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**SOVIET OFFICIAL TO VISIT ISRAEL,
RAISING HOPE OF RENEWED RELATIONS**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- Israeli officials have welcomed Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh's announcement that he will visit Israel next month on a tour of the Middle East, though they said they had not been informed officially of his plans.

The Soviet foreign minister made the announcement in Kislovodsk, the Caucasus resort town where he met Thursday with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

Bessmertnykh would be the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to visit the Jewish state. It is hoped here that his visit will herald the re-establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries, which Moscow severed in 1967.

Bessmertnykh indicated Thursday that the Soviet Union was ready to co-sponsor a Middle East peace conference with the United States.

While Israel has agreed to U.S.-Soviet sponsorship of a regional conference, it has insisted the Soviets restore full diplomatic ties beforehand.

Asked about that possibility, the foreign minister said it depended on progress toward a Middle East peace settlement.

The Soviet announcement may have compensated in some degree for the fading hopes for Baker's peace mission, as the secretary of state returned to Jerusalem late Thursday for another round of talks with Israeli leaders Friday.

U.S. Urged Not To Give Up

Baker made no statement when he landed Thursday evening at Ben-Gurion Airport. He was met by Foreign Minister David Levy and Zalman Shoval, Israel's ambassador to Washington.

The secretary, who had a long session with Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus on Wednesday, has all but acknowledged his failure to bridge the gap between the Arab states and Israel over how to advance the peace process.

But Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was said to have written a letter this week to President Bush, urging the United States to continue its diplomatic efforts, despite the difficulties.

That theme was picked up Thursday by one of Shamir's chief aides, Yosef Ben-Aharon, who is director-general of the Prime Minister's Office.

In an Israel Radio interview, Ben-Aharon urged Baker to "persist" in his peace mission.

He said the Israeli government was doing its best to take into account Arab sensitivities with respect to the proposed peace conference and Palestinian representation, which has been one of the main stumbling blocks.

But Ben-Aharon cautioned that Israel could not agree to Arab insistence that an international framework be substituted for direct bilateral talks, nor would it accept any role for the Palestine Liberation Organization, which it considers to be, by its very nature, the antithesis of peace.

Ben-Aharon sidestepped the controversial issue of accepting East Jerusalem Arabs as members of the Palestinian delegation.

Baker will take time out Friday for another meeting, his fourth in six weeks, with local Palestinian leaders.

**SENATE URGES SAUDIS TO RECONSIDER
REFUSAL TO JOIN IN PEACE CONFERENCE**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 25 (JTA) -- Half of the U.S. Senate is urging King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to reconsider his refusal to take part in a proposed Middle East regional peace conference.

But the Bush administration appears satisfied with the Saudi stance that it is not a "front-line state" in the Arab-Israeli conflict and should therefore only get involved in discussions with Israel after the Palestinian issue is resolved among the immediate parties.

The senators made their views known in a letter expected to be mailed by this weekend. The letter is a reaction to a statement Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal made Monday after meeting with Secretary of State James Baker, who was touring the region.

Faisal said his country "supports the efforts of the United States for the convening of an early peace conference" and "aspires to and exerts all of its efforts" to achieve peace.

"Saudi Arabia believes it is time to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and to achieve a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question," Faisal said.

Once that question is "tackled in the conference," Saudi Arabia might be interested in discussing areas of mutual cooperation with other countries in the region, he said.

But he added, "We cannot go ahead of ourselves."

Saudi Involvement 'Indispensable'

Before arriving in the Saudi kingdom, Baker said in Egypt that he did not think the Saudis would participate in the proposed "political discussion between Israel and her Arab neighbors and the political discussion between Israel and the Palestinians."

He explained that the "issues in dispute" affect Israel and the front-line Arab states. There is a question of "where do you draw the line" among such states, he said.

The letter, which was signed by 57 senators as of Thursday afternoon, argues that "Saudi Arabia's participation in the negotiations with Israel is indispensable for any real peace process to succeed."

The senators criticize the Saudi government for its "unwillingness to engage itself fully in the peace process through a regional peace parley."

The lawmakers praise Israel for its "agreement to invite the Soviet Union into the process and to convene a broader Middle East parley that would lead immediately to bilateral negotiations."

The senators tell Fahd that Israel has made an "important contribution to the peace process" and has made a "concession" at "substantial risk."

"Israel has been willing to meet with every country ever since their independence" in 1948, Sen. Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), who co-sponsored the letter along with Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), told reporters Thursday.

"The only peace that's ever going to work," he said, "is a peace which is bargained by the parties."

SHAMIR TAKING MEASURES TO PREVENT MORE EMBARRASSMENT ON SETTLEMENTS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- West Bank settlers complained Thursday that they are being spied on by the Shin Bet, Israel's internal intelligence agency.

They said the agency is acting on orders from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to spare the government surprises like the establishment of two new settlements in the West Bank in the past 10 days without advance notification.

The Prime Minister's Office denied the charge.

The militant Gush Emunim settlers movement put up a settlement called Revava on April 16 and another called Talmon B on Tuesday.

Each was erected overnight shortly before a scheduled visit by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, who is on a Middle East peace-seeking mission. They caused political embarrassment to Shamir.

The United States has made clear repeatedly that it considers settlement activity an "obstacle to peace," a position Baker reiterated Wednesday in Damascus.

Shamir's Likud bloc and its right-wing coalition partners are committed to settlements for ideological reasons. But the government would like to control their timing.

The Defense Ministry acted Thursday to prevent Jewish militants from further expanding the new settlements during Baker's visit. The secretary arrived here Thursday night for meetings Friday with Israeli leaders.

Settlers managed to haul six more mobile homes to Revava on Thursday. But the army prevented them from bringing in 10 more.

Defense officials said there could be no further work at Revava until the High Court of Justice hears a suit filed by a local Arab landowner.

Revava, said to have been approved by the Cabinet years ago, was to be inaugurated on April 18, Israel's Independence Day. The settlers jumped the gun by two days in what was seen as a gesture of defiance to Baker.

Talmon B was never approved. The settlers claimed it is simply an extension of an existing settlement called Talmon. Shamir's office went along with that explanation, even though the two sites are miles apart.

Revava and Talmon B consist at present of several mobile homes housing a handful of families and some single people.

The settlers said they were told by the manufacturer of their mobile homes that the Shin Bet had them under surveillance.

GROUP PROTESTS PLAN TO DEMOLISH HOME OF ARAB WHO INJURED SOLDIER By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- Israel's Civil Rights Association is trying to save the home of the widow and children of a West Bank Palestinian who injured an Israeli soldier before being shot dead.

The association's attorney, Yehoshua Shoffman, argued Thursday that the Israel Defense Force has no right to demolish the home of a deceased person alleged to have committed a security offense, because it is the innocent survivors who suffer.

Munzir Abdullah, 33, a Hebron shopkeeper, was shot to death by an IDF soldier on April 14, after hitting and injuring another soldier with his car. Eyewitnesses maintained the collision was an accident.

But the IDF claims it found a letter on Abdullah's body making clear his intention to kill an Israeli soldier, though it so far has refused to produce the document.

The IDF ordered Abdullah's home demolished, a punitive measure authorized under the emergency regulations of the British Mandate, which Israel has retained.

Abdullah's widow and six children have been evicted with their belongings and live in a tent donated by neighbors. Their house has been sealed, its doors and windows welded shut, pending the Civil Rights Association's appeal to the military authorities governing the territory.

The IDF also shut the family's grocery business.

Shoffman wrote to Brig. Gen. Ya'acov Or, commander in the West Bank, that the army had no legal authority to demolish the house, even if Abdullah injured the soldier intentionally.

According to Shoffman, since the suspect has been killed, the punishment would fall on innocent family members.

IDF officials say demolitions are not punishment, but a deterrent to others who might contemplate security offenses.

More than 330 houses of Palestinians accused of security crimes have been demolished since the intifada, or Palestinian uprising, began some 40 months ago. Another 200 houses remain sealed.

The Civil Rights Association charged that demolitions are patently discriminatory because no such measures are taken against Jews who commit ideologically motivated crimes against Arabs. The association said that type of punishment contradicts the "values, justice and ethics" of the State of Israel.

FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER'S MEETING WITH ARAFAT OUTRAGES EUROPEAN JEWS

PARIS, April 25 (JTA) -- The European Jewish Congress is incredulous over French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas' meeting in Libya this week with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat.

The group, which is affiliated with the World Jewish Congress, is angry because the encounter boosts Arafat's badly sagging image and could "encourage extremist positions."

In a statement, the group pointed out that Dumas' move contradicts a decision made by the European Community's Council of Ministers not to renew relations with the PLO, which it severed when Arafat supported Iraq in the Persian Gulf crisis.

The group said Dumas' meeting with Arafat, which took place Tuesday in Tripoli, was "liable to jeopardize the efforts of the E.C. to be associated with the peace negotiations" U.S. Secretary of State James Baker is trying to arrange in the Middle East.

Jean Kahn, president of CRIF, the representative body of French Jewish organizations, has asked the foreign minister for a meeting on the subject.

Jewish and diplomatic circles here wonder why France continues to put its power and prestige on the line for a perennial loser like Arafat, whom other Western diplomats have written off.

SURVEY FINDS POLES MORE NEGATIVE ABOUT JEWS THAN CZECHS, HUNGARIANS
By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, April 25 (JTA) -- Poles tend to hold more negative attitudes toward Jews than do residents of Hungary or Czechoslovakia, according to the first wide-ranging survey of attitudes conducted in those three countries since the collapse of communism.

Hungarians hold the most positive views, while in Czechoslovakia, Jews are viewed more positively by Czechs than Slovaks.

Forty percent of Poles surveyed said they did not want Jews living in their neighborhood, compared with 23 percent of Czechoslovaks and 17 percent of Hungarians.

Despite the negligible number of Jews living in Poland -- fewer than 10,000 out of a total population of 38 million -- 26 percent of Poles surveyed said Jews have too much influence over society in Poland, and 42 percent said they did not know.

Nineteen percent of Poles said they think Jews "behave in a manner which provokes hostility in our country," and 27 percent agreed with the idea that Jews have too much influence over Poland's economic life.

Although the survey found that Hungarians generally hold the most positive attitudes toward Jews, 28 percent agreed strongly or somewhat that Jews have too much influence over the country's political life.

On the issue of religious freedom, 89 percent of Hungarians strongly agreed that Jews should be allowed to practice their religion freely, compared with 52 percent of Poles and 55 percent of Czechoslovaks.

The survey, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and Freedom House, a conservative think-tank, polled about 1,200 people in each country during January and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

Penn + Schoen Associates, a U.S. public opinion research firm, worked with local polling companies in each country on the comprehensive survey, which questioned people on a variety of issues, including democratic and economic reforms and views toward Jews and other minorities.

Mistrust Of Other Minorities

The mixing of questions about democratization with questions about minority groups was "an ideal way to get a fix on attitudes toward Jews," said David Singer, AJCommittee research director.

"Certainly, our perspective is that the fate of Jews in any given society is directly related to the fate of democracy -- so goes democracy, so go the Jews," he said.

Mark Penn, president of Penn + Schoen Associates, said people surveyed expressed no clear sense of what they wanted from economic or political reforms. He said there was a correlation between this uncertainty and the apparent inability of these countries to move toward a policy of eradicating anti-Semitism.

People in all three countries expressed fairly high degrees of hatred and mistrust of minority groups besides Jews -- such as Gypsies, blacks and Arabs. Officials involved in the survey said such xenophobia is clearly something the three countries still have to address.

"If you think it's hard to be a Jew -- my God, it's really hard to be a Gypsy," Singer said of the attitudes in Eastern Europe. "But the

findings toward Jews are absolutely terrifying," he added.

Despite their strongly negative attitude toward Jews, 81 percent of Poles surveyed said they believe that remembrance of the Holocaust should continue, compared with 61 percent of Hungarians and 71 percent of Czechoslovaks.

Close to 90 percent or above of people in each country agreed that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and they generally expressed greater sympathy with Israelis than Palestinians.

But as was the case in a similar survey recently conducted by AJCommittee in the Soviet Union, positive attitudes toward Israel do not easily translate into support for Zionism: 25 percent of Hungarians, 39 percent of Poles and 50 percent of Czechoslovaks said they agreed with the 1975 U.N. General Assembly resolution denigrating Zionism as a form of racism.

The survey, like the previous ones undertaken by AJCommittee in the Soviet Union and unified Germany, are useful in aiding work with local and overseas government officials on issues of mutual concern, said David Harris, executive vice president of AJCommittee.

GERMAN JEWS ASK FOR INVESTIGATION OF STASI ROLE IN TRAINING TERRORISTS
By David Kantor

BONN, April 25 (JTA) -- The German Jewish community has asked the state prosecutor's office in Karlsruhe to launch an investigation into allegations that Stasi, the former East German secret police, trained the Arab terrorists who massacred the Israeli team at the 1972 Olympics in Munich.

The community made the request in response to a documentary broadcast Wednesday night on the state-owned television channel, which disclosed that the Munich killers had extensive training in East Germany.

If the allegations prove true, the individuals responsible should be arrested and brought to trial, the community said in a statement Thursday.

It is generally known that the terrorists who masterminded and executed the Munich massacre hid out for long periods in East Germany.

Recently, the German media have published details of the assistance the former East German Communist regime provided to the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Arab groups.

It consisted mainly of facilities, expertise, equipment and explosives used in intensive training programs conducted at various sites in what was formerly East Germany.

2,000-YEAR-OLD STOLEN MOSAIC FOUND
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- The police have recovered a 2,000-year-old archaeological treasure stolen two years ago from an excavation in Beit She'an.

The mosaic medallion, depicting Tichea, the Roman goddess of plenty, is estimated to be worth "millions of dollars." Although the alleged thief broke it down to its component stones, the mosaic is said to be reconstructible.

When discovered, it was part of the floor of a late Roman or early Byzantine building destroyed by an earthquake in the 6th century BCE.

The police identified their suspect as a 35-year-old man who worked at the archaeological site several years ago.

FOUR ISRAELIS ARRESTED IN CYPRUS ALLEGED TO BE MOSSAD OPERATIVES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- The Israeli authorities are keeping mum. But Israeli news organizations have sent a flock of reporters to Cyprus, where four Israeli nationals were arrested this week, allegedly trying to tap the telephone wires of the Iranian Embassy in Nicosia, the Cypriot capital.

A Cypriot court ordered the two men and two women held in custody for eight days, pending formal charges. But according to the Israeli press, Cyprus has no law against wiretapping. At most, they could be tried for "loitering" and deported, the newspapers said.

The four were discovered in the basement of the building housing the embassy, allegedly in possession of burglary tools, pliers, wire-cutters and a transistor radio.

Israeli newspapers, quoting foreign sources, said the four were operatives of Mossad, the Israeli secret service, who bungled an attempt to bug the Iranian telephones to gather information about Iranian-backed terrorist groups in Lebanon holding Israelis hostage.

Reports from Cyprus said the accused claimed to be tourists. They were registered at separate hotels.

They said they entered the basement of the embassy building in search of toilet facilities when one of the women took sick.

The court released the names of the four suspects Thursday, in Greek. They are Dabi Dave, Ran Souf, Anna Dolgin and Amit Litvin.

GREEKS ARREST PALESTINIAN LINKED TO BOMBING LAST WEEK THAT KILLED 7

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, April 25 (JTA) -- A 26-year-old Palestinian was arrested here Wednesday in connection with an April 19 bombing in the Greek seaport of Patras that killed seven people.

The suspect, Assar al-Nobani, was handed over to the Greek authorities by the local representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Giani Vassiliades, the minister of public order, announced.

The PLO disclaimed prior knowledge of Nobani or of Ahmed Hashaykeh, a Palestinian student killed when the bomb he allegedly was carrying exploded prematurely in a Patras office building last Friday. The other victims were four employees and two customers of a parcel delivery service in the building.

Since the Nobani connection was established, the police have detained 52 other Arabs for questioning.

The PLO said it was cooperating with the authorities, "in an attempt to uncover and impose exemplary punishment on those behind the abhorrent crime that took place in Patras, so that the traditionally friendly relations between the Greek and the Palestinian people are not damaged."

Observers said the PLO is trying to gain favor with the conservative government, which is not as sympathetic to the Palestinian cause as its Socialist predecessor and which is trying to improve relations with Israel.

Both Nobani and Hashaykeh were reported to belong to the Union of Palestinian Students in Greece and to the Fatah faction of the PLO.

Nobani was expelled from Greece in Febru-

ary, along with some 100 other Arabs suspected of terrorist activities. He was believed to have been involved in a 1985 grenade attack on Palestinian students who belonged to a different faction of the PLO.

He returned with a forged Israeli passport, according to a report the Israeli Embassy here refused to confirm or deny.

Nobani, one of 11 brothers, was born in 1965 in the Israeli-administered territories. He came to Greece in 1984 to study chemistry in Salonika.

After his father and two brothers were arrested by the Israelis in 1989, he was forced to quit school and took a job as a house painter. He was known in Salonika by the alias Yakub Assad.

CONGRESS URGED TO PRESS SYRIA TO LET ITS 4,000 JEWS EMIGRATE

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 25 (JTA) -- Congress must press Syria to allow the 4,000 Jews living there to emigrate, an activist for Syrian Jewry said Wednesday.

"Syria's Jewish community is a hostage community, living in a climate of fear and fundamental insecurity," said Alice Sardell Harary, vice president of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jewry. She testified at a hearing on Syrian human rights abuses conducted by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

Coincidentally, the hearing came as Secretary of State James Baker ended nearly 10 hours of talks in Damascus with Syrian President Hafez Assad, in an unsuccessful attempt to get Syrian support for a regional conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), co-chairman of the caucus, expressed concern that the United States would make the same mistake with Assad as it did by ignoring for years the human rights violations of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"Within the abysmal human rights record which the Syrian government has maintained, it is Syrian Jews who have been singled out for particularly adverse treatment," Harary said.

She said Jews live under 24-hour surveillance and cannot travel outside the country unless they leave a large sum of money and a family member behind. There are four Jewish men in prison for having tried to leave the country, she said.

The secret police check the attendance records at schools every day and if a child is absent, the child's home is visited to see if the family tried to escape the country, Harary said.

She added that Syria has refused to allow Jews to leave to join families abroad.

ISRAELI IS MOST POPULAR ARAB ON RADIO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- A 25-year-old Israeli Arab woman is the most popular radio broadcaster in the Arab world, according to a poll taken by the Cairo-based Egyptian Friendship Bank among 4,319 of its clients in Arab countries.

Jaffa-born Iman Elkasem, who works for Israel Radio's Arabic-language service, broadcasts five days a week. Her programs feature interviews, phone-ins, popular music and soft news.

Elkasem has a bachelor's degree in Arabic literature from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is working toward her master's degree. Her father is a well-known personality on Israel Television's Arabic-language service.