

VOL. 69 - 74th YEAR

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 1991

NO. 67

ISRAEL PREPARES CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES AS BAKER ARRIVES FOR TALKS

By David Landau and Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 8 (JTA) -- The Israeli government appeared poised to undertake a series of "confidence-building measures" to advance the Middle East peace process as U.S. Secretary of State James Baker arrived here Monday evening for talks with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and his aides.

Baker arrived for two days of talks aimed at clearing the way for a regional peace conference to be convened by the United States, possibly in cooperation with the Soviet Union. It would serve as a curtain raiser for parallel direct talks Israel would conduct with the Arab states and with the Palestinians.

But Israel was expected to insist on ironclad guarantees from Baker before committing itself to such a conference. It also wants to know from the Americans what goodwill gestures the Arab states are prepared to make to provide a conducive atmosphere for the peace talks.

Baker himself has suggested a lifting of the 40-year Arab economic boycott of Israel.

Justice Minister Dan Meridor, a close confidant of the prime minister, said Monday evening that Israel was awaiting with interest to hear what new readiness for progress the secretary could report from the Arab side.

Shamir spent considerable time Monday conferring with his two chief collaborators in the government, Foreign Minister David Levy and Defense Minister Moshe Arens. They decided to nail down the United States on the precise nature of the proposed regional conference, media reports said.

Shamir himself confirmed to reporters Sunday that a regional conference was one of the ideas under discussion, but he gave no details.

1,000 Prisoners To Be Released

As for confidence-building measures, the army radio reported Monday that "many hundreds" of detained intifada activists would be freed. In addition, Palestinian universities in the West Bank will be reopened for the first time in the three years since the intifada began, the army radio reported.

There was no official confirmation of these moves. But a few hours before Baker's scheduled arrival, the Defense Ministry announced Arens had just approved the release of 1,000 prisoners and detainees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Arens' media spokesman, Danny Navch, insisted the release had nothing to do with Baker's visit, but was a sort of amnesty on the occasion of the Moslem feast of Id al-Fitr.

A Defense Ministry communique later stressed that none of the persons freed was involved in murder or physical offenses, and that they had served most of their sentences anyway.

The communique said the defense minister also decided on tax reform to remedy the severe economic deterioration in the administered territories since the Persian Gulf war, when Palestinians were confined to their homes by curfew.

Israel Radio had said earlier that Defense Ministry officials were working on plans for new

economic development in the territories and that the entire package of "confidence-builders" would be presented to Baker during his visit.

The secretary was to meet separately Tuesday with Shamir, Levy and Arens, as well as with the same group of Palestinian leaders he received when he was last in Jerusalem on March 12.

Israeli sources said Baker would probably have a concluding meeting Wednesday morning with Shamir, Levy and Arens before taking off for Cairo and Damascus.

The sources said Shamir is not necessarily opposed to a regional conference under joint U.S.-Soviet auspices, provided it is a one-time, formal opening event, followed immediately by direct talks.

Because they want to be sure there are no subsequent "misunderstandings" with Washington, the Israelis would like the Americans to assure them on these points in writing.

Palestinian Representation Problematic

The sources also said Israel continues to oppose the participation of any Palestinian representatives from East Jerusalem and would insist that a Palestinian delegation from the administered territories contain no representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The issue of Palestinian representation stalled the diplomatic process a year ago. And Israeli commentators speculated Monday that it could very well be a major obstacle again.

They pointed out that the Palestinians with whom Baker met last month and would meet again Tuesday include East Jerusalem activist Faisal Hussein, whom Shamir has dismissed as "no better than (Yasir) Arafat," the PLO chief.

Another problematic issue expected to arise is Washington's request that Israel issue a categorical commitment to U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Israeli ministers say they are committed insofar as the Camp David accords recognized the resolutions as a "basis" for the peace process. But the Shamir government is unwilling to accede to the U.S. interpretation of 242 as a mandate to trade land for peace.

Levy reportedly advised the prime minister Monday that Israel should sidestep that issue for the time being and concentrate on efforts to build confidence for a regional conference leading to negotiations.

The French news agency Agence France-Presse reported last week that the Israeli government has already presented the United States with proposals for a Mideast peace conference.

According to the AFP, citing highly placed Israeli officials who requested anonymity, the Israeli plan is notable in that for the first time it calls for a preparatory meeting, likely to be held in Cairo, which would include Israel and the Arab countries.

But Israel proposes that the Arab countries first declare publicly an end to their state of war with Israel and renounce acts of terrorism and violence against it.

There was no confirmation of the reported plan from Israeli officials. But according to AFP, the Israelis envisage a meeting with Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states.

**ISRAELI ACTIVIST TO ASSIST KURDS
AS JEWS AROUND WORLD VOICE CONCERN**
By Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, April 8 (JTA) -- While the Israeli government ponders how it can provide humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds fleeing to Turkey after the collapse of their uprising against Saddam Hussein, peace activist Abie Nathan says he is prepared to act.

Nathan, who has organized relief for starvation and natural disaster victims all over the world, said in a television interview Sunday night that he is going to Turkey to find out what kind of aid is required and how he can get to the people who need it most.

Nathan has already made a personal contribution of \$25,000 to purchase food and medical supplies for Iraqi refugee relief.

It came from advertising revenues earned by his Voice of Peace radio station, a ship anchored outside Israeli territorial waters which has been broadcasting peace messages and pop music to Israel and Arab countries for more than 20 years.

The peace activist, who has often embarrassed Israeli officialdom by his outspokenness and attention-getting tactics, seems to have spurred the government to seek ways to help.

Dr. Yossi Olmert, director of the Government Press Office, told foreign correspondents Sunday that if Israel could help the Kurdish refugees, "we would do it with enthusiasm."

But Olmert, an expert on Iraq, said the lack of a common border with Turkey or northern Iraq is an obstacle to Israeli relief efforts.

Nevertheless, Kupat Holim, Histadrut's health care agency, informed the Health Ministry on Monday that it is prepared to send a team of doctors and nurses to assist Kurdish refugees stranded in Turkey.

Pressure From Kurdish Israelis

There is strong pressure on the government as well from Israel's large community of Jews from Kurdistan. A delegation of them was assured Monday by Foreign Minister David Levy that the government would arrange to send emergency supplies to the Kurdish refugees.

Levy promised the delegation he would try to arrange a meeting for them to discuss the subject with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, who arrived here Monday evening.

President Bush last week ordered U.S. Air Force transports to parachute food and medical supplies to the Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq. The airlift, which began Sunday, followed mounting pressure on the White House to act to relieve people in desperate straits.

American Jewish organizations, including the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council and B'nai B'rith International, joined the chorus of public appeals late last week. Some accused Bush of abandoning the Kurds after urging them to mount a revolt against Saddam Hussein.

In a letter delivered to the president Monday, the American Jewish Congress urged Bush to ask for immediate action by the U.N. Security Council "to save the lives of thousands of Kurdish refugees who are fleeing the terror and vengeance of Saddam Hussein."

The letter, signed by AJCongress President Robert Lifton and its executive director, Henry Siegman, reminded Bush their organization supported his efforts to mobilize the world community to counter Hussein's aggression against Kuwait.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee also issued statements Monday calling on the Bush administration and the international community to step up efforts to protect the Kurdish people.

And the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee announced it was establishing an "open mailbox" to provide humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees.

Donations may be sent to Open Mailbox for Kurdish Refugees, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 711 Third Ave, 10th floor, New York, N.Y. 10017.

'Smell Of Blood Cries Out'

Statements of concern about the plight of the Kurds were also issued by Jewish leaders in Germany and the Netherlands.

In Bonn, Heinz Galinski, chairman of the German Jewish community, issued a statement calling on the German government to aid the refugees and support the political aspirations of the Kurdish people.

In the Netherlands, three Jewish congregations and the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel issued a joint statement condemning the Iraqi aggression against the Kurds and urging the Dutch government to admit as many refugees as possible.

In Geneva, David Littman, a representative of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, sent a strongly worded letter to the U.N. undersecretary-general for human rights, Jan Martenson, urging the United Nations to provide immediate support to the Kurdish refugees.

"Today the smell of blood cries out to heaven" as the "tyrant of Baghdad" oppresses the Kurdish people, and meanwhile the U.N. Commission on Human Rights remains silent, wrote Littman.

"Silence now, and no sign of any action whatsoever, would brand the U.N. as an accomplice of tyranny and, God forbid, to the genocide of a people who have knocked on the door of history" for the past 70 years in vain, he wrote.

Here in Israel, peace activist Nathan said that his past experiences cast doubt on air drops as the best way to get supplies to the people who need them. He said he had personally witnessed refugees stampeding to the drop site, where the strong fought the weak for supplies, even killing children in the process.

Often, the strong gained possession of the food and other supplies, which they sold later at inflated prices, Nathan said.

Uprising May Have Saved Hussein

Olmert of the press office denied reports that Kurdish leaders had visited Israel recently seeking military support. He also said the Kurdish experience was further proof that a nation can rely only on itself for security.

Ofra Bengio of Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center offered a different twist on the Iraqi situation. She told a news conference here that the Kurdish and Shi'ite Moslem uprisings may have saved Hussein from being overthrown by his own army and the Sunni Moslems in Iraq.

"If the Sunni elite had not felt so threatened by the rebellion, they might have toppled the government," said Bengio, who has just written a book on the Iraqi Kurds.

(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents David Kantor in Bonn, Henrietta Boas in Amsterdam and Tamar Levy in Geneva.)

**ARAB WHO STABBED FOUR WOMEN
SENTENCED TO FOUR LIFE TERMS**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 8 (JTA) -- A Gaza Arab who stabbed four Jewish women to death last month in Jerusalem's Kiryat Yovel neighborhood was given four life sentences in magistrate court here Monday.

Judge Ya'acov Bazak, who pronounced the sentences, said he wished he had the legal power to impose the death penalty on the defendant, 26-year-old Mohammed Abu-Jalala, a resident of the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Israel does not have capital punishment, except for crimes perpetrated during the Holocaust. Last month, only days after the stabbings, the Knesset decisively rejected the death penalty for terrorists.

But the punishment accorded Abu-Jalala "is insufficient for the magnitude of this crime," the judge said. The women were murdered only because they were Jewish, he said.

None of their families was in court for the sentencing.

Abu-Jalala attacked the women at a bus stop near a popular playground in the Kiryat Yovel section of western Jerusalem on March 10, shouting, "Allahu Akhbar" (God is Great).

He told police later that the killings were "a message for Baker," a reference to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, who was due in Israel the following day for diplomatic talks.

Meanwhile, the High Court of Justice ordered a halt Monday to deportation proceedings against four Palestinian activists from the Gaza Strip until the hearing of their case is concluded.

The four appealed to the court Sunday after a military appeals board rejected their plea. The court will review their case this week.

The expulsion of the four -- Jamal Yassin Hassan Abu-Habal, 33; Muin Mohammed Mussalam, 31; Hashem Mohammed Dahalan, 31; and Jamal Abu-Jidian, 33 -- was ordered March 23 by Gen. Mattan Vilnai, Israel Defense Force commander in the southern region. Although none of the four was linked to the recent spate of stabbings, the IDF branded them "hard-core terrorists."

Nevertheless, the deportation orders have been strongly protested by the United States and the United Nations.

**IDF SPARS WITH COMPTROLLER
OVER REPORT ON GAS MASKS**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 8 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force is at loggerheads with a report by State Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat that alleges the IDF distributed inadequate gas masks for babies and young children during the recent chemical warfare scare.

Ben-Porat's report, made public last month, was officially accepted Monday by the Knesset's Control Committee and angrily rejected by the IDF high command.

Defense Minister Moshe Arens was to explain the army's objections at a committee hearing Tuesday.

Ben-Porat, a former member of the High Court of Justice, also charged that about 1,000 gas masks distributed to adults were defective.

But her allegation that infants and children could have been without protection in a poison gas attack has stirred the most controversy.

According to Ben-Porat, gas-protected cribs for infants were inadequate and the "passive masks" issued to youngsters between the ages of 4 and 8 were good only for an hour or so.

The comptroller said the IDF should have developed an "active" mask with battery-driven ventilators. The defense authorities claim they did the best they could with the limited funds available.

The IDF said reduced military budgets compelled the civil defense authorities to limit their purchases to two sizes of gas masks for the entire population, even though facial sizes vary greatly among babies, young children and adults.

Soldiers admittedly were favored over civilians. The IDF acknowledged they were issued much better-fitting gas masks than the general populace but said they needed them in order to fight or work outdoors during a chemical attack.

Civilians did not need the same standard because they were protected by the gas-proof rooms in which they were instructed to remain during air raid alerts, the defense authorities said.

That was never put to the test. A total of 39 Iraqi Scud missiles were fired at Israel from western Iraq during the recent Persian Gulf war, but none carried chemical warheads.

Part of Ben-Porat's report, which has been largely accepted by the Knesset committee though rejected by the military, claims the IDF sold thousands of inferior gas masks to a German purchaser at a low price several years ago, only to buy them back for a much higher price when it became clear that Israel had no gas masks for West Bank Arabs.

**NEW IDF CHIEF WARNS STAFF TO EXPECT
BUDGET CUTS, ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 8 (JTA) -- High- and middle-ranking Israel Defense Force officers got the unpleasant news Sunday that for the next four years the IDF will have to scrimp along on reduced budgets and undergo significant organizational changes.

The measures are "painful but justified," the IDF's new chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, told officers of the rank of lieutenant colonel and above, who were summoned to a meeting at General Headquarters here which was closed to the press.

But military correspondents have a fair idea of some of the economies in mind.

Reports circulating since Barak succeeded retiring Gen. Dan Shomron as chief of staff last week said two top-echelon jobs would be eliminated: the chief of staff's operations evaluation aide and the aide to the chief of military intelligence.

Both posts are held by officers with the rank of general.

Barak was said to have called the meeting to arrest what he sees as increasing estrangement between the army's top brass and the middle ranks of the officers corps.

He was reported to have stressed discipline and personal example, honesty and professionalism in the performance of duty.

Meanwhile, correspondents say Barak's plan to invest the Ground Forces Command with greater responsibility does not sit well with the generals who hold regional commands. They have privately expressed concern that the new emphasis will encroach on their autonomy and authority.

AUSTRALIAN PRESS COUNCIL RAPS NEWSPAPER FOR OFFENDING JEWS

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, April 8 (JTA) -- The Australian Press Council has castigated one of the country's major newspapers for publishing a commentary judged offensive to Jews.

The Sun Herald, a Sunday newspaper published in Sydney with a nationwide circulation of over 550,000, was taken to task for consistently rebuffing efforts by the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies to correct a false commentary.

The Press Council, a voluntary association that includes most Australian newspapers and news magazines, decided that the Sun Herald item "breached the ethical standard that material should not be harmfully disparaging of a group by reference to their race, nationality or religion."

The offensive column was written by the Sun Herald's news editor, Alex Mitchell, who alleged that students would be evicted from campus accommodations to make way for a new Jewish residential college and academic center at the University of Sydney.

Numerous attempts by the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies to meet with the editor were rebuffed, and the paper's administrators refused to consider the claim that the item was both inaccurate and "most offensive to members of the Jewish community."

It was "likely to exacerbate interethnic tension among the citizens of New South Wales," the Board of Deputies said.

Professor Graham de Vahl Davis, chairman of the Board of Deputies Public Relations Committee, praised the Press Council for recognizing that "the contemptuous response" of the Sun Herald's editor to the complaint "was totally unacceptable and required strong action to be taken."

BONN GENTLY TRYING TO PERSUADE SOVIET JEWS TO RETURN TO ISRAEL

By David Kantor

BONN, April 8 (JTA) -- The German government, trying gently to persuade some 300 Soviet Jews who came to Berlin from Israel in January to return there, may have scored a small success.

About 30 of them seem ready to board flights to Tel Aviv. But the other 270 adamantly refuse to go back to Israel, a country for which they express profound dislike.

They came to Berlin originally, they said, to take refuge from Iraqi Scud missiles, which began falling on Israel on Jan. 18.

The German authorities, who insist they will not expel the "refugees," are making it clear, nevertheless, that their status is temporary.

Dieter Heckelmann, the Berlin official responsible for refugees, said Sunday that the Jews could remain as Israeli tourists until their fate is decided by Interior Minister Wolfgang Schauble.

Israeli officials have warned the Germans not to set a precedent by recognizing Israeli citizens as refugees.

The Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel last year and hold Israeli passports or other travel documents. They are Israeli citizens, and Israeli consular officials here are furious with them.

The Israelis seem most sensitive to allegations in the media by some of the expatriates that Soviet Jews coming to Israel are forced to settle in the administered territories.

That would be a violation of Israel's promise

to the United States in return for U.S. financial help to absorb immigrants.

The charge is a malicious lie, according to statements issued by the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem and the Israeli Embassy in Bonn.

Israeli officials had an angry confrontation with the Soviet Jews at the consulate here last week. Asked to produce their Israeli identity cards, the Soviet Jews refused, saying they did not feel themselves Israelis even if they were registered as citizens of Israel.

The emigres were upbraided for their complaints about conditions in Israel. Some said they accepted Israeli citizenship unwillingly, only as a means of getting out of the Soviet Union.

The group has already hired several Berlin lawyers sympathetic to their situation to represent them. They say they like Germany and want to remain here.

The Germans said they would help the Jews if they insist on staying in the country.

But Berlin officials said the city is incapable of providing temporary housing for refugees, let alone "for tourists from other countries."

That allusion to their temporary status may have convinced a few to go back to Israel.

BULGARIAN OLIM ARRIVE IN ISRAEL

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 8 (JTA) -- The first flight to Israel by Balkan Air, Bulgaria's national airline, landed Monday at Ben-Gurion Airport with 68 immigrants on board.

Jewish Agency officials expressed hope that at least 100 Bulgarian olim would arrive each month now that direct flights from the capital city of Sofia have been established.

The Jewish Agency signed an agreement on Feb. 4 with Balkan Air to transport Bulgarian olim to Israel. Balkan Air also signed an interline agreement March 25 with El Al, Israel's airline.

El Al is expected to begin regular flights to Sofia in July.

About 1,000 Bulgarian Jews immigrated to Israel last year, according to Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Diniz. They traveled by indirect routes in the absence of direct flights.

Diniz said he hoped a similar number would come to Israel this year.

About 5,000 Jews now live in Bulgaria.

JEWISH AGENCY REOPENS IN ROMANIA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 8 (JTA) -- The Romanian office of the Jewish Agency for Israel, shut down during 40 years of Communist rule, was reopened Sunday in Bucharest.

The ceremonies were attended by the country's chief rabbi, Moses Rosen, who affixed a mezuzah to the doorpost.

The office was officially reopened by Simcha Diniz, chairman of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization Executives, in the presence of representatives of Romania's Jewish community.

About 50,000 immigrants passed through Bucharest during the past year, most of them Soviet Jews immigrating to Israel.

Diniz expressed the hope that it would also become "warm house" providing educational services for those of Romania's 20,000 Jews planning to emigrate and that Bucharest would continue to serve as a transit center for Soviet Jews going to Israel.