-1 vote took place Friday at a Security Council session requested by Sudan on behalf of the Arab League.

Thomas Pickering, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the United States vetoed the resolution because it was "unbalanced."

He said the resolution made no mention of "serious acts of violence" committed by the Palestinians.

The United States vetoed another Security Council resolution condemning Israel earlier this year.

EGYPTIAN ARRIVES IN ISRAEL FOR TWO-DAY PEACE MISSION

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- A senior Egyptian official arrived here Sunday on a two-day peace mission. But his visit appeared to be more of a goodwill gesture than a substantive diplomatic initiative.

Dr. Butros Ghali, Egypt's minister of state for foreign affairs, was greeted at Ben-Gurion Airport by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, who urged his guest to convince his government to support Israel's new peace plan.

Ghali arrived with a message from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak apprising Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of the outcome of the recent Arab League summit meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, which rejected the Israeli peace initiative.

But the Egyptian president pointed out in the message that it was the first Arab summit meeting ever to endorse U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which implicitly recognize Israel's right to exist behind secure borders.

Egypt has not rejected the Israeli peace plan outright. But at the same time, Egyptian leaders have said they will not act contrary to the stance advocated by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Israeli leaders are concerned that the PLO is using its dialogue with the United States to raise obstacles to the peace plan.

At the third formal round of U.S.-PLO talks in Tunisia on June 8, the PLO asked the United States for a statement of principles recognizing the Palestinians' right to self-determination, which would be tantamount to recognition of their right to an independent state.

To do so would mean a complete turnaround of American policy.

The PLO also reportedly proposed that Israel should negotiate the terms for Palestinian elections directly with a team of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Ghali was to meet here with both prominent Palestinians and Israeli leaders, and it appeared that each side would ask the Egyptian diplomat to influence the other.

But his visit is something of a disappointment to officials here, who see it as Egypt's response to repeated invitations for Mubarak to come to Israel for a summit meeting with Shamir. The Egyptian president has not responded to those calls. Not even the Egyptian foreign minister, Esmat Abdel Meguid, is prepared to visit Israel at this time.

FIRST MAJOR JUDAICA AUCTION IN GENEVA

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, June 11 (JTA) -- The richly illustrated Wolf Haggadah, which dates from the 13th century, will be one of many rare items of Judaica to go on the auction block here June 19.

Conducted by the Habsburg Feldman Co., it will be the first major auction of Judaica to be held in Geneva.

It is expected to draw wealthy collectors from all over the world.

Other items include a seder brachot dating from 1738, with an estimated value of 80,000 Swiss francs (\$47,000), and an 1846 Chanukah menorah by a Russian artist, valued at 200,000 francs (\$118,000).

WEST GERMAN OPPOSITION PARTY URGES CONTACTS WITH THE PLO

By David Kantor

BONN, June 11 (JTA) -- The opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD), apparently taking a cue from American policy, has changed its position toward the Palestine Liberation Organization.

It called on the government Friday to "co-operate with the PLO" and to accord it the status of a participant in the Middle East peace process.

The SPD declaration was issued two weeks after the party chairman, Hans-Jochen Vogel, met with a PLO representative to establish a working relationship.

He invited a PLO delegation to visit Bonn and West Berlin in October.

An SPD official explained that inasmuch as the United States opened a dialogue with the PLO six months ago, the party saw no reason to maintain its longstanding policy of avoiding contact with the PLO.

Two left-leaning SPD politicians, Heidemarie Vieczorek-Zeul, who is known to take anti-Israel positions, and Peter Glotz, visited Jerusalem last month on a fact-finding trip.

They have prepared a memorandum for the party recommending contacts with the PLO. They argue that, in the absence of other credible Palestinian representation, such a policy would improve peace prospects in the region.

YOUTH STAGE NATIONALIST RALLIES IN 5 ISRAELI ARAB MUNICIPALITIES

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, June 11 (JTA) -- An Israeli Arab civic leader sharply reprimanded nationalist youth Sunday for indulging in anti-Israel acts over the weekend at a series of rallies in Arab towns and villages in Israel.

Mayor Ibrahim Nimer Hussein of Shfaram, who heads the Committee of Arab Councils in Israel, called on Israeli Arab organizations to ostracize the Sons of the Village movement for these acts.

He said members acted without the sanction of local Arab authorities when they waved Palestine Liberation Organization flags and shouted anti-Israel slogans at peaceful rallies Saturday.

In any event, the mayor said, PLO flags belong in the territories, not in Israel.

The rallies, protesting an alleged national mood of hostility and racism, were held Saturday in Shfaram and Sakhnin, in Galilee; Umm-el-Fahm and Taiba, in central Israel; and the Bedouin town of Rahat, in the Negev.

All were without incident, except in Rahat, where fights broke out between followers of the Moslem Brotherhood and members of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, otherwise known as the Hadash Communist party.

HERZOG WON'T GRANT CLEMENCY TO FOUR JEWS WHO KILLED ARABS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 11 (JTA) -- President Chaim Herzog has refused to commute the sentences of four Israeli Jews convicted of killing Arabs, Ha'aretz reported Sunday.

He rejected appeals to reduce the life sentences of three Jewish youths found guilty five

years ago of the reprisal slaying of an Arab taxi driver.

He also turned down the appeal of David Ben-Shimol, who fired an anti-tank missile at an Arab bus, killing one passenger and wounding several others. He was convicted four years ago.

Herzog has been criticized in some circles for the clemency he granted on June 5 to the last three members of a Jewish terrorist underground still in jail.

He reduced their sentences from 15 to 10 years, which means they could go free in two years if given time off for good behavior.

The trio, Menachem Livni, Uzi Sharbaf and Shaul Nir, originally drew life sentences for fatally shooting four Palestinians in a 1984 attack on the Islamic College in Hebron.

Herzog twice reduced their sentences. He acted a third time on the personal recommendation of Justice Minister Dan Meridor and on the basis of reports that the prisoners showed remorse.

According to Ha'aretz, the president also took into account research done in the United States that questioned the deterrent effect of prolonged prison terms.

EILAT RESIDENTS PROTEST DEATH OF ISRAELI SHOT BY EGYPTIANS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 11 (JTA) -- Residents of Eilat dropped hundreds of wreaths into the waters off their resort town Saturday in memory of Shlomo Yisraeli, a local yachtsman killed a week ago in an encounter with the Egyptian coast guard.

Earlier, some 200 angry Eilat boat and truck owners attempted to shut down the Israeli-Egyptian border crossing at Taba to protest the incident.

They planned to block the road with boat trailers, but were foiled by the Israeli police.

Yisraeli, 42, was fatally wounded when officers of the Egyptian coast guard fired what they said were warning shots at his charter yacht.

The Egyptians claimed Yisraeli's boat invaded their territorial waters a few hundred yards off the Sinai shore. People aboard the craft insist it was in international waters at the time.

Both countries apparently consider the matter closed. The Israeli charge d'affaires in Cairo, David Aphek, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry last week to receive an official apology from Egypt.

337 BUS ATTACK CASUALTIES REPORTED

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 11 (JTA) -- The Egged bus cooperative reported Sunday that 337 people have been hurt in 3,136 attacks on its passenger buses since the Palestinian uprising began in the administered territories 18 months ago.

But there have been no fatalities. Egged said 42 of its buses were damaged.

Bus windows have been reinforced with wire mesh to decrease the possibility of injury from flying objects.

Egged, which predates the state by many years, provides interurban and local bus services throughout Israel, except in the Tel Aviv area, where the Dan bus cooperative holds the franchise.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
SOVIET EMIGRATION CHALLENGE TO BE
KEY ISSUE AT JEWISH AGENCY ASSEMBLY**
By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, June 11 (JTA) -- The Jewish Agency for Israel, claiming aliyah and Jewish education as top priorities, has unprecedented opportunities and daunting challenges this year, as the Soviet Union allows record numbers of Jews to emigrate.

Jewish Agency officials are calling 1989 their "year of judgment," and have been bringing that sense of urgency to briefing sessions for American Jews who will be voting delegates to the Jewish Agency Assembly, which will convene in Jerusalem from June 25 to 29.

The major obstacle to the Jewish Agency's aspirations is its shrinking budget. It has dropped to \$360 million in 1989-90, down from \$388 million in 1988-89, tightening the budgetary limitations on the services the agency can offer Soviet olim.

With the new Soviet immigrants to Israel its top priority, the Jewish Agency has increased its funds for aliyah and absorption, despite the budget crunch. The allocation has come at the sacrifice of programs for rural development and Jewish education.

The Jewish Agency was to have been freed of primary responsibility for absorbing new immigrants.

Last November, the agency agreed with the Israeli government to hand over absorption responsibilities -- most importantly, the operation of the absorption centers. The government was to have closed down the bulk of the centers, replacing them with apartment housing, in what is known as "direct absorption."

Government Must Prove Itself

But Jewish Agency officials are now seriously reconsidering the agreement, saying the government has not demonstrated it is capable of housing immigrants.

"Unless we are satisfied the government has the capacity and the will, we will have to reconsider our decision," Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, declared last month.

At a recent New York briefing for delegates to the assembly, the Jewish Agency's secretary-general, Howard Weisband, said the government had promised a comprehensive report outlining its plans for housing both new immigrants and those currently in absorption centers. The report, he said, is a last chance for the government to prove itself.

Weisband said he is skeptical as to whether the government's plan will be satisfactory. So far, he said, the agency has been unsuccessful in convincing the government that absorption, or "klita," must be a primary concern.

"We had hoped that we would make aliyah and klita not the highest of priorities -- there is defense, there is the economy -- but to move it up the ladder somewhat," he said.

A resolution the assembly will consider proposes "the transfer of absorption from the Jewish Agency to the government be re-examined" and that the transfer "be suspended until such time as the re-examination process has been completed."

In a paper Weisband prepared for the United Israel Appeal, he says there is a "probability that the Jewish Agency may fully reassume the responsibility for the absorption system."

With the decision to retain responsibility for absorption likely, the Jewish Agency is calling for a substantial share of the money raised in the United States for the resettlement of Soviet Jews, despite the fact that the vast majority of Soviet Jews are not choosing to settle in Israel.

The agency's rallying cry is for American Jews not to forget that "the free Soviet Jewry" movement started as an aliyah movement.

Free Choice Vs. Financial Aid

While both Dinitz and Weisband endorse the principle of "free choice," they insist that the Soviet Jews who go to Israel should get first priority for financial aid.

"Jewish people should use their energy to make Israel attractive. We must strive to make the Jewish home appealing," Dinitz said in an address last month at the Jewish Theological Seminary's commencement ceremonies here.

"We do not have the responsibility to provide the same amount of support to the Russians who come to the U.S. as those who make aliyah to Israel," said Herman Markowitz, executive vice chairman of the United Israel Appeal. "Free choice remains the ability to make a choice -- and accept responsibility for that choice."

Markowitz spoke at a briefing session for New York area delegates to the agency assembly. The sessions were sponsored by UIA, which serves as the chief conduit of United Jewish Appeal funds to the Jewish Agency.

UIA briefings also were held recently in Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago and Washington.

Of the 398 voting delegates at the assembly, approximately 170 will be Americans, 119 of them UIA delegates representing various Jewish federations across the country.

Aside from the absorption issue, the Jewish Agency is looking at ways to "streamline and strengthen" operations, particularly in the area of Jewish education.

To that end, the agency is looking at fundamental changes in its structure, particularly in its relationship with the World Zionist Organization.

A proposal will be presented to the assembly to consolidate WZO and Jewish Agency education efforts.

In the plan, the WZO's 27 separate departments would be reduced to four or five, and its budget would be subject to approval by the Jewish Agency's Budget and Finance Committee.

**ISRAELI MEDICS EXPECTED TO STAY
IN MOSCOW FOR DURATION OF WEEK**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 11 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force medical team of burn specialists is expected to remain in the Soviet Union until the end of this week, treating victims of the Trans-Siberian Railway disaster.

They are instructing Soviet doctors in the latest techniques of burn therapy, including grafts of artificial skin that is produced in Israel.

The IDF team flew to Moscow last Thursday after the Soviet authorities accepted Israel's offer of assistance.

More than 400 people died and at least 600 were injured when a natural gas pipeline exploded in the Ural Mountains on June 3, just as two passenger trains were passing in a narrow gorge.

The survivors with the most severe burns were sent to Moscow General Hospital, where the Israeli group is now based.