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**SHAMIR PLANNING POSITIVE REPLY
TO BUSH REQUEST FOR FLEXIBILITY**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 4 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir is drafting a letter to President Bush that "would enable the peace process to go forward," a well-placed Israeli government official asserted Tuesday.

The official disputed media reports saying that Shamir would reject a plea for Israeli flexibility contained in a letter Bush sent to the prime minister last weekend.

The media reports, which predict an imminent confrontation between Bush and Shamir, have senior Israeli policy-makers seriously concerned.

Their worry is that inaccurate reports of Israeli intransigence may persuade the Bush administration to abandon its Middle East peace-making efforts and blame Israel for their failure, the government official, who requested anonymity, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The letter to Shamir was one of several Bush sent last weekend to Middle East leaders, urging them to show flexibility on the procedural issues blocking a Mideast peace conference.

The White House confirmed that Bush sent such letters to Shamir, Jordan's King Hussein, Presidents Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Hafez Assad of Syria, and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia.

The letters were described as a "follow-up on the various opportunities" that arose during Secretary of State James Baker's last peace mission to the region in May.

Bush reportedly tried to convince the Mideast leaders that the obstacles to a peace conference are basically secondary and procedural.

It is up to them, he is said to have written, to transcend such considerations and seize upon the historic opportunity provided by the coalition victory over Iraq to help create a "modality" in which substantive peace talks can take place between Israel and the Arabs.

Bush implored the Middle East leaders to make compromises to help advance peace in the region. Media reports said Israel was asked to make the bulk of the concessions.

Push For A 'Silent U.N. Observer'

The two issues on which Baker's shuttle diplomacy foundered are a U.N. role in the proposed peace conference and continuation of the conference after its ceremonial opening.

Israel wants no U.N. role whatever, because it considers the world organization to be biased in favor of the Arab cause.

It also wants the conference restricted to a one-time opening session that would usher in direct, bilateral talks between Israel and its adversaries. Once that was accomplished, the conference would be adjourned and could not resurface to adjudicate or impose any solution, the Israelis insist.

The Arabs hold opposing views on those subjects. Syria, for example, demands a significant U.N. role and a conference that would be the first of a series of multinational meetings.

In his letter, Bush reportedly asked Shamir to reconsider Israel's rejection of a proposed "silent U.N. observer" at the conference and to

accept the notion of a conference that could be reconvened, though only if all parties agreed.

Media reports said the prime minister expects Syria to reject Bush's call for flexibility. In that event, Israel would not be held alone to blame if Washington gives up its peace efforts.

There was speculation, though, that rather than abandoning the diplomatic initiative, Bush and Baker might decide to send invitations to a Middle East conference, even if the prospective conferees fail to reach agreement on procedures.

A joint U.S.-Soviet invitation specifying date and place would be difficult to reject.

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

**SHAMIR BLUNTLY REJECTS IDEA
JORDAN IS PALESTINIAN STATE**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 4 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has bluntly rejected the notion that Jordan is the Palestinian state, an idea vigorously championed by Ariel Sharon and long cherished by hard-liners of the far right.

Addressing the Agudat Yisrael Knesset faction Tuesday, Shamir said he preferred not even to mention the "Jordan is Palestine" concept, to avoid arousing the enmity and fears of King Hussein, the Hashemite ruler of Jordan.

The issue arose in the aftermath of Hussein's peace-feeler last week, his interview in the French magazine *Le Point* offering to hold face-to-face meetings with Israeli leaders.

Amman backed off after Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy welcomed the proposal.

Right-wing ministers objected to a Hussein visit. Housing Minister Sharon said its only purpose would be to inform Hussein that Jordan is Palestine and he is no longer its king.

That view is based on the fact that a majority of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian origin. Its acceptance would mean the Palestinians already have their state and can make no territorial claims on Israel.

But Shamir said he has no desire to see Hussein replaced by Yasir Arafat, the Palestine Liberation Organization chairman.

His conciliatory nod toward Hussein indicated the Likud government is leaning toward the so-called "Jordanian option" long advocated by opposition Labor Party leader Shimon Peres.

**ISRAELI PLANES BOMB LEBANON
IN HEAVIEST RAID SINCE 1982**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 4 (JTA) -- Israeli air force jets bombed and strafed Palestinian terrorist bases for the second time in 48 hours Tuesday morning, in what was described as the heaviest air raid over southern Lebanon in nine years.

Reports from the scene said at least seven people were killed and 46 wounded by rocket and machine-gun fire from the attacking aircraft.

According to eyewitness reports, 12 jets took part in the two-hour raid, attacking in two waves. It was said to be the most intensive air attack since 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon.

The Palestine Liberation Organization and

other terror groups reportedly ordered their forces on maximum alert.

An intelligence officer for Al Fatah, the main wing of the PLO, warned that Israel was preparing for a major assault on Lebanon. But there were no signs in Israel of any such preparations.

Reports from Tyre identified the air raid targets as bases and headquarters of at least four organizations, located near Majdelyoun and Safiyeh villages, three miles east of Sidon, and elsewhere in southern Lebanon.

A major installation of Nayef Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine was destroyed by a direct air-to-ground missile hit.

One report described it as a depot housing armored combat vehicles, artillery and ammunition.

Headquarters of the Abu Nidal group in the village of Salhiyeh were damaged, as were Fatah headquarters near Ibra village and a Sunni Moslem militia base near Sidon.

The Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army was reported to have shelled the target areas during the air raid.

Reports from Lebanon said the casualties included several children from a school near one of the targets.

Israeli sources claimed terrorists deliberately sited their installations near schools and hospitals to lessen the risk of attack and to use civilian casualties for propaganda purposes.

ISRAEL WOULD GET \$3.2 BILLION IN 1993 UNDER BILL PASSED BY HOUSE COMMITTEE By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 4 (JTA) -- The House Foreign Affairs Committee has approved a bill that would boost U.S. foreign aid to Israel above the \$3 billion it has received annually since the mid-1980s.

The foreign aid authorization bill, which the panel approved Tuesday and is expected to come before the full House later this month, would increase annual U.S. military aid to Israel from the current \$1.8 million to \$2 billion in the 1993 fiscal year.

Economic assistance would remain at \$1.2 billion, for a total aid package of \$3.2 billion.

The increase is intended to partially offset the erosion of the foreign aid package's buying power due to inflation since 1986, when the \$3 billion level was first attained.

Pro-Israel activists offered scant explanation of how the \$200 million increase was arrived at.

But Morris Amitay, former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said pro-Israel lobbyists are "always in the position where they can't appear to be overly piggy," especially since Israel is already by far the largest U.S. foreign aid recipient.

Lobbyists decided to push for an increase in military aid rather than economic aid, because, as one put it, "American officials are more acutely aware of the pressure" on Israel's foreign military sales account, which the Jewish state uses to purchase defense equipment from U.S. contractors.

"Israel simply does not have enough in its account for some of the purchases that (the Pentagon) considers necessary for Israel's security," the lobbyist said. Israel is required to spend all but \$475 million of the military aid in this country.

By contrast, there are fewer supporters in

the administration for increasing direct economic aid, the lobbyist said.

\$600 Million For Refugees

But economic aid to Israel will likely grow over the next five years because Israel is planning to seek \$10 billion in U.S.-guaranteed securities to finance the resettlement of Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel.

Israel received \$400 million in such loan guarantees earlier this year and agreed at the time not to make any new requests until mid-September.

The aid would be in \$2 billion annual chunks over five years that Israel would borrow from U.S. banks or investors at an interest rate based on the U.S. credit rating.

In addition to providing military and economic aid to Israel, the bill passed by the House panel on Tuesday authorizes more than \$600 million to bring 121,000 refugees to the United States in each of the next two fiscal years, 40,000 of whom would be Soviet Jews.

Jewish lobbyists have been reluctant to seek an increase in the admission of Soviet refugees, for fear that, at a time of tight fiscal constraints, it would alienate other ethnic groups seeking to bring refugees to this country. Jewish groups also do not want to further sap Israel's pool of potential immigrants.

But a new tactic introduced in this year's bill is to transfer from one fiscal year to the next any unused funding earmarked for Soviet refugees.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society estimates that some 15,000 of the 40,000 "refugee slots" set aside for Soviet Jews this fiscal year will not be used, because of Soviet delays in processing people seeking to emigrate.

The bill also earmarks \$75 million for the resettlement of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews in Israel, money which will be channeled through the United Israel Appeal. The sum is \$35 million more than the Bush administration requested.

Restricts Contacts With PLO

The bill in its current form also contains a number of foreign policy restrictions, which President Bush opposes in principle as an encroachment on his constitutional authority to conduct foreign policy.

Last year, language restricting U.S. contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization was stricken at the last minute to avert a veto by Bush. But Rep. Mel Levine (D-Calif.) has included similar language this year.

Other restrictive language, sponsored by Rep. Peter Kostmayer (D-Pa.), bars U.S. aid to any country that provides weaponry to Syria or other nations deemed by the State Department to support terrorism.

Less forceful language calls for the United States to seek the repeal of the 1975 U.N. General Assembly resolution denigrating Zionism as a form of racism. Since this is a stated policy goal of the administration, there is unlikely to be any opposition.

The bill also would bar Syria from receiving U.S. aid unless it is willing to enter negotiations with Israel, ease emigration restrictions for Jews and extradite accused Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner to Germany.

But because direct aid to Syria is not being contemplated anytime soon, this language is also largely symbolic.

**NEW ETHIOPIAN REGIME WILL ALLOW
REMAINING JEWS TO LEAVE, SAYS ENVOY**
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, June 4 (JTA) -- Ethiopia has assured the United States it will not prevent Jews remaining in the strife-torn country from emigrating, former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.) said Tuesday.

Boschwitz served as President Bush's special envoy to Ethiopia and is credited with helping to negotiate the Operation Solomon airlift that brought more than 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel on May 24 and 25.

The airlift began three days after Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country and ended scarcely three days before the capital fell to rebel forces.

Speaking to reporters after receiving the Presidential Citizens Medal at the White House, Boschwitz said, "We did get an agreement from the new government that there will be no barriers to their leaving," he said.

The agreement covers "several hundred, perhaps," left in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, Boschwitz said.

It also covers "1,000 or 1,500 left up in Gondar," he said, referring to the northern province where most of the country's Jews lived before migrating to the capital.

Asked about the chances of getting to Israel the tens of thousands of Ethiopians who have converted from Judaism to Christianity, Boschwitz said, "I leave that to the liturgical department (in Israel). That's a little bit out of my line."

But he added, "I don't think that the Ethiopian government has any particular reason to create barriers for anybody (who) wants to leave."

'Something Wonderful Has Happened'

Bush, in presenting the medal to Boschwitz, said the airlift "unfolded with dazzling speed" and became "one of the most humanitarian airlifts in history."

"I think that for all Jews around the world this was an event of emotional proportions, and I just want you to know that I share in that emotional feeling, that something wonderful has happened," the president told 70 guests, mainly from the organized Jewish community.

Bush also presented Special Awards for Exceptional Service to Irvin Hicks, deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs; Robert Frasure, director of African affairs on the National Security Council; and Robert Houdek, U.S. charge d'affaires in Addis Ababa. They assisted Boschwitz in the negotiations.

Among those at the ceremony were leaders of the United Jewish Appeal, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, American Association for Ethiopian Jews and North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

Nobody from the Israeli Embassy was invited to the ceremony. But an embassy official was not upset. "It was a private ceremony, as far as we know. We don't run the White House operation."

Comedian Jackie Mason, who attended the ceremony, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "This is the first time the gentiles have done so much for the Jewish people."

"I was joking before it happened, because I said to myself this was a terrible predicament," he said. "Now, thank God, this is phenomenal!"

**ROBERT STRAUSS, TEXAS DEMOCRAT,
NAMED NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR TO USSR**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, June 4 (JTA) -- Robert Strauss, a former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and briefly President Jimmy Carter's special envoy to the Middle East, was nominated Tuesday by President Bush to be the next U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Bush, in making the surprise announcement of the appointment of the 72-year-old Washington and Dallas lawyer, said Strauss had taken on "difficult and delicate assignments in the past for presidents of both parties."

The president praised Strauss as the right man for the job, at a time when the United States has a role in helping the Soviet Union foster democratic reforms and economic change.

In the brief White House Rose Garden announcement, Bush said no one is more qualified or more talented than Strauss in being able to guarantee that the United States and the Soviet Union will not be "two big ships" that "pass in the night for lack of understanding."

It is Strauss' ability for conciliation and bringing people together that may have prompted Bush to call on his fellow Texan to replace the current ambassador, Jack Matlock.

Strauss, a native Texan who is Jewish, had been Carter's special U.S. trade representative since 1977 when the president chose him in April 1979 to be special Middle East envoy. His job was to bring about an agreement on autonomy for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, under the terms of the Camp David Accords.

Strauss served as special envoy only until November 1979, when he became campaign manager for Carter's unsuccessful bid for re-election. But during his short stint, Strauss identified the various problems that had to be solved to bring about autonomy.

His successor, Sol Linowitz, used Strauss' approach to bring agreements on various issues. The autonomy discussions were abandoned by the incoming Reagan administration.

NEW GERMAN EXPORT LAW DEADLOCKED
By David Kantor

BONN, June 4 (JTA) -- A joint committee of the two houses of the German parliament failed Monday to reach a compromise on legislation to combat the illegal sale of arms and weapons technology abroad.

The government initiated the move after a scandal erupted over the role of German companies in providing chemical warfare capabilities to Libya and Iraq.

The conservative Christian Democratic Union, which heads the governing coalition in the Bundestag, the lower house, proposed a bill that would allow the government to tap the telephones and intercept the mail of suspected violators.

But the opposition Social Democratic Party, which holds a majority in the Bundesrat, the upper house, opposed such measures.

The draft law has been sent back to the government for revisions.

Germany came in for some sharp criticism from its Western allies after it was learned that German technology enabled Iraq to produce poison gas and to improve its outmoded Scud missiles, with which it attacked Saudi Arabia and Israel during the Persian Gulf War.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**AT ABSORPTION CENTER IN ASHKELON, ETHIOPIANS ADJUST TO NEW LIFESTYLE**

By Cathrine Gerson

ASHKELON, Israel, June 4 (JTA) -- The sounds are strange, the smells are different, but the "Shalom" is the same greeting used by Jews all over the world.

It is used by Israelis whose parents came from Germany, Poland and Morocco. Now the greeting is offered with the same intent and meaning by dark-skinned Ethiopian children playing on a lawn in Ashkelon.

They stare at a reporter's white skin and blue eyes with curiosity and, if they can muster the courage, cry out, "Shalom, shalom."

Almost two-thirds of the 578 newly arrived Ethiopians housed at the former French Recreation Village in Ashkelon are children. As usual, they are the quickest to adapt.

While their parents are busy dealing with the seemingly endless paperwork involved in registering as new immigrants, the Jewish Agency has set up a day-care center to amuse the nearly 400 children.

Until a few years ago, Israelis came here to vacation in a Club Med environment. Now, the facilities have become an absorption center for the Ethiopian immigrants who arrived in Operation Solomon at the end of May.

Kindergarten teachers organize play groups and continue Hebrew lessons begun at a school run by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Addis Ababa.

The children familiarize themselves with the heaps of toys donated by Ashkelon residents. The weather has been benevolent as well: sunny with mild breezes. The youngsters can sit on the lawn, which allows for easy access to their parents.

'Most Sort Themselves Out'

The manager of this Jewish Agency-run absorption center is a woman familiar with the problems of settling in a new country. Ofra Aloni came from Morocco about 30 years ago. She manages three absorption centers in Ashkelon.

"Each group has its own problems," she said, "but in the end, most sort themselves out."

Aloni had only 48 hours to prepare for the Ethiopians sent to Ashkelon. She is happy she managed to find this one-time resort village. Her only regret is that it has a central kitchen, rather than separate cooking facilities in each unit.

Registering the Ethiopians is an arduous task.

There are no statistics available, but it seems that a majority of the newly arrived families consist of husbands and wives who have each been married at least once before.

Jewish Agency officials, helped by an Ethiopian translator, require an average of two to three hours to unravel the often very complicated social and blood lines of each family.

Due to the haste of the initial registration in Addis Ababa, mistakes were made. Patience and repeated questioning are needed now to make sure the ages and names of immigrants are correct.

While a kess -- the Ethiopian Jewish religious authority -- officiated at most of the marriages, divorces were often quick split-ups without much formality. Each of the ex-spouses usually remarried in a few months.

That worries Israel's Orthodox Chief Rabbi, who insists that Ethiopian Jews undergo ceremonial conversion.

Without it, thousands of Ethiopian children will be branded "mamzerim" -- illegitimate -- by the rabbinate because their father is not the man their mother is currently married to.

Two of these children in danger of being stigmatized are Aramito Bitscha and Wasu Federe, born to the same mother, Imawai Federe.

First Ethiopian Baby Circumcised

Aramito, a thin 12-year-old girl with a serious eye infection, is not the daughter of Imawai's current husband; nor is she the daughter of her first husband, to whom she was married at the age of 12 and divorced from without the aid of a kess.

Aramito is the offspring of Imawai's second marriage, to Zemu Eremi, which lasted less than a year. No kess officiated at that wedding, and there were no witnesses.

When the social worker, Gila, heard this, she gave up, closed the file and announced that the case would be sent to Tel Aviv.

Ethiopians have learned to fear that pronouncement. Anything unclear goes to Tel Aviv for further investigation and more probing into the family history.

Although only two families were registered in four hours, everyone took a break when Aloni entered the room to announce they were all invited to the brit milah (ritual circumcision) of the first Ethiopian baby born in Ashkelon since Operation Solomon.

The ceremony took place in the communal dining room, with only the passive participation of the parents.

Danake, the mother, sat on a chair holding the baby born only hours after she arrived Saturday. She was surrounded by her five older sons, while the father sat on a chair outside, surrounded by his brothers.

The mohel directed the ceremony without help from the aged kess, who was placed on a chair next to the mother.

The infant was named Shai, which means "gift" in Hebrew.

'Hugged And Couldn't Say A Word'

After the circumcision, while most of the families settled down to an Israeli-style lunch of rice, vegetables, salad and a meat stew, a happy family reunion took place near the entrance of absorption center.

Shaul, a 24-year-old soldier from Afula, arrived in Israel from Ethiopia six years ago with his mother and five younger brothers. He had searched the length and breadth of the country for relatives.

Here, in the former French resort village, he found his mother's younger brother and was happily explaining to him how to use one of the public telephones to call his sister in Afula.

Although he heard his uncle might have been among the new arrivals, Shaul had about given up hope.

"I have been nearly everywhere the last few days," he said. "In Jerusalem, I found my father, who had heard that I died on the way to Israel."

"It was wonderful, just wonderful," he said, on the verge of tears.

"We didn't talk, we just held each other, hugged and couldn't say a word, we were so happy."

A Jewish Agency official passing the happy scene mused, "It is at times like these I understand what Zionism is all about."