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MENGISTU DEPARTURE FROM ETHIOPIA HAS NO IMPACT YET ON PLIGHT OF JEWS
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 21 (JTA) -- The sudden resignation and departure from Ethiopia of President Mengistu Haile Mariam has not produced any immediate change in conditions for the country's Jewish population, State Department officials and Jewish activists say.

That is because the rebel forces seeking to overturn the government remain at least 40 miles from Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, where the country's estimated 18,000 Jews have converged for months in the hope of being allowed to leave for Israel.

While it is unclear how the rebels would treat the Jewish population, it is generally assumed that the disruptions caused by a rebel invasion would interrupt the steady flow of Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

Israeli and U.S. officials, as well as Jewish organizations in the United States, are monitoring the situation closely, watching for any sign of a change in the situation.

There is hope that the rebels will be at least temporarily appeased by the resignation Tuesday of Mengistu, who has been in power since he staged a coup in 1974 to depose Emperor Haile Selassie.

A State Department official said it was even possible that the situation in the capital could remain calm for awhile. "It's hard for us to guarantee that there is going to be an emergency," the official said.

Concern about the plight of Ethiopian Jews prompted President Bush to send former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.) to Addis Ababa last month to meet with Mengistu and other senior Ethiopian leaders.

Boschwitz made it clear that the United States wanted the Ethiopian government to increase the rate of Jewish emigration from the recent level of 1,000 a month.

Emigration Rate Up Slightly

In the first half of May, the government allowed 838 Jews to emigrate. If this pace continues through the end of the month, the total will surpass the 1,008 who left in April for Israel, said William Recant, executive director of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews.

Recant attributed the increase to efforts made by Boschwitz during 13 hours of talks with Ethiopian leaders.

It remains unclear whether the new government will be any more amenable to increasing the emigration rate.

But State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Tuesday that Ethiopia is more likely to achieve peace by virtue of Mengistu's resignation than it would if he were still in power.

"Everyone who is in a rebel faction was united in one regard in that they were not supportive of the current leadership," she said.

Deputy White House spokesman Roman Popadiuk said of Mengistu's departure for exile in Kenya: "We welcome this development."

The White House also announced Tuesday that it will host a conference in London starting May 27 between the government and the three major insurgent groups from the north, two from the province of Eritrea and one from Tigre.

The U.S. delegation to the talks will be led by Herman Cohen, assistant secretary of state for African affairs. The aim of such a conference is to secure a "peaceful transition" in Ethiopia, Popadiuk said.

"We hope that all government and insurgent forces in the country will cease all military operations," Popadiuk said. "We now hope that the door is open for the realization of peace and democracy in this tragic situation."

Assuming the presidency from Mengistu is Lt. Gen. Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, the vice president. In a statement here, the Ethiopian Embassy said he "is temporarily assuming power until a transitional government is formed."

The State Department official said "it is our understanding that he is more a professional figure than a party ideologue, and I think that's a step in the right direction."

But Recant expressed concern that the new president may not be assuming a ceremonial post and will exert power that may upset the insurgents. In that case, the rebels "may not trust him any more than they did Mengistu," he said.

ISRAELI GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO START CREATING JOBS FOR SOVIET IMMIGRANTS
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 21 (JTA) -- Israel's ministerial committee on the economy has approved a plan in which the government would assume most of the burden of providing jobs for immigrants.

This represents a sharp departure from the policy established last year to leave immigrant absorption to the free market and is an admission, in effect, that the policy failed.

According to preliminary estimates by the Treasury, the plan will cost over $2.16 billion. But it will not solve Israel's overall problem of unemployment, which was rising even before most of the new immigrants entered the labor market.

There are presently an estimated 100,000 jobless in Israel, and the number increases as immigrants pouring into the country begin looking for work.

But the plan, which Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i will submit shortly to the full Cabinet, provides job opportunities for no more than 50,000 immigrants.

Some would be employed in large-scale, government-sponsored economic development projects, while others would be given jobs at some 30 to 40 large industrial plants, where the state would pay their wages.

At the same time, the government plans to enroll 20,000 to 36,000 new immigrants in vocational courses over the next six months to train them in the skills necessary to participate in the development projects.

"Despite the additional job solutions, we shall still face a high rate of unemployment in the next few years," David Brodett, director of the Treasury's budget office, told the Knesset Economic Committee on Monday.

The new economic measures coincide with Moda'i's announcement last week that the govern-

ment would abandon the laissez-faire policy of "direct absorption" in favor of direct government intervention in the immigrant absorption process.

The changes are an acknowledgement that the initial assumptions by Moda'i and Bank of Israel Governor Michael Bruno were flawed. They had assumed that massive aliyah would itself get the wheels of economic recovery turning with minimum government interference.

Now the worsening plight of new immigrants who are without jobs or adequate shelter has convinced the economic policy-makers that the state must act or the boon of aliyah could become a catastrophe.

Moda'i explained the changes in an interview Tuesday in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

"One must understand what direct absorption means today," he said. "The immigrants leave the airport, take a taxi to a place of their choice, wake up the local mayor in the middle of the night, and he provides them with temporary shelter at a local school.

"I am saying that whoever can manage on his own should continue with the direct absorption, but I assume we shall have to switch to planned absorption," the finance minister said.

So far, seven public works projects employing immigrants have been approved. The largest project, expected to cost $281.5 million, will employ 2,600 persons to modernize and expand the national electric power system.

In addition, $21.5 million has been earmarked to employ 10,000 people in the building and construction industry.

BUSH REVIEWING MIDEAST STRATEGY IN WAKE OF BAKER'S LATEST TRIP
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, May 21 (JTA) -- President Bush plans to make a major policy address on the Middle East once he decides what the next step will be in the U.S. effort to bring about peace talks between Israel and the Arabs, the White House said this week.

But White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater indicated that no decision has been made yet on a new administration proposal following the completion last week of Secretary of State James Baker's fourth trip to the Middle East since the end of the Persian Gulf War.

"We don't have a venue yet" for a speech on the Middle East, Fitzwater said. But "policy drives the venue," he said, and "when we are ready, we will find one."

After being briefed Friday by Baker on his latest Middle East trip, Bush told reporters there is "real cause for optimism, and we will continue to work this process."

Baker will make a fifth trip to the region "if there's reason to go back," the president said.

Bush said he believes that the "window of opportunity" created in the area by the Gulf war remains open. "I think the credibility of the United States is higher in the Middle East than it has ever been. I think it's still there," he said.

But the president refused to give any details. "A lot of these things have to be quiet when you are talking about diplomacy," he said. "The way to solve this conundrum is not to get these parties positioned by public statements."

Following Baker's latest trip, the major problem seems to be Syria's insistence that a peace conference must be under U.N. auspices.

Jerusalem sees the United Nations as biased toward Israel and wants no U.N. presence. Israel believes that any conference that goes beyond a ceremonial prelude to direct talks will result in all the countries ganging up on Jerusalem.

U.S. Not Giving Up Yet

The administration is expected to take about two weeks of continued discussion with the Arabs and Israelis before reaching a decision on the next step.

In Israel, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir revealed that one proposal under consideration is the convening of a summit in Washington. But the State Department refused to confirm this Monday.

Another idea is to forget about Syria and go back to the pre-Gulf aim of involving only Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. But Jordan would not likely participate without Syria's approval.

This may be one of the reasons King Hussein met Saturday in Damascus with Syrian President Hafez Assad, who met the following day with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Bush spoke last week with both Hussein and Mubarak before their trips to Damascus.

Even before Baker went to the Middle East, a senior White House official told a group of reporters that the Bush administration would not give up on trying to bring about a Middle East peace settlement.

If the current effort to bring about a peace conference does not work, "we will not give up," the official said. "We will do something else."

But he stressed there is "zero interest in having diplomacy for the sake of it. We are interested in results."

KNESSET MEMBERS FROM RIGHT AND LEFT URGE ABIE NATHAN TO END HUNGER STRIKE
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 21 (JTA) -- Knesset members from across the political spectrum joined Tuesday to introduce a motion urging Israeli peace activist Abie Nathan to end his hunger strike, now in its fourth week.

But most of their colleagues balked at attaching an amendment that would nullify the law which Nathan is protesting. It forbids contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The Knesset motion, which appeals to Nathan on grounds that his life is imperiled, was a procedural rarity requiring the approval of Knesset Speaker Dov Shilansky, a Likud hawk.

It was sponsored jointly by Reuven Rivlin of Likud, Moshe Shahal of the Labor Party and Yossi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement.

They hope for unanimous Knesset endorsement. But Labor's Knesset faction voted Tuesday against a request by one of its members, Yossi Beilin, for permission to introduce the amendment nullifying the PLO contact law.

Beilin, an leading dove, said it was intended only to permit Israelis to attend international events at which the PLO was present.

But most of the faction sided with Labor hard-liner Michael Bar-Zohar, who warned that the public would see the amendment as a legitimation of the PLO by the Labor Party.

Amnon Rubinstein of the Center-Shinui Movement said he would introduce the amendment.

Nathan has been subsisting on water and fruit juices since April 29. The 60-year-old activist was hospitalized on the 17th day of the fast last week, when his doctor detected an irregular heartbeat. But his condition soon stabilized.

JUDGE REVOKES U.S. CITIZENSHIP OF FORMER GUARD AT DEATH CAMPS
By Marilyn Ruby
The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle

MILWAUKEE, May 21 (JTA) -- For the second time in six months, a Milwaukee-area man is being stripped of his U.S. citizenship for lying about his service as Nazi concentration camp guard.

U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Curran ruled last Friday that Anton Baumann, an 80-year-old retired carpenter from West Allis, Wis., had illegally concealed his service in the Death's Head Batallion of the SS when he sought entry to the United States after World War II.

Curran ruled that Baumann would have been ineligible for a visa to enter the United States since he had "acquiesced in the Nazi persecutions" by serving as an armed guard at the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland and the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany.

Baumann also "lacked the statutorily required good moral character prerequisite to becoming a United States citizen," Curran ruled.

The judge gave him 60 days to surrender his certificate of naturalization. Neither Baumann nor his attorney, David Cannon of Milwaukee, was available for comment.

The U.S. Justice Department will begin deportation proceedings against Baumann after he surrenders the certificate, explained Neil Sher, director of the department's Office of Special Investigations, which prosecutes Nazi war criminals.

Anton Tittjung, 66, a resident of Greenfield, Wis., was denaturalized in a similar case last December. Tittjung is appealing the decision, with legal assistance from Cannon.

Baumann's denaturalization hearing was held in federal court here Jan. 2 to 4.

OSI attorneys based their case on an SS personnel card, found in the Stutthof museum in Poland, which listed Baumann's name, place and date of birth, wife's maiden name, Yugoslav army service dates and ethnic background.

Baumann is listed as a "joiner," meaning he volunteered for the SS.

Photo Considered Sufficient Proof

OSI also displayed a photograph in which Baumann is wearing a Death's Head Batallion uniform.

Baumann's attorney called no witnesses. He had agreed before the hearing not to contest the authenticity of the documents and photo.

No evidence was offered about Baumann's duties as a concentration camp guard.

"The fact that these events occurred approximately a half-century ago makes such proof difficult if not impossible," Judge Curran wrote.

But he noted that a U.S. court found recently that a concentration camp guard's "armed, uniformed service is sufficient to establish that he assisted in persecution."

Baumann, a short, frail-appearing man who walks with a limp and the support of a cane, attended parts of the hearing. He sat in the back of the courtroom with members of his family.

Curran asked in his decision whether the United States should "commit substantial resources, both financial and human, to revoke the citizenship of a young man who lied 41 years ago in order to start a new life in a new land."

He noted that Baumann "has lived in the United States for over 40 years, has raised a family, and been a productive member of society."

But the judge concluded that "Baumann entered the United States on an invalid visa and acquired that coveted citizenship unlawfully."

In 1950, Baumann applied for a visa to enter the United States from the U.S. Consulate in Salzburg, Austria. He claimed in a sworn application that he resided in Yugoslavia from 1925 to 1944, Curran wrote.

In 1957, when Baumann applied for U.S. citizenship, he swore that he belonged to no "organizations, clubs or societies in the United States or any other country before the last 10 years," Curran wrote.

Sher of OSI refused to comment on what he called Curran's "wondering out loud" about the appropriateness of prosecuting Baumann.

"The important thing to focus on is that, from our perspective, he came down on the right side," Sher said. "Obviously, Congress and this department think this is very important. We believe these people had no business coming here in the first place."

Thomas Schneider, president of the Milwaukee Jewish Council, agreed that it is "absolutely important to continue going after these guys."

"It's troubling that so many people here in Milwaukee and around the world are so quick to say, 'It happened so long ago. Why can't we forget? Why dredge up all these painful memories?' " he said.

"That's easy for them to say, because it wasn't their relatives who were killed."

EX-NAZI TESTIFIES HE DID NOT KNOW JEWS WERE BEING KILLED AT AUSCHWITZ
By David Kantor

BONN, May 21 (JTA) -- A former Nazi SS official, known by Auschwitz inmates for his brutality, claimed in court last week that he was unaware of a program for the systematic killing of Jews at the notorious death camp.

Heinrich-Johannes Kuehnemann, 72, is charged with the murder of at least five Jews and complicity in the killings of hundreds of other inmates. He is on trial in the western German city of Duisburg.

The charges against him are based on eyewitness testimony and documents made available recently by Poland and the Soviet Union.

He insists he is innocent. "I have always behaved in a proper manner and was never involved in wrongdoing," Kuehnemann said.

He claimed no inmates were ever killed in the part of Auschwitz where he was stationed, known as Effektenkammer I.

Kuehnemann was first identified in October 1989 at the trial of another suspected Nazi war criminal, Ernest August Koenig, who was thought to have been the commanding SS officer of the "Kanada" section at Auschwitz.

But Auschwitz survivors failed to recognize him as the man who shared responsibility for the selection of inmates for the gas chambers.

A former deputy in the Kanada section, Otto Graf, was then asked to tell the court the identity of the SS commander. Instead of naming Koenig, he gave Kuehnemann's name.

Investigators gasped in disbelief, for the man he had named was a well-known opera singer in the town of Essen. Kuehnemann was later summoned to the court and identified by survivors as the notorious Auschwitz commander.

WALESA VISITS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL, SAYS POLAND WON'T SELL ARMS TO SYRIA
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 21 (JTA) -- The second day of Lech Walesa's four-day state visit to Israel was an emotionally draining experience for the Polish president.

The former trade union leader, a devout Catholic, spent the afternoon touring Christian shrines in Jerusalem's Old City and in Bethlehem.

But he and his wife were visibly shaken after their morning visit to Yad Vashem, the museum and memorial to the Holocaust, the worst of which occurred on Polish soil.

Yad Vashem Chairman Yitzhak Arad said Mrs. Walesa broke down in tears in front of some of the exhibits. Arad said the president was deeply moved as he gazed at the names, etched in stone, of more than 1,400 Polish Jewish communities eradicated by the Nazis.

"Not to be understood," was his comment in the visitors book.

But Walesa grew defensive talking to reporters outside the memorial. He warned against judging and condemning the actions of the Polish people as a whole.

He said it was hard for this generation to judge, not having been there at the time of the Nazi occupation.

Walesa said that as a fighter, he knew well that brave giants become pygmies in certain circumstances.

The Polish president also met Tuesday with Defense Minister Moshe Arens. Israel Television reported later that he pledged Poland would not sell Syria Soviet-designed tanks, "because we do not want to sell weapons to Israel's enemies."

Walesa might have been trying to make points in the wake of another Eastern European leader's recent visit here.

When Czechoslovak Prime Minister Marian Calfa came here earlier this month, he confirmed that his country had plans to sell Soviet-designed T-72 tanks to Syria, despite U.S. and Israeli protests.

NEO-NAZI VIDEO GAMES CONFISCATED, BUT THOSE RESPONSIBLE STILL UNKNOWN
By David Kantor

BONN, May 21 (JTA) -- All of the racist and neo-Nazi video games found in Germany have been confiscated, German authorities say. But a nationwide investigation by the federal police has been unable to trace their origin.

The games, which award points for sending Jews or Turks to concentration camps, have been circulating underground. They are reported to have reached substantial numbers of youths in Germany and Austria, countries where the distribution of Nazi material is a criminal offense.

The Austrian government announced May 3 that it had "initiated legal proceedings in order to determine their origin, bring the author(s) to justice and stop further circulation."

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, meanwhile, urged Justice Minister Klaus Kinkel and Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble in letters sent May 10 to take action against those distributing the games.

"The use of computer games with a clearly racist and neo-Nazi content should be rigorously prosecuted," declared Genscher, who met with Jewish leaders in New York earlier this month.

But so far the producers of the games have not been found.

A spokesman at federal police headquarters in Wiesbaden said serious efforts have been made to no avail to pinpoint where the games might have been produced.

Police in the federal state of Hesse questioned producers of a neo-Nazi board game who were arrested and prosecuted several years ago.

But they could establish no connection between the manufacturers of the board game, played with dice, and the sophisticated computer programmed games glorifying the Holocaust.

The police say they are not even sure the video games are produced in Germany.

But the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center thinks they probably are. About 140 of the neo-Nazi video and computer games were in circulation in Germany and Austria, the Wiesenthal Center reported May 8 at a news conference in Washington, where it demonstrated samples.

RETURN OF CONFISCATED PROPERTY MAY ENRICH JEWISH LIFE IN BERLIN
By David Kantor

BONN, May 21 (JTA) -- Former Berlin Jews or their heirs who are trying to recover property confiscated either by the Nazis or later by the former East German Communist regime stand to get rich.

But they are expected, in turn, to enrich the Jewish and general communal life in the old Prussian metropolis that was Germany's capital until the fall of the Third Reich and a divided city for more than 40 years afterward.

Scores of Jewish Berliners eligible to get back their real estate plan to settle in Berlin, according to officials interviewed.

Much of the restored property is in the traditional heart of Berlin, which was located in the eastern sector of the formerly divided city.

Developers and contractors who have spoken to claimants say they have very definite ideas about what to do with the property.

"They, of course, know how valuable the land is in the most precious area of united Berlin, and they certainly intend to make the best use of the new situation," one developer said.

The prospect of Jewish property in Berlin being restored to its owners became a reality after East and West Germany united last year.

But the process may take years because of complex legal and practical problems.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to revive Jewish life in Berlin," said one city official, "and we are grateful to those who seriously consider the possibility of coming back to the town and participate in the reconstruction work."

Not only individuals but the Berlin Jewish community as a whole will get back property. The community is claiming former hospitals, schools, cultural centers and homes for the aged.

In most cases, those properties were used for purposes not intended. An example is a former Jewish home for the aged, which the dreaded Communist secret police, Stasi, appropriated for its headquarters. It will revert to the original owners.

The JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published on Monday, May 27, because of the Memorial Day holiday in the United States.