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**PRAGUE MAY USE NEW TIES WITH ISRAEL
AS PRETEXT FOR ROLE IN PEACE PROCESS**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Czechoslovakia may use its new relationship with Israel as a springboard to become actively involved in the Middle East peace process.

Although officially Prague still leans toward the Palestinian cause, its resumption of diplomatic ties with Israel on Friday, after a 23-year break, enhances its credibility as a mediator.

An agreement establishing full diplomatic relations was signed in the Czech capital by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and his counterpart in the new Czech government, Jiri Dienstbier.

"I am happy to remedy the nonsensical situation that occurred in 1967, when we broke off diplomatic relations with Israel," Dienstbier said at a news conference.

He was referring to the break with Israel by the Soviet Union and all of the Warsaw Pact countries except Romania in the wake of the Six-Day War.

The renewal of diplomatic ties was promised in December by Czechoslovakia's new president, Vaclav Havel.

Havel, a prominent playwright, announced as soon as he took office that relations with Israel were one of the top priorities in his country's new foreign policy.

Czechoslovakia was originally a warm friend of Israel. It supported the establishment of the Jewish state in the U.N. General Assembly in 1947 and was one of the first countries to recognize Israel when it declared its independence in 1948.

Havel, who has expressed interest in helping to create a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, has invited Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat to Prague.

**E.C. POSTPONES VISIT AND MEETING
TO EXPRESS DISPLEASURE WITH ISRAEL**
By Yossi Lempkovicz

BRUSSELS, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- The European Community is linking its economic and scientific relationships with Israel to political developments in the Middle East, particularly the continuing intifada.

The E.C. Executive Commission announced over the weekend its decision to postpone a scheduled visit to Israel in April by Abel Matutes, the commissioner in charge of Mediterranean affairs.

It is also postponing "until a better opportunity" the meeting of the E.C.-Israel committee for scientific cooperation, at which Israeli and European scientists would have discussed joint projects.

The withholding of cooperation in both economic and scientific spheres is the E.C.'s response to a recommendation by its legislative body, the Strasbourg-based Parliament of Europe, to penalize Israel for its alleged "contempt" for human rights.

The Jan. 17 vote was the first in the parliament's 33-year history calling for punitive measures against Israel.

Israeli behavior toward Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was cited, specifically the closure of Palestinian universities and other schools in the West Bank since the intifada started in 1987.

The 12 E.C. members were urged to protest by freezing funds allocated for scientific cooperation with Israel, notably energy and biotechnology research.

Last month, the E.C. Commission postponed a memorandum for energy cooperation with Israel, which was to have been signed during the visit of Israel's minister of energy and infrastructure, Moshe Shahal.

Until those developments, scientific cooperation between Israel and the E.C. was proceeding "very positively," Israeli sources said.

Despite the tough collective measures, however, individual E.C. member states, notably France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, continue to advance scientific cooperation with Israel bilaterally, E.C. sources said.

According to those sources, any advance in the current peace diplomacy involving Israel, Egypt and the United States would cause the E.C. as a whole to soften its policy toward Israel.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
IN AFTERMATH OF BUS ATTACK,
CAIRO IS SUDDENLY FRIENDLY**
By Gil Sedan

CAIRO, Feb. 8 (JTA) -- Perhaps it is revolution against terrorism. No doubt it is shame. It may even be feared loss of revenue from tourism.

But whatever the cause, Cairo clearly is a more pleasant place for an Israeli to visit now than it was for a long time before Feb. 4.

That was the day terrorists attacked an Israeli tour bus on a busy highway southeast of Cairo, killing nine Israelis and two Egyptians, and wounding 18.

Now, Israelis are suddenly popular with Egyptians from all walks of life, who have little good to say about the Palestinians.

"We have been fighting for them since 1948," said Sheikh Sa'ad, as he polished shoes outside the Israeli Academic Center here, "and look what they (the Palestinians) have done to us."

Yasir Arafat "is the devil himself," he said, unknowingly using the same label Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir often uses to describe the Palestine Liberation Organization chief.

Sa'ad had a ready reply for a bystander who thought Palestinians living in the Israeli-administered territories deserved their "national rights."

"The Jews did not disown anyone of his land, they all paid for their land in cash," the elderly boot-black declared.

The source of his pro-Israel bias turned out to be the Israeli ambassador, Shimon Shamir, who leaves him a much bigger tip than the Saudi envoy.

At a different end of the social scale, prominent Egyptian journalists -- intellectuals never known for affection for Israel -- are writing sympathetically about the Jewish state.

It is not that the Egyptians have suddenly been overwhelmed with a wave of compassion for

the Israelis mourning their dead. Rather, they feel hurt that terrorists, whether Palestinians or Moslem fundamentalists, managed to shame their security system.

A Big Blow To Tourism

"It could have happened anywhere," explained Anwar Helal, the young director of Safaga Travel, which arranged the bus tour. "It happened in Munich, it even happened on the Tel Aviv-Haifa highway," he recalled.

Helal said his company already had five tour cancellations from Israel. "This has been the worst blow to tourism since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat," he said.

There is always a sharp drop in tourism from Israel after violent events, and that means a serious economic loss for Egypt.

In a good year, tourism from Israel, which includes non-Israelis in transit, accounts for 10 to 15 percent of Egypt's entire tourist volume. It is a vital source of revenue, especially for an ailing economy.

But beyond the economic concerns, the Egyptians see the bus attack as a challenge to their control of the country and a blow to the peace process which President Hosni Mubarak has diligently sought to advance.

It is also seen as a low blow to a country that has paid a high price for its involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

By the end of the week, Egyptian anger over the attack developed into an open rift with the PLO, aggravated by Palestinian failure to push the peace process forward.

The Egyptian press criticized the low-key Palestinian condemnation of the attack, which linked it to Israeli actions in the territories.

Escorts From The Police

"This was a very weak and unfitting reaction to such a big and ugly crime," wrote Ibrahim Nafa, editor in chief of the semi-official daily Al-Ahram.

A group of Israeli travelers learned of the bus attack while visiting Aswan, in southern Egypt. They agreed not to cut their trip short, but otherwise their attitudes differed.

Standing atop the Cairo Tower, which overlooks the sprawling capital, Clara Deutsch of Rishon le-Zion said she would not have gone to Egypt had she not been here already. "Why should we give them the pleasure of another attack?" she asked.

But Malka Lioz of Ramat Gan, who was born in Cairo, said she "would have come here anyway, in order not to give the terrorists a prize."

On Feb. 6, two days after the attack, the daily excursion bus from Jerusalem to Cairo was half empty. Most of the seats were occupied by journalists who came to write about Israeli tourists still bold enough to visit Egypt.

The journalists found each other instead.

At the Rafah border point, separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the group transferred from the Israeli bus to an Egyptian coach. The passengers were relieved to find that the driver was Egyptian, not Palestinian.

There were five buses making the trip to Cairo. They were formed into a convoy with a police van in front and another, loaded with armed policemen, in the rear. The caravan raced along the Sinai road to the Suez Canal, with police sirens screaming.

On Feb. 4, the Israeli bus was attacked on a

heavily traveled highway. Yet only one passerby stopped to investigate the stalled vehicle with smashed windows and bodies lying about.

It was Dr. Yasir Mahrous, a chemist driving from Port Said.

"I heard shots, explosions, windows shatter and a lot of noise," he recounted at his Cairo home. "People were screaming. I thought it was some kind of a military operation."

'You Are My Brothers'

When he realized what was happening, Mahrous pulled the wounded into his Mercedes and raced, partly against traffic, to Heliopolis Hospital, just outside Cairo.

He told the emergency room doctors that other cars were probably behind him, loaded with dead and wounded.

But there were no others. Egyptians are just too used to seeing people in trouble to stop for them.

The streets of Cairo are full of crippled beggars, children hungry and cold, many homeless. No one stops for them either.

After the attack, they embraced Israeli tourists, not because they suddenly love them, but because the Israelis symbolize a kind of progress and stability.

"You are not tourists," an Egyptian shopkeeper said in broken Hebrew to the small group of Israelis visiting the famous market at Khan el-Khalili. "You are my brothers."

But observers of the Egyptian scene warn that visitors should be wary of such effusion. A single speech by President Mubarak or a few articles in the press can reverse the mood overnight.

2 DEPORTEES SUSPECTED IN BUS ATTACK

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Two terrorists deported from Israel may have been involved in the Feb. 4 fatal attack on an Israeli tour bus in Egypt, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin told the Cabinet on Sunday.

Their names were not made available, but Rabin appeared to be referring to Mohammed Mahajneh and Assad Tamimi.

Mahajneh was released in a 1985 prisoner exchange with Ahmed Jabril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. He was deported to Lebanon three years later.

Tamimi was deported in 1970, for involvement in terrorist activities.

Nine Israelis and two Egyptians died in the bus attack, and 18 Israelis were wounded.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has put his recently appointed interior minister, Abdul Halim Mousa, in charge of the investigation. It is Mousa's first major job after three years of near exile in the southern Egyptian town of Asyout.

IDF MAJOR JAILED FOR REFUSING DUTY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force major was sentenced last week to 25 days in military prison for refusing to serve in the administered territories.

Maj. Zvi Nir-Al was the 100th and highest-ranking reservist jailed since the intifada began in December 1987 for refusal to serve where he was assigned. Of the 100, 11 were officers and 89 held lower rank.

BAKER REFUSES TO JOIN THE SOVIETS IN WARNING ISRAEL ON RESETTLEMENT

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Before leaving Moscow on Saturday, Secretary of State James Baker rejected a Soviet proposal that the two superpowers issue a joint statement condemning any Israeli attempt to resettle Soviet Jews in the West Bank.

"We do not think it is productive for us to join together in a condemnation of a strong and important ally of the United States, Israel," Baker said at a midnight news conference Saturday, after two days of talks with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

Both Washington and Moscow have issued statements in recent weeks criticizing any resettlement of Soviet Jews in the West Bank as an obstacle to peace.

But the Soviet Union apparently sought a joint statement, because it had been under strong criticism from the Arab countries for allowing an increasing number of Soviet Jews to emigrate.

In an apparent effort to ease Arab concerns, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov told a news conference last Thursday that Baker told Shevardnadze the United States would allow an additional 10,000 to 20,000 Jews to enter the United States as refugees.

The United States has a quota of 50,000 refugees from the Soviet Union and no longer considers Soviet Jews who emigrate on Israeli visas as potential candidates for refugee status.

As a result, Israel has replaced the United States as the destination of first resort for most Soviet emigrants. Last month, 97 percent immigrated to Israel, compared to 41 percent in December and 16 percent the month before.

Bush Calls For Direct Flights

This reversal has pleased Israel, which had long wanted the United States to ensure that Soviet Jews who emigrated on visas to Israel actually ended up there.

Therefore, Gerasimov's announcement that the United States might now admit up to 20,000 more Soviet Jews than expected came as a rude shock to Israeli officials.

American Jewish leaders sought a clarification from Washington on Friday, but the State Department had no immediate comment on Gerasimov's statement.

But the Jewish leaders have now come to the conclusion that nothing new has been proposed by Baker.

Phillip Saperia, assistant executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, said he believes the additional number cited by Gerasimov was a reference to the Bush administration's earlier proposal to admit additional Soviet Jews without government funding, either under the attorney general's parole authority or under a proposed law creating a new status of immigrants.

Saperia said about 20,000 Soviet Jews are still in transit centers outside Rome, and all of them should be processed by June. They will be counted as part of the 50,000 quota.

While in Moscow, Baker was to have expressed U.S. concern to Gorbachev about reports of growing anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. The matter did not come up at the Saturday night news conference.

Nor was it clear whether Baker had urged that the Soviets institute direct flights for Soviet Jews between Moscow and Israel.

El Al and Aeroflot have agreed to such flights, but the Soviet government has not yet implemented the agreement.

Baker brought with him to Moscow a letter to Gorbachev, signed by all 100 senators, urging that the flights begin.

President Bush last week publicly called for direct flights as evidence the Soviet Union wants to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process.

One signal "would be to assist more through transportation, direct flights for Soviet Jews wishing to leave the Soviet Union to go to Israel," the president said in response to a question after a Feb. 7 speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco.

Bush also said it would "be helpful" if Moscow would "normalize diplomatic relations with the State of Israel."

ISLAMIC BLOC REQUESTS U.N. ACTION TO STEM SOVIET JEWISH IMMIGRATION

By Allison Kaplan

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- The Islamic bloc here is demanding that the United Nations take immediate action to curtail Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel, charging that the Jewish state plans to settle Soviet Jews "in the Palestinian and Arab lands under the illegal occupation of Israel since 1967."

Dr. Hamid Algabid, secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, sent a message last week to U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar asking him and various U.N. bodies "to take urgent and effective action" on the question of Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel.

The Soviet Union on Friday suggested that the subject of Jewish immigration be discussed by the United Nations.

Officials at the Israeli mission, however, said Friday that they did not believe a Security Council session on the issue was imminent.

If a Security Council resolution calling for Israel not to settle Soviet Jews in the territories is formally introduced, it may be difficult for the United States to veto, since the State Department itself has been making such requests to Israel.

Whether or not there is Security Council action, the question will be addressed in Washington later this month by a special Arab League delegation made up of the foreign ministers of Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union.

The delegation plans to lobby both in Washington and the European Community against the huge influx of Soviet Jews expected to arrive in Israel, particularly if they wind up in the administered territories.

In the Islamic Conference's letter to Perez de Cuellar, Algabid states that Soviet Jewish settlement in the territories "would impede the prospects for the political settlement of the Middle East question and have incalculable consequences for regional peace and stability."

"The United Nations must take serious cognizance of the Israeli policy of establishing new settlements in the territories under its illegal occupation, coupled with the forceful eviction of the Palestinian people from their homes and lands," Algabid wrote.

ABIE NATHAN, RELEASED FROM PRISON, SAYS HE WOULD MEET WITH PLO AGAIN

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Peace advocate Abie Nathan was released from prison Friday, after completing four months of a six-month sentence for meeting with Yasir Arafat and other officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Leaving prison, he said he would do it again, "as soon as I get the chance," in order to advance peace.

Nathan was convicted last Sept. 27 of violating the controversial Anti-Terror Law, which forbids Israelis from having contacts with members of terrorist organizations.

He freely admitted having had four meetings with Arafat, the most recent in Tunis just a year earlier. He said his purpose was to try to get an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue going.

Nathan was confined to a minimum security prison. He was released for good behavior after completing two-thirds of his sentence, according to the superintendent of prisons, Chief Inspector Shaul Levy.

"I am going to do my very best to overcome all obstacles and continue with my mission" Nathan told reporters as he left prison. "I'll be talking to any Palestinians and Arabs who are willing to talk to me about peace."

Communications Minister Gad Ya'acobi of the Labor Party on Friday proposed Nathan as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of his persistent efforts to bring about peace between Israel and its neighbors.

Those efforts date back to the early 1960s, when Nathan flew his private plane to Egypt twice in an attempt to talk to President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Both times he was expelled from the country.

For more than 20 years, Nathan has operated the "Voice of Peace" radio ship, which broadcasts pop music and peace messages in Hebrew and Arabic from outside Israeli territorial waters.

WOMAN WHO WON 'RIGHT TO DIE' DECIDES INSTEAD TO CHOOSE LIFE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Ruth Trabelsi's gangrenous leg was amputated Friday -- probably saving her life -- after the 84-year-old great grandmother won a legal victory for patients' rights and then asserted a woman's right to change her mind.

The Tunisian-born Trabelsi, reported Sunday to be recovering at Poriya Hospital in Tiberias, was the center of a medical drama that unfolded when she refused to sign a waiver to allow surgeons to remove her diseased leg.

Doctors warned that she would suffer a painful death very soon unless the amputation was done.

Poriya Hospital sued last week to prevent her "passive suicide" and to protect itself from malpractice suits if Trabelsi died.

The issue, which riveted national attention, was whether a patient has the right to a reject a life-saving medical procedure.

Opinion was sharply divided, mainly along religious-secular lines. The Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, Yisrael Lau, insisted that, according to halachah, sick persons have no right to prevent their cure.

But Dr. Ram Ishai, chairman of the Israel

Medical Association, argued that the right of decision rests ultimately with the patient, as long as the patient fully understands the consequences.

The case came before Judge Oded Gershon of Nazareth District Court, which has jurisdiction over Tiberias. In a landmark decision Feb. 8, he ruled that Trabelsi could not be forced to undergo amputation.

The judge was convinced by the testimony of a psychiatrist and a geriatrics expert, who spoke to the woman and reported her to be sane, lucid and fully aware of the probable consequences of refusing surgery.

Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, meanwhile, appealed to the deeply religious Trabelsi to submit to surgery. Last Thursday night, she said she would.

But on learning of Judge Gershon's ruling Friday morning, she changed her mind.

The chief rabbi persisted, reinforced by pleas from her family. The Arabic-speaking woman, who has 258 living children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, changed her mind again.

Her leg was amputated above the knee Friday. A local anesthetic was used, because Trabelsi suffers from asthma.

On Saturday, she was sufficiently alert to order family members out of her hospital room, threatening to "get out of bed and walk home" if they did not leave immediately.

TU B'SHEVAT OBSERVED BY PLANTING TREES TO REPLACE VICTIMS OF ARSON

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 11 (JTA) -- Tu B'Shevat in the shadow of the intifada is symbolized by hundreds of tiny saplings in black plastic bags nestled at the foot of towering, fire-charred Jerusalem pines -- leafless victims of arson.

That was the sight that greeted President Chaim Herzog, who joined 750 Canadian visitors and 1,000 Israeli schoolchildren this sunny Sunday, the traditional new year of trees, to plant replacements for those burned last year near Moshav Neveh Ilan, in the Jerusalem corridor.

All over Israel, about 200,000 children planted trees in Tu B'Shevat ceremonies organized by the Jewish National Fund. The Jerusalem hills were dotted with yellow JNF flags marking special planting sites.

Speaking at Neve Ilan, Herzog called on world Jewry to contribute a "tree for a tree" for every one destroyed by arsonists.

The Canadian group, aptly called "Operation Roots," is the largest-ever Canadian contingent to visit Israel.

The "Tree for a Tree" project was conceived by Toronto's Adat Yisrael Congregation and quickly grew to include many congregations across Canada.

JNF World Chairman Moshe Rivlin told those attending the ceremony that he picked the Neveh Ilan site for this year's central ceremony in response to the extensive fire damage in the area.

He made the decision only a day before the terrorist attack on a Tel Aviv-Jerusalem bus that left 14 dead on the slopes below the main highway just outside Neveh Ilan.

Rivlin recalled the more recent bus tragedy in Egypt and announced that these trees were being planted in memory of the nine Israelis killed there on Feb. 4. He noted that Sunday's festivities marked 100 years since the first Tu B'Shevat tree-planting ceremony.