SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER PLANS VISIT TO ISRAEL LATE NEXT WEEK

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) -- Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh will come to Israel late next week for a 24-hour visit, Israel's Foreign Ministry announced Wednesday evening.

A spokesman said further details would be announced at a later date.

The visit will be the first ever by a high-ranking Soviet diplomat to Israel and may mark the resumption of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union, which Moscow broke during the Six-Day War of 1967.

While Israel has agreed in principle to a regional conference for Middle East peace under the joint auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union, it has insisted the Soviets must resume diplomatic ties with Israel before they can participate in the conference.

The announcement said that "as a result of consultations between Foreign Minister David Levy and the Soviets, it was established that Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh will visit Israel on May 10."

The announcement triggered speculation that diplomatic relations would be re-established during or just prior to the visit.

The Soviet foreign minister first indicated he might visit Israel sometime this month after Secretary of State James Baker interrupted his diplomatic mission to the Middle East last week to meet with Bessmertnykh in the Caucasus town of Kislovodsk.

ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN TENSIONS MAY HURT MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS, ARENS WARNS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) -- The continuing coolness and deterioration of relations between Israel and Egypt could jeopardize chances for further progress in the Middle East peace process, Defense Minister Moshe Arens warned this week.

He demanded that President Hosni Mubarak meet with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, something the Egyptian leader has avoided for years.

Arens' unexpected sharp comments on Egypt, the only Arab country with which Israel has diplomatic relations, came Tuesday during an appearance before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

He made the remarks a day before the Egyptian-Israeli joint diplomatic-military committee was to hold its semianual meeting in Herzliya. The committee was set up under the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty to discuss bilateral issues regularly.

Israel is known to be upset by the 12-year prison sentence an Egyptian court gave a border policeman who killed four Israelis and wounded 23 in an ambush after crossing into Israel from Sinai last Nov. 25. It considers the penalty far too lenient.

Meanwhile, Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy urged the United States to persevere in its Middle East peace initiative.

According to Shamir, who spoke to reporters at Dimona in the Negev, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker has no reason to be disappointed with his achievements so far, since it was anticipated that the process would be difficult.

In Washington, Baker met over lunch Wednesday with President Bush to brief him on his latest trip through the Middle East. State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said the two would be discussing what "appropriate steps" to take next in the peace process.

When Baker left Jerusalem last Friday on news of his mother's death, Tutwiler issued a statement blaming insufficient responses from Israel for his failure to get Israelis and Arabs to agree on a regional peace conference.

Levy told visiting politicians from the United States and Italy this week that it is unfair to blame Israel for Baker's difficulties.

The Arabs have not even consented yet to direct talks with Israel, the foreign minister said. He defended Israel's settlement-building in the West Bank during Baker's peace mission, contradicting the U.S. view that the settlements are an obstacle to peace.

(JTA correspondent David Friedman in Washington contributed to this report.)

E.C. INCHING TOWARD RENEWAL OF SUSPENDED PLO CONTACTS

By Yossi Lempkowski

BRUSSELS, May 1 (JTA) -- The European Community seems to be inching toward a renewal of contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which it suspended after PLO chief Yasar Arafat threw his support behind Saddam Hussein of Iraq in the Persian Gulf crisis.

French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, who broke ranks when he met with Arafat in Libya last week, briefed his E.C. colleagues during an informal meeting of the community's 12 foreign ministers in Luxembourg last weekend.

"There was no criticism," Dumas said, nor did his fellow ministers accuse him of breaching an E.C. agreement not to talk to the PLO.

In fact, after hearing Dumas, the ministers agreed that a PLO emissary would be received soon in Luxembourg by the E.C.'s political director, Jean-Jacques Kasci.

Luxembourg presently holds the rotating chairmanship of the Council of Ministers of the 12 member states and is the center of E.C. diplomatic activity.

The ministers are preparing, meanwhile, for a discussion with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on a possible role for the E.C. in a Middle East peace conference, when they meet at an annual meeting of the E.C.-Israel Cooperation Council here May 14.

Europe's participation in a Middle East peace conference is "in the nature of things," said Jacques Poos, Luxembourg's foreign minister and current E.C. chairman.

In Jerusalem, however, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said he had "doubts" about the E.C.'s participation, because Europe has recently "showed sympathy toward the Palestine Liberation Organization for some reason."

Shamir made the remarks after meeting with visiting Greek Foreign Minister Antonis Samaras. In Luxembourg, Poos said the E.C. also plans
contacts soon with Syria, "in order to gain maximum support for the American move."

The 12 ministers will meet on May 11 with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which consists of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

According to Dumas, the meeting will give the E.C. an occasion to respond to Arafat's recent letter to the prime minister of Luxembourg, Jacques Santer, in which he stressed the need for PLO participation in an international conference on Middle East peace.

(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

JACK KEMP FORCED TO MEET SHARON AT EMBASSY INSTEAD OF HUD OFFICE
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, May 1 (JTA) -- Israeli Housing Minister Ariel Sharon met here Wednesday with Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp in an attempt by the White House and State Department to prevent the session from taking place.

They did succeed, however, in preventing Kemp from hosting Sharon at his HUD office. The meeting was held instead at the Israeli Embassy.

At issue was Sharon's opposition to U.S. proposals to advance the Middle East peace process and his insistence on freezing aid to new settlements in the administered territories, which the Bush administration considers an obstacle to peace.

Kemp had invited Sharon, his Israeli counterpart, to meet with him during his current visit to the United States, where he is addressing various Jewish groups.

Secretary of State James Baker heard about the planned meeting while on his Middle East tour last week, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Wednesday.

She said Baker sent a "heads up" message to the White House saying that for a member of Bush's Cabinet "to receive Minister Sharon, who was publicly opposing the president's policy regarding Middle East peace, would not be the appropriate thing to do at this time."

"That was the end of his involvement" in the matter, Tutwiler maintained. But the White House apparently suggested to Kemp that he not see Sharon in his office.

Baker has been annoyed by Sharon's vigorous support for Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Just before the secretary arrived in Israel, members of the militant Gush Emunim moved mobile homes into two new locations in the West Bank, in a move seen as a direct slap at Baker.

The secretary denounced the buildup during a news conference in Damascus, Syria.

During a news conference at the National Press Club on Wednesday, after his meeting with Kemp, Sharon said neither he nor anyone in the government knew in advance that the settlers' mobile homes would be set up overnight.

But he said the "policy of building Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza is not a personal plan or initiative," but rather the policy of the Israeli government.

Sharon said he was not upset by Baker's failure to meet with him on his three visits to Israel in the last seven weeks. He said the prime minister is the one who speaks for the government of Israel with foreign leaders.

The meeting with Kemp dealt with the issue of Soviet Jewish immigration and absorption, Sharon said. He noted that Kemp, a former Republican congressman from New York, had long been a supporter of Soviet Jewish emigration rights.

Sharon reiterated that Israeli policy is not to direct Soviet Jews to the West Bank, and he said that fewer than 1 percent of them had settled there.

No Need For 'Preaching' On Peace

He said there are 150 Jewish settlements in the West Bank and that they were built on the hills to ensure security for Israel. He said for that reason, no matter what solution is eventually reached, Israel will never give up the settlements.

They are not an obstacle to peace, he maintained. "If Israel feels secure, Israel will be willing to take more daring steps for peace."

But Sharon suggested the present effort at peace is the wrong way of going about it. He said the United States should be able to persuade Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which it saved in the Persian Gulf War, to sign a peace accord with Israel.

Sharon maintained that despite his reputation as a hawk, he wants peace, because as a veteran of Israel's wars who had been wounded twice, he understands the horrors of war.

"Jews do not need any preaching for peace," the housing minister declared Monday at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, where he spoke at a lecture series sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Israel is "a nation of people with very high moral values, and we understand peace better than any nation around the world," he said.

But during his National Press Club news conference here, Sharon said Israel must worry about its security because, as Americans might say, "we live in a high-crime neighborhood."

(JTA correspondent Tom Tugend in Los Angeles contributed to this report.)

POLICE HOLD PALESTINIAN WAITER IN STABBING DEATH OF FRENCH WOMAN
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) -- A 19-year-old Palestinian waiter linked to the fundamentalist Hamas movement is being held for the fatal stabbing of a French woman who was on a religious pilgrimage to Christian shrines in Bethlehem.

Khaled Asakra, a resident of nearby Abadiya village, surrendered to police on Friday. A 5-foot-1, 165-pound man, Asakra, 21, is accused of stabbing Anne Le, 64, a half-Chinese French woman who was murdered Tuesday with a 16-inch kitchen knife as she left the restroom in the Andalus Restaurant, where Asakra was working.

Israeli authorities said the murder was related to the internecine violence among Palestinians in which Moslem extremists have frequently assaulted Christian Arabs.

The suspect is known to be a supporter of Hamas, founded in the Gaza Strip soon after the Palestinian uprising began in December 1987.

His village is known to be a hotbed of Hamas activism, which in recent months has been aimed against the relatively wealthy, predominantly Christian Arab population of Bethlehem and its suburbs, Beit Sahur and Beit Jala.

The Palestine Liberation Organization condemned the Bethlehem murder in a statement issued from its Tunis headquarters by Bassam Abu Sharif, a senior adviser to Yasir Arafat.

It was also deplored by Palestinian activist Faisal Husseini, who sent a message of condolences to the French Consulate in East Jerusalem.
HOUSE OF LORDS AGAIN VETOES BRITISH NAZI WAR CRIMES BILL
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, May 1 (JTA) -- The War Crimes Bill, overwhelmingly adopted by the House of Commons six weeks ago, was rejected late Tuesday night by the House of Lords, for the second time in less than a year.

But the measure, which would allow British courts to try suspected war criminals living in Britain, is expected to become law despite opposition by the peers.

The House of Commons made clear when it approved the bill March 20 that the rarely used Parliament Act would be invoked if necessary to prevent the Lords from blocking legislation.

The Lords turned down the bill by 131-109 on a free vote, a much slimmer margin than their 207-74 rejection on June 6, 1990.

But the same reasons were cited by the unelected, primarily hereditary upper chamber of Parliament: the advanced age of the suspects, passage of time and the view that retribution rather than justice was the objective.

Lord Waddington, leader of the Lords, opened debate weeks ago in favor of the measure, which he first piloted through the House of Commons last year as home secretary.

He said he was one of a handful of people to have read an unpublished report identifying at least three alleged war criminals living in Britain.

But they are immune from prosecution under present law because they were not British citizens at the time of their crimes and the crimes were committed against non-Britons in another country.

The amendment to nullify the War Crimes Bill was introduced by a 92-year-old Labor peer, Lord Houghton of Sowerby. He conceded that it was impossible to prevent the bill from becoming law but urged the peers to "stick by their principles and not be ashamed of them."

The opposing views heard during the eight-hour debate were best summarized in the arguments of Lord Jakobovits, chief rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth, and Lord Shawcross, a prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

Jakobovits addressed concerns that the accused would be given absolutely fair trials under the measure, and where that could not be assured, the proceedings would be stopped.

"Our task," he said, "is to ensure that by our default, the law will not exonerate the horrendous crimes of which we speak, letting the thousands of voices of the martyrs crying out from the earth go unheeded and unanswered."

BUENOS AIRES CEMETERY DESECRATED

NEW YORK, May 1 (JTA) -- Some 110 gravestones at a Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Buenos Aires were destroyed early Tuesday morning, the World Jewish Congress reported.

The vandalism of the cemetery in Berazategui interrupts a period of relative calm with regard to anti-Semitic acts, Manuel Tenenbaum, director of the Latin American Jewish Congress, told the AP.

The DAIA, or Delegation of Israelite Associations of Argentina, has publicly called for an investigation of the event.

David Goldberg, president of the DAIA, the representative body of Argentine Jewry, was quoted as saying that the vandals had hammered the tombstones to pieces but left no graffiti.

ADVERTISEMENT ASSAILS JEWISH SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED GUN CONTROL LEGISLATION
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 1 (JTA) -- Jewish organizations are outraged at an advertisement that attacks their stance on gun control and calls Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) a "stupid Jew" for backing a major gun control bill working its way through Congress.

The advertisement, published in the April 19 edition of The New Gun Week, described "Schumer and other Jewish gun-grabbers -- notably the B'nai B'rith and its Anti-Defamation League" as being "stupid."

"They cannot see that their gun control activities fuel the fires of real anti-Semitism," the ad said, contending that "tens of millions of Americans" increasingly find "their civil right to own guns reduced by these pro-criminal Jews."

The ad was placed by Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, a Milwaukee-based group that claims 1,000 members. In an interview, Aaron Zelman, the group's executive director, accused proponents of the gun control bill of "letting the Jews do the dirty work."

The so-called Brady Bill would impose a mandatory seven-day waiting period on new applicants for gun permits. The bill, which was approved last week by the House Judiciary Committee and is expected to reach the House floor next week, is named for James Brady, the former White House press secretary who was shot and paralyzed during the unsuccessful 1981 attempt on the life of then President Ronald Reagan.

Schumer, who, as chairman of the Judiciary subcommittee on crime and criminal justice, is a key supporter of the bill, told the New York Daily News that the advertisement "appeals to the worst instincts in people."

Two Views Of Jewish Tradition

Jess Hordes, Washington representative of the ADL, called Zelman's argument a "red herring" and "demeaning" to public policy.

He said that the "overwhelming majority of Americans" support the Brady Bill approach, and that it is law enforcement agencies, not Jews, who are doing most of the lobbying work.

Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress, said, "Injecting religious bigotry into a public debate is well beyond the bounds of reasoned political discourse."

Other groups condemning the advertisement include Agudath Israel of America, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The advertisement charged that "Schumer defiles Jewish tradition, because Jewish law supports the right of self-defense and states 'If a man comes to kill you, arise and kill him first.'"

But Rabbi J. David Bleich, a professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University, told AJCongress in a letter last week that "Jewish law and tradition does not favor indiscriminate dissemination of arms or other weapons of violence."

There are also "authentic precedents favoring the sale of weapons to individuals who are likely to utilize them for crimes of violence," Bleich wrote.

But in the interview, Zelman cited both Jewish and Western jurisprudence as teaching, "It is wrong to treat the innocent the same as the guilty. Under the Brady Bill, you're guilty until you're proven innocent," he claimed.
CONCERN OVER JOBS AND HOUSING SLOWS THE FACE OF SOVIET ALIYAH
By Charles Hoffman

JERUSALEM, May 1 (JTA) -- Some 16,000 Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel in April, the highest monthly total this year but still far fewer than the 20,000 who had been expected.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, which assists with immigration, put the monthly total at 15,585, while the National Conference on Soviet Jewry in New York announced a figure of 16,286.

Addressing the Jewish Agency spokesmen Gad Ben-Ari, tens of thousands of Soviet Jews are putting off plans to immigrate here for the time being because of the housing and employment problems in Israel.

But he said the Jewish Agency expects a modest increase this month in Soviet aliya, which totals about 50,000 for the year to date.

According to the agency, a total of 17,272 immigrants arrived in Israel last month, including 997 Jews from Ethiopia. That was an improvement over March, when aliya was halted for two weeks, bringing the total for the month to 696 arrivals.

About 100,000 Jews in the Soviet Union now hold visas for Israel that they are not using for the time being, the Jewish Agency spokesman said. Ben-Ari said the lines outside the Israeli Consulate in Moscow now are mainly composed of those seeking to extend the validity of their visas, which are valid for only three months.

An official of the Jewish Agency's aliya information center said that recent telephone and mail queries from Soviet Jews about conditions in Israel show that they have a realistic understanding about the problems of finding affordable housing and decent jobs here.

The worsening absorption situation occupied the members of the Jewish Agency Executive, which met Tuesday in Jerusalem. The Executive, which includes Diaspora fund-raising and community leaders, adopted a proposal by Chairman Simcha Dinitz for an urgent meeting with Prime Minister Shamir.

The heads of the agency asked Shamir to take charge of absorption policy personally and to head the ministerial absorption committee, which Housing Minister Ariel Sharon now chairs. Shamir replied that he was already sufficiently involved.

5,000 Applied For German Visas

Paul Berger of Washington, chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, told the Executive that there is a growing feeling in the United States that the Israeli government cannot cope with the mass wave of aliya and is not properly utilizing the resources set aside for this purpose.

Dinitz told the Executive that 85 percent of the immigrants leaving the Soviet Union now arrive at the transit points in Eastern Europe by rail. Only a small percentage arrive now by air, because they can bring much more baggage with them by rail.

He said some 5,000 Soviet Jews have applied for immigration visas to Germany, but most of them apparently will not be accepted. Several thousand Soviet Jews arrived last year in Germany as tourists and then requested immigration visas.

The Soviet Jewish Zionist Forum last week condemned the plan recently put forward by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, calling for a large one-time increase in the quota of Soviet refugees allowed into the United States. The forum is headed by Natan Sharansky, the famous former prisoner of conscience.

Informing sponsors of the plan as "dangerous," the forum said in a statement that it would give many Soviet Jews the "illusory hope" of coming soon to the United States, prompting them to postpone or cancel their plans to go to Israel.

Immigration To U.S. Down

A total of 2,171 Soviet Jews immigrated to the United States as refugees last month, according to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in New York. That was a drop from March, when 2,470 Soviet Jews immigrated there.

The April figure brings Soviet immigration to the United States to 11,101 for the first seven months of the fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

Up to 40,000 Soviet Jews will be permitted to immigrate to the United States during the fiscal year, but at this rate, the quota is unlikely to be filled, despite the fact that thousands of Soviet Jews have already been admitted.

Officials of HIAS and the National Conference blame delays in the issuing of visas by the Soviet state emigration agency OYIR.

FORMER ISRAELI CHIEF RABBI REFUSES AUDIENCE WITH POPE

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, May 1 (JTA) -- Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the former Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, who is attending an ecumenical conference here, refused to join the conference's other participants Tuesday at an audience with Pope John Paul II because the Vatican has not extended diplomatic recognition to Israel.

Saying the Holy See is one of the few states in Europe not to have diplomatic relations with Israel, he said, "I therefore do not think it is necessary to participate in such a meeting."

Goren came to Rome for a conference on "Peace Among Religions, Peace in Society" organized by the San Egidio Community, a Catholic group involved in charity and the promotion of interfaith dialogue.

Held in the historic Campidoglio, Rome's City Hall, the conference was attended by Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti and Mayor Franco Carraro of Rome.

The theme of the conference was the substance of the pope's remarks to his guests.

Peace among religions is a prerequisite for peace among people as a whole, the pontiff said.

"If there is not loving peace among the religions, how can one find harmony in society?" Goren touched on the same subject in what the newspaper La Repubblica called "the strongest speech" delivered at the San Egidio conference.

According to the Israeli rabbi, "the cardinal problem" is whether "religion is a unifying factor that radiates love, brotherhood and peace among nations and human beings, or if, perhaps, instead, religion is the cause of separations and nourished hatred, conflicts and dissension among peoples of different faiths.

"If I must judge, basing my judgment on the relations between the Jewish people and the world in the past," he said, "I would have to arrive at the sad conclusion that most persecutions, organized massacres and projects of genocide against the Jewish people were designed and carried out in the name of religion and with its encouragement."