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**NEW DATA SHOW 230,000 SOVIET JEWS
COULD ARRIVE IN ISRAEL THIS YEAR**

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Israeli authorities are stunned by a new prediction that as many as 230,000 Soviet Jews will immigrate to Israel this year alone.

Previous estimates had been in the neighborhood of 100,000.

The latest forecast was reported Tuesday to the interministerial committee on immigration and promptly leaked to the news media.

Israel Television described the source of the information as "a high government official working in absorption, whose previous projections have all been correct in the past."

Such an influx would have a severe impact on Israel's absorption capacity. Uri Gordon, chairman of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, said that while the housing problem could be overcome, finding jobs for the new arrivals would be a major challenge.

The Israel Defense Force also will have to accelerate its preparations to absorb large numbers of new recruits, in face of a reduced military budget.

According to plans authorized last week by the IDF chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, mass conscription was not expected to begin until 1991, the IDF magazine *Bemahane* reported Wednesday.

The interministerial committee, chaired by Deputy Finance Minister Yossi Beilin, met Tuesday to discuss absorption plans based on a maximum of 100,000 olim.

The session broke up in disarray when more than double that figure was seriously projected.

4,815 Arrivals In January

The immediate reaction of one high-ranking Jewish Agency official was that the new estimate could "strengthen the Arab states' pressure on the Soviet Union to curtail immigration."

The official observed, however, that "there is no way of knowing how realistic it is."

Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization Executives, said guessing games are not helpful. "Efforts should be made to find alternative ways for the Soviet Jews to leave the USSR," he said.

The Soviet authorities so far have refused to approve direct flights between Moscow and Tel Aviv. As a result, many emigrants have to wait a year or longer for flights by existing air services.

Nevertheless, a huge number seem to be getting out. Of the 6,170 immigrants who arrived in Israel in January, 4,815 were from the Soviet Union, according to figures released Wednesday by the Absorption Ministry.

Government sources said the high estimate of arrivals this year is conditional on finding new exit routes for Soviet Jews. The sources suggested Prague, Warsaw and even Helsinki as transit points.

Another solution would be to establish an ocean passenger service to Israel from the Soviet Black Sea port of Odessa.

The Soviets have been willing to transport the emigrants' heavy baggage and household effects by container ship to Israel, but have

repeatedly refused to establish an ocean liner service for passengers.

Israeli officials seem to be as concerned by the leak of the high estimate as by the problems that could arise if it materializes. Gordon told reporters Tuesday that the government official who made the prediction should not have publicized the figure.

"It will only cause problems," mainly concern over finding jobs for so many newcomers, he said. Unemployment in Israel is currently at a record 9 percent.

Most Settling In Tel Aviv Area

"We can overcome the housing problem by temporarily placing immigrants in hotels, hostels and youth centers," Gordon said.

But Efraim Cohen, deputy director general of the Absorption Ministry, said the new projection would require an increase in the absorption budget from the present \$1.5 billion to at least \$3.5 billion. He said home-building would have to be accelerated using prefabricated houses erected in brand new neighborhoods.

"We will have to stop talking and start acting," Cohen said.

Of the 6,170 immigrants who arrived in January, 4,836 bypassed absorption centers, opting instead for "direct absorption."

Sixty percent settled in Tel Aviv and central Israel, 28 percent opted for Haifa and the North, and 7 percent chose the Jerusalem area.

**SHAMIR DENIES SCHEME TO SETTLE
SOVIET JEWS IN THE TERRITORIES**

By Allison Kaplan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir pleased American Jewish leaders Wednesday evening by reiterating that there is no deliberate plan to settle new Soviet immigrants in the administered territories.

"Let me state once again that it is not the policy of the government of Israel to direct the olim to the areas of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Nor are there special incentives for those that do go there," Shamir told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

But he also said that new immigrants are free to settle wherever they like.

"If anyone expects me to say that we shall forbid any Jew from going to Judea, Samaria or elsewhere -- I shall never do that. The olim have complete freedom of choice," he said, using the biblical names for the West Bank.

His statements received thunderous applause from members of the conference, who were attending the closing banquet of its annual three-day Israel seminar.

American Jewish leaders reportedly had been pressing the prime minister to issue a clear statement that would calm Arab fears that Israel plans to populate the administered territories with Soviet immigrants, thereby displacing Palestinian residents.

It was remarks by Shamir declaring that a "big Israel" was needed to absorb the Soviet immigration that first touched off Arab fears, which have since caught the attention of both the Soviet and U.S. governments.

But the prime minister told his listeners Wednesday night that the Arabs were now waging a "hysterical" publicity campaign against Soviet aliyah, and he exhorted the American Jewish leaders to help him fight it.

"To my regret," Shamir said, "Jordan has taken the lead in this campaign."

Speaks Of Pressure From U.S.

He followed with a warning that Israel would not countenance any Arab states attempting to curtail Soviet Jewish immigration. Any nation that does so "cannot be regarded as a candidate for peace," he said.

Shamir declared that Israel will "say to all the Arab countries -- including Egypt -- that anyone who fights against this aliyah reveals himself as an enemy of Israel, for it is impossible not to understand that for Israel, aliyah is the essence and the substance of life."

The prime minister also spoke about the peace process and hinted that he was not yet prepared to accept the inclusion of East Jerusalem residents or deportees in the Palestinian delegation that is to hold preliminary talks with Israel.

"We are being pressed to agree to the participation of Palestinians who live outside" the administered territories, "as well as some who are in Jerusalem," Shamir said, in an apparent reference to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's latest proposal.

"We shall not permit any action that will cast any doubt on the status of united Jerusalem as Israel's capital or that could undermine the position of our eternal capital," he said.

The Likud leader also said, "We will not be a party to any attempt that will bring the PLO into the process through the back door."

The Palestine Liberation Organization is believed to have endorsed the idea of including Palestinians once deported from the territories in peace talks, as representatives of a larger "Palestinian diaspora."

Shamir urged his listeners to pay attention to all four points of his May 1989 peace plan, which among other things calls on Arab states to sign a peace treaty with Israel.

"Concentrating on only the last point--elections in Judea, Samaria and Gaza -- will not end the conflict. It might even expose us to bigger security dangers," he said.

SHARON TRIES AND APPARENTLY FAILS TO SWAY AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS

By Allison Kaplan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Rebel Likud politician Ariel Sharon presented his own outline for Middle East peace to a group of American Jewish leaders Tuesday, but his proposals received a decidedly unenthusiastic reception.

Ten members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations met with Sharon for 45 minutes in the hotel suite of conference Chairman Seymour Reich.

Sharon requested the meeting to explain why he resigned from the Cabinet last week. He told the group he quit as a warning to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and for Israel's own good.

The former minister of industry and trade said he had opposed Israel's peace plan, but had gone along with it until his resignation for political reasons. But now, he told them, he wants to stop the plan before Shamir moves the country into even more "dangerous territory."

Sharon criticized Shamir for caving in, first by agreeing to hold preliminary talks with a Palestinian delegation, and now by appearing to accept the inclusion in that delegation of Palestinians deported from the territories or living in East Jerusalem.

When asked by the Americans to present an alternative proposal, Sharon told them he believed that peace would only come about if:

- * A peace treaty is struck with the Arab nations, not the Palestinians.

- * There is a reduction in Middle East arms stockpiles, negotiated by a superpower.

- * The borders with Jordan are opened so that citizens can travel back and forth freely.

- * Gaza is developed, with industry established and modern housing built for Palestinian refugees.

Support For The Shamir Plan

Sharon reportedly was challenged on his statements a number of times by the group. Most were highly critical afterward.

"I regard these proposals as extraordinarily unrealistic. They will happen when the Messiah comes," said Howard Squadron, a former chairman of the conference.

Another prominent participant in the meeting said Sharon was pursuing a "destructive path" by trying to scuttle the peace proposal currently on the table.

The group left the meeting "with the impression that Sharon does not have the answers for Israel," said the participant.

Overall, there is not a great deal of support for Sharon's position among the members of the Conference of Presidents attending its Israel seminar. Even those who staunchly oppose territorial compromise seem to think that negotiations with Palestinians should at least be attempted.

"American Jewish leaders have decided that the Shamir peace plan must be supported," said Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress.

He said that American Jews believe in moving the process forward, "even if it holds out the possibility that an end result might be something they don't necessarily agree with."

But Morris Amitay, vice president of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, said that while Sharon's ideas are farfetched, they are no more outlandish than proposals for a two-state solution that the conference had heard Monday from Peace Now activists.

Like the military veteran he is, Sharon is positioning himself strategically, so that "in six months or so, if the peace process falls through, he will be there to pick up the pieces," said Amitay.

BRITISH TOURIST STABBED IN HEBRON

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- A middle-aged tourist from Britain was stabbed and seriously wounded in Hebron on Wednesday afternoon.

A curfew was clamped on the town, as security forces searched for the assailant.

The victim, whose name was not released, was discovered by Jews with a large knife plunged into his lower back. He was rushed by ambulance to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, where he underwent what was described as major surgery.

The Israeli authorities assume the attack was an act of terrorism.

SOVIET RESISTANCE ON DIRECT FLIGHTS COULD IMPERIL JACKSON-VANIK WAIVER

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) warned the Bush administration Wednesday that he would lead a fight in Congress against the waiver of Jackson-Vanik Amendment trade sanctions, unless the Soviet Union implements direct flights between Moscow and Israel.

Lantos said there is an urgent need for the flights, because Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev "may fall tomorrow, emigration might end tomorrow," and the lives of Soviet Jews could be in real danger.

He said that until now, he and many other members of Congress have urged President Bush to waive Jackson-Vanik Amendment sanctions because of the increased emigration permitted under Gorbachev.

But the Soviet refusal to implement an agreement for direct flights signed last year by El Al Israel Airlines and the Soviet carrier Aeroflot "is a clear violation of the principles underlying Jackson-Vanik," Lantos said.

His remarks were made during testimony by John Kelly, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, to the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East.

When Kelly said that Secretary of State James Baker had urged the Kremlin to institute direct flights, Lantos indicated that Baker had not been forceful enough.

"I find it inconceivable that if this is indeed a high-priority issue, the president and the secretary didn't have enough clout in the Kremlin to get this done," Lantos said.

Arab Fear Termed 'Red Herring'

He said he is circulating a letter among his House colleagues urging Gorbachev to allow direct flights. As of Wednesday, more than 110 members had signed the letter, which Lantos said he would present to the Soviet Embassy.

The lawmaker scoffed at explanations that Moscow will not move on direct flights because of pressure from the Arab countries.

"The Soviet Union may be in real trouble, but nobody in his right mind believes the Soviet Union's troubles would increase perceptively if people would be able to fly from Moscow to Israel directly," he said.

Lantos also said the "ultimate red herring" is the "absurd claim that the Arab world is terrified of Soviet Jewish immigration."

Kelly maintained that "responsible" Arabs do not oppose Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel, only to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He said the fear among the Arabs is that large numbers of Soviet Jews going to the territories will force out the Palestinians living there.

Kelly said that only 1 to 1.5 percent of Soviet Jewish immigrants are now settling in the territories. But he stressed that the United States wants Israel to state that it will not increase the number of settlements and that it will no longer provide the financial benefits that may induce some Soviet Jews to settle there.

Lantos said that while he agrees that the settlements "are not helpful" to the peace process, a democratic society cannot exclude its own citizens from living where they wish. He said to do so would make "second-class citizens" of Soviet Jews.

SHEVARDNADZE REITERATES PROMISE TO CONDEMN ANTI-SEMITISM, HATRED

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze this week promised a delegation of World Jewish Congress leaders visiting Moscow that he would shortly issue a public statement denouncing anti-Semitism and all forms of incitement to hatred.

Shevardnadze made a similar promise last month to New York City Councilman Noach Dear.

Shevardnadze and other high-level Soviet officials met Tuesday with Edgar Bronfman, president of the WJC; Israel Singer, the group's secretary-general; Elan Steinberg, its executive director; and Isi Leibler, a WJC vice president from Melbourne, Australia, who was instrumental in establishing the Solomon Mikhoels Cultural Center last year.

Steinberg said in a telephone interview that the center is renting out several places in Moscow and teaching Hebrew to 450 students every evening.

The delegation, which arrived in Moscow from Israel, brought with it an exhibit on Israel by French photographer Frederic Brenner. The photographic exhibit will travel to several cities.

Also on display in Moscow now is what is believed to be the first comprehensive exhibit of Jewish books, religion and culture publicly shown in the Soviet Union.

The exhibit, which opened last week at the National Library for Foreign Literature, displays some 300 books in Russian and Hebrew, including prayer books, dictionaries and reference books.

Havel Will Visit Israel

The flowering of Jewish culture, a product of glasnost, comes amid unsettling threats against Jews. Soviet officials assured the WJC leaders that administrative and legislative measures will be adopted as part of the government's effort against individuals and groups engaged in anti-Semitic activity.

Other officials present Tuesday were Alexander Yakovlev, a member of the Politburo and secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, and Yuri Chiorachnov, chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs.

The WJC delegation, carrying messages from the Israeli government, pressed the Soviets to allow emigrating Jews to leave on direct flights for Israel. The delegation was unable to comment on the substance of the talks until it reports back to the Israelis.

The group also discussed the cases of remaining refuseniks, particularly that of Vladimir and Karmela Raiz. The WJC group was "informed at the highest level that the case would immediately be reviewed and favorably resolved," Steinberg reported.

The WJC leaders left Moscow on Wednesday for Prague, where they attended a state dinner hosted by President Vaclav Havel. The dinner was held in Kolodeje Palace, in whose basement the dissident playwright was once held prisoner.

The parties discussed the subject of Jewish property that the Nazis confiscated, much of which is part of the Czech Jewish exhibit "A Precious Legacy," soon to open in Israel.

Havel will visit Israel on April 26, in connection with the showing of "A Precious Legacy" at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, Steinberg reported in a telephone call from Prague.

FACTION OF CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT IS STARTING A SEMINARY OF ITS OWN

By Elena Neuman

NEW YORK, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- A faction of the Conservative movement of Judaism that opposes the ordination of women as rabbis, among other recent trends, is starting its own non-denominational rabbinical seminary for the study of what it calls "traditional Judaism."

The formation of the Institute of Traditional Judaism was announced at a news conference here Wednesday by leaders of the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism.

Although the new institute claims to be unaffiliated with any one branch of Judaism, many see it as an academic alternative to the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative rabbinical school, which in the past decade has promoted the ordination of women as rabbis and cantors.

"We want the institute to serve as a unifying force among the traditional elements within the Jewish community," Rabbi Ronald Price, dean of the institute, said in an interview. "This is not a Conservative institution, it is independent and non-denominational."

"From our perspective, we are not setting ourselves up in competition with any institution that exists in the community today," said Price. "Our goal is to work with as broad a spectrum of the community as possible. The labels are not relevant to us."

Plans To Open In September

Many of the leaders of the new seminary are past and present members of the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, a group that formed in 1983 in direct response to the Conservative movement's decision to allow the rabbinic ordination of women.

In that year, the union ruffled feathers with an advertisement it circulated throughout the Jewish news media, which said, "Leading Talmudic scholars of the Conservative movement have declared (the ordination of women) to be halachically wrong."

The organization, which boasts a membership of 400 to 450 rabbis and approximately 5,000 lay families, also has opposed allowing women to participate as full members in minyanim and Torah readings, although it sanctions women leading segregated women's prayer services.

The institute, scheduled to open this September in Mount Vernon, N.Y., will offer traditional ordination to male rabbinical students, as well as non-matriculated studies to students "regardless of age, gender or denominational affiliation."

"While our institute will ordain only men," explained Price, "that is not the primary raison d'etre of the school. The issue is our approach to Jewish law and the community."

"We are responding to a feeling that there is a need in the community for the leadership of rabbis who are fully traditional, passionately observant and faithful," he said.

"The motto of our school is genuine faith and intellectual honesty. We see them both as religious imperatives," said Price. "We don't believe in closing our students' minds to the modern world, but we want them to be passionately devoted to their own observance of Jewish law and tradition."

The school, to be headed by Rabbi David Weiss Halivni, a prominent Talmudist at Columbia

University, will offer a five-year program that includes intensive study of Talmud, codes and jurisprudence, and Bible, as well as courses in history, Hebrew literature, Jewish thought, community service and counseling.

Members of the academic advisory council include Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel; Horace Bier, who will also serve as chairman; Eliezer Berkovitz, David Novak, Charles Liebman, Ruth Wisse and Marvin Fox.

Bid To Attract 'Modern Orthodox'

The institute's "non-denominational" label may be intended to attract "modern Orthodox" Jews who feel increasingly alienated by the growing strength of the "ultra-Orthodox" movements of Judaism.

"There are people in modern Orthodoxy who will fit as easily into our camp as members of the traditional Conservative movement," said Price. "We want to be a bridge between halachic Jews coming out of different backgrounds who feel similar needs for community."

"Until this time, there has been no institution whose main focus is on the ideals that we are presenting to the community," he said.

But according to Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of JTS, the philosophy of the institute "seems to me to be identical with the educational ethos of the Jewish Theological Seminary."

"If they seek to become part of the constellation of higher learning, they have a long road ahead of them," he said. "An announcement is not a fact. So far they are non-accredited, they do not have a permanent full-time faculty or access to a major library."

"I think it has a long way to go before we can assess what implications it will have for the Conservative movement," said Schorsch.

COURT TO CONSIDER NEW EVIDENCE SUPPORTING DEMJANJUK'S ALIBI

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Feb. 28 (JTA) -- Israel's High Court of Justice has agreed to consider new evidence that might support the alibi of convicted war criminal John Demjanjuk, who was sentenced to death two years ago.

It is scheduled to hear his appeal May 14.

Demjanjuk's Israeli defense lawyer, Yoram Sheftel, will interview a witness in West Germany before trying to corroborate the claim that Demjanjuk is a victim of mistaken identity.

The Ukrainian-born former automobile worker from Cleveland was found guilty by a Jerusalem district court in 1988 of responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews between 1942 and 1943, when he was a guard at the Treblinka death camp. His brutality earned him the moniker "Ivan the Terrible."

Demjanjuk, 69, claims he was a German prisoner of war and was never in Treblinka.

Sheftel said he learned only in December of a West German woman, Josefine Dolle, whose testimony might give credence to that claim.

Dolle, 70, was a clerk at the German military camp in Heuberg, where Demjanjuk claims he was part of Vlasov's Army, a group of captured Red Army soldiers who defected to the Germans.

Dolle's evidence does not include photographs of Demjanjuk, nor does she claim to have known him. But she can testify that there were Red Army defectors at the camp at the time Demjanjuk says he was there, Sheftel explained.