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**BAKER PLANNING EIGHTH MIDEAST TRIP
TO RESOLVE PEACE CONFERENCE ISSUES**

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Secretary of State James Baker, hoping to get a Middle East peace conference going this month, is returning to the region next week for the eighth time this year, the State Department announced Tuesday.

Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Baker, who will visit Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Syria, plans to deal with issues "that must be resolved before the issuance of invitations" for a Middle East peace conference.

She did not say what those issues are, except to comment that Baker is "working on a number of letters of assurances with various governments."

But the key outstanding issue is the composition of the Palestinian delegation to the talks. In addition, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Monday said his government is still seeking assurances on a number of other procedural issues, including its request that the conference not reconvene once direct negotiations begin.

President Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev this summer called for the peace conference to take place in October, and "that's still what we're working toward," Tutwiler said.

She refused to confirm a report in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot that the conference will take place in the Hague on Nov. 5 and not, as rumored in some quarters, on Oct. 29 or 30 in Switzerland.

"I have nothing for you on venue, and I have nothing for you on timing," Tutwiler said.

The Bush administration is trying to form a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation to represent the Palestinian position at the peace talks.

To further that goal, Baker will be meeting soon with Palestinian representatives Hanan Ashrawi and Faisal Hussein in either Washington or Jerusalem, Tutwiler said.

In Jerusalem, Hussein was quoted Tuesday as saying that he and Ashrawi would leave Wednesday for Washington.

'A Matter For The Israeli Government'

Israeli law enforcement authorities on Tuesday met with the two to question them about charges that they attended a meeting in Algiers last month of the Palestine National Council, the Palestine Liberation Organization's so-called parliament-in-exile. Israeli law forbids Jews and Arabs under its administration from making contact with the PLO.

An official at the Israeli Embassy here confirmed Tuesday that the two were interrogated in Israel. "I'm aware of the fact that there was a police investigation and nothing beyond that," the official said.

Tutwiler would not comment when asked about the Israeli inquiry. "That is a matter for the Israeli government," she said.

Israel has made clear it will refuse to participate in any peace conference that involves Palestinians claiming to represent the PLO. On that issue, Tutwiler said Tuesday that Israel will not have to sit down at the peace conference with "anyone they don't want to."

But when asked if Israel might interpret that to mean it can exercise a veto power over possible participants, Tutwiler would only say that U.S. policy has not changed.

Baker is reportedly considering issuing invitations to a peace conference at the end of the month, even if his trip to the region next week fails to close the gap on the outstanding issues.

When asked about that possibility, Tutwiler said, "That will be a decision for him to make and something I couldn't prejudge."

She also would not say whether this will be Baker's final trip to the region before invitations are issued.

The invitations will be sent by Bush and Gorbachev. While there is speculation that the two will preside at the conference, a more likely scenario is that their foreign ministers will attend instead.

The Israeli government has yet to make a "firm decision" about requesting from Washington either a letter of assurances or a memorandum of understanding that would help lay out the two countries' position going into such a conference, Tutwiler said. "I have not ever heard it discussed," she said.

The difference between the two is that a memorandum of understanding is signed by two parties, whereas a letter of assurances would be a unilateral statement, from the United States to Israel.

An Israeli Embassy official said Tuesday that the issue has yet to be worked out between Baker and Shamir.

Baker "has said publicly in his last visit that whichever each government wants, it's up to them, and he will work on whichever it is they decide," Tutwiler said.

The State Department spokeswoman also denied a news report that Jordan has had its letter of assurances spelled out.

"I have seen so many reports of what is in so many different letters of assurances. Bits and pieces might be correct, but so far I have never seen anything that comes close to being totally correct," she added.

Meanwhile, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater had no particular response when asked about Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's statement Monday that by requesting a delay in congressional action on a package of loan guarantees for Israel, Bush had caused the Jewish state "disappointment and grief."

"It serves no purpose to respond to his comments," Fitzwater said.

**HEZBOLLAH THREATENS ATTACKS
TO SABOTAGE PEACE CONFERENCE**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Hezbollah threatened Israel on Tuesday with a series of "showcase" attacks on its own soil and in the southern Lebanon security zone, to prevent the proposed Middle East peace conference from taking place this month or to disrupt it if it does.

Leaders of the pro-Iranian, Shi'ite fundamentalist militia told a news conference in Beirut

that Hezbollah has the active support and encouragement of the Teheran government for its undertaking.

Hezbollah already seems to have joined battle against the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army.

The SLA imposed curfews on Shi'ite villages just north of the security zone Tuesday, firing automatic weapons at farmers who showed their faces out of doors.

The SLA, a mainly Lebanese Christian force supported and equipped by Israel, is furious over a Katyusha rocket barrage from the vicinity of the villages Monday. The barrage followed six hours of shelling by SLA artillery.

The shelling, which reportedly caused severe damage to homes, was retaliation for the death of one SLA soldier and the wounding of two others by roadside bombs that exploded in the security zone Sunday. Hezbollah took credit for planting them.

A QUIET ANNIVERSARY MARKS YEAR AFTER TEMPLE MOUNT RIOTS, DEATHS By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Tough precautionary measures were credited with keeping the peace in Jerusalem on the first anniversary of the Temple Mount riots Tuesday.

Palestinians staged a general strike. But no serious incidents were reported at the Islamic shrines, where at least 1,000 police and soldiers were deployed.

But sporadic disturbances occurred elsewhere in the city and in the West Bank. Security sources said the police would be kept in a state of high alert through this weekend.

The anniversary commemorated the fatal shooting of 17 Arabs by Israeli soldiers and border police, who stormed the Temple Mount on Oct. 8, 1990, after Arabs crowds threw stones at Jews worshipping at the Western Wall below.

More than 200 Arabs were wounded. A subsequent inquiry faulted police conduct but no disciplinary measures were called for or taken.

Anticipating trouble at memorial services Tuesday, the security authorities barred West Bank residents from entering Jerusalem for the day. That, and other precautions, accounted for the low turnout for the services, according to Police Minister Ronni Milo.

Only 200 Arabs prayed at the mosques. They were outnumbered at least 5-to-1 by armed troops and police, who kept them under scrutiny until they dispersed without incident.

Elsewhere in the Old City, a gasoline bomb was thrown at border police guarding the residence that Housing Minister Ariel Sharon established in the Moslem Quarter several years ago. No one was hurt.

Masked youths threw stones at a border police patrol in the Sawahre neighborhood of East Jerusalem on Tuesday evening and blocked roads with burning tires.

The police dispersed them with rubber bullets. No injuries or damage was reported.

Masked men attacked a Jewish driver near Efrat, a settlement south of Bethlehem, in the West Bank. His car was slightly damaged but the settler escaped unharmed.

Several villages near Jerusalem marked the anniversary by protest marches. At least one clash occurred between demonstrators and soldiers in El-Ram village north of Jerusalem.

ELECTORAL REFORM IN ISRAEL FACES UPHILL BATTLE IN KNESSET By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Legislation to reform Israel's much-criticized electoral system is facing an uphill battle in the Knesset.

Although the legislation has broad support across party lines, Likud backing for the reforms has eroded recently, following indications by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he is inclined to oppose the draft bills now in committee. The bills call for direct election of the prime minister.

Some observers predict the measure will die for lack of support at the top. Most agree that prospects for passage before the next statutory elections, still a year away, have dimmed. But the reform lobby is not ready to concede.

Several pro-reform groups published large newspaper advertisements this week demanding that Shamir and his lieutenants honor past pledges to allow Likud Knesset members to vote their conscience on the issue.

While the opposition Labor Party is firmly committed to the proposed reforms, the small parties in the Likud-led coalition, fearful of losing influence, and possibly their seats in the Knesset, oppose them.

If Shamir throws his weight behind the reforms' opponents, or if the party formally decides to oppose reform, only a handful of Likud Knesset members will likely break party discipline -- hardly enough to secure the 61-vote minimum a constitutional measure needs to become law.

Widespread Voter Disgust

Likud, of course, is aware that the popularity of electoral reform is directly related to widespread voter disgust with the present system.

The public's disaffection began with the collapse of the Likud-Labor unity government in March 1990. Because neither major party commanded sufficient Knesset mandates to govern alone, they turned to the small Orthodox parties, granting those parties influence far beyond their electoral strength.

Many Israelis were furious that the coalition-making machinery was effectively controlled by an ultra-Orthodox rabbi in Bnei Brak, Eliezer Schach, and his archival in Brooklyn, the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, who has never set foot in Israel.

Israelis were also repelled by the tactics of Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i's short-lived splinter party, the Movement for the Zionist Ideal, which vacillated until the last moment, making threats and demands of both major parties, before falling back into the Likud camp.

Such spectacles could be eliminated if voters cast direct ballots for prime minister, effectively ending a candidate's dependence on the support of splinter factions.

But some academicians believe that direct election of prime minister would be an inappropriate change in a system based on the British concept of Cabinet government closely accountable to parliament, rather than the American system of separate legislative and executive branches.

Some political scientists say more stable governments could be achieved by raising the "threshold" for entry into parliament.

At present, a party needs to poll only one percent of the popular vote to win a Knesset seat, compared, for example, to Germany, where the entry level is 5 percent.

A NEW SOVIET-ISRAELI AIRLINE BRINGS OLIM TO ISRAEL'S DOOR

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- A new Soviet-Israeli airline, which got off to a sputtering start when it began direct Moscow-Tel Aviv flights last week, landed its first substantial load of olim Monday at Ben-Gurion Airport and is promising to deliver huge numbers in the future.

But first, Aerolicht, the new carrier established jointly by Israeli businessman Ya'acov Nimrodi and the Soviet state airline, Aeroflot, must win a contract with the Jewish Agency for Israel. Nimrodi and his local agent, Menahem Laufer, were scheduled to begin negotiations with Jewish Agency officials Tuesday.

The Jewish Agency pays the transportation costs of all immigration to Israel, regardless of route. Aerolicht wants it to pick up the tab for its direct service and to encourage immigrants to use it. The Jewish Agency objects to the monopoly status Nimrodi demands for Aerolicht, which it cannot guarantee.

Aeroflot and the Israeli state airline, El Al, are expected to eventually reach agreement on a joint service between Soviet cities and Israel. It has been held up because of differences over market share and security measures.

Moreover, the newly independent Soviet republics are expected to establish their own airlines, which may want to participate in the direct immigration market.

Finally, the Jewish Agency is skeptical of the new service. While its Monday flight safely landed 145 olim from Kishinev, in Moldavia, theirs was an unceremonious arrival, with no VIPs on hand to greet them.

The Jewish Agency and Absorption Ministry claimed they had not been informed in advance of the flight, although they read "predictions" about it in the press.

In addition, the so-called "Aerolicht fiasco" last week made a bad impression. The company's inaugural flight on Oct. 2 was supposed to bring in 300 to 400 olim. But it never arrived, because Turkey refused the new airline permission to cross its air space.

Jewish Agency and Foreign Ministry officials accused Aerolicht of lack of coordination with the Israeli authorities. A second direct flight on Oct. 3 carried only eight passengers.

But Nimrodi, who so far has financed the service out-of-pocket, promises great achievements if he gets a contract. Aerolicht will operate daily direct flights between several Soviet cities and Tel Aviv, carrying as many as 300,000 immigrants over the next two years, he said.

SQUABBLE DEVELOPS OVER SUGGESTION SOVIET DOCTORS ARE DELAYING ALIYAH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Officials of Israel's Absorption Ministry and of the Jewish Agency for Israel are angry about a suggestion by the head of a major Israeli government hospital that Soviet doctors postpone or abandon plans for aliyah because of the surplus of medical practitioners here and consequent lack of jobs.

Soviet Jewry advocacy groups were also irked by the remarks of Professor Mordechai Shani, medical director of Sheba Hospital at Tel Hashomer.

Shani, who is in charge of implementing the

government's medical reform plan, told Israel Radio that the present ratio of 300 doctors per 100,000 population in Israel is much higher than in the West, where the most generous ratio is 250 per 100,000.

Under those conditions, the unemployment problem faced by immigrant doctors "cannot be solved," Shani said. He suggested that Jewish medical professionals in the Soviet Union planning to come to Israel would do well to reconsider.

Some agency officials conceded privately that Shani may be right but should not have expressed himself publicly.

Top agency officials complained that Israel should be sending a different message, emphasizing that Jews should get out of the Soviet Union as quickly as possible.

But in fact, Shani's remarks came on the heels of reports that fewer Soviet doctors are coming to Israel. They are refraining not only because of dismal job prospects but also because of the tough qualifying examinations they must pass, in keeping with the high medical standards prevailing in Israel. According to a report to the Cabinet, only 2,500 Soviet doctors immigrated to Israel in the first eight months of 1991, compared to 5,800 the year before.

The dwindling numbers were attributed to the stiff examinations, as the reverse is true of doctors with 20 or more years' experience, who are exempt from the qualifying tests.

During 1990, 2,226 veteran physicians immigrated to Israel. In the first eight months of 1991, their number was 3,907.

But their practice must be supervised for the first six months and the Health Ministry needs to find an extra \$3.5 million to pay for the supervision.

Tests are another matter. Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that only 600 of 8,900 Soviet doctors who immigrated since 1989 -- less than 15 percent -- passed the licensing examinations allowing them to practice in Israel.

But Moshe Mashiah, director general of the Health Ministry, reported to the Cabinet's Absorption Committee Monday that 58 percent of 1,352 doctors who took the examination this year passed.

He reported that 1,280 Soviet doctors are taking special refresher courses at 15 hospitals all over Israel.

ISRAELIS, JORDANIANS MEET ON WATER

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- "Regular meetings" are taking place abroad between top executives of Israel's Dead Sea Works and their counterparts from the Jordanian industrial complex on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.

The disclosure was made by Uri Bin-Nun, director general of the Dead Sea Works. He spoke Sunday night at Sdom, site of the Israeli plant, where Tel Aviv University has opened a research center to study the world's saltiest body of water at the farthest point below sea level on earth.

The meetings have taken place in Europe and the United States, Bin-Nun said. At one recent session, a ranking Jordanian company official expressed hope that eventually joint projects would be undertaken by Dead Sea-linked industries of both countries.

Such meetings have been rumored in the past. Bin-Nun's disclosure was the first confirmation of them by an authoritative Israeli source.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS MOSTLY HAVE SOLID PRO-ISRAEL RECORDS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- Most of the candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 1992 have strong pro-Israel records.

But there is still a question mark about Sen. Robert Kerrey of Nebraska, whom pundits are already calling the Democratic front-runner.

While Kerrey has supported Israel in the Senate, the former Nebraska governor is not considered in the forefront of the pro-Israel lawmakers. And he is not among the majority of senators who co-sponsored legislation that would provide Israel with guarantees for \$10 billion loans for immigrant resettlement.

Former Sen. Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, until recently the only announced Democratic candidate, has accused President Bush of turning Israel's request for guarantees into a personal fight with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

"What I don't understand is why he has gone out of his way to pick this fight," Tsongas was quoted by the Atlanta Journal as saying after he met with former President Jimmy Carter in Georgia on Sept. 16. "No Arab state has made this a major issue," he said.

Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa had been critical of Bush's treatment of Israel even before he announced his candidacy Sept. 8.

Harkin has argued that before the United States agreed to lead the military coalition to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, Washington should have gotten a promise from the Arab countries that after the war they would recognize Israel, end their economic boycott and begin negotiations with the Jewish state.

Settlements No Obstacle To Peace

He has said that it is the Arab refusal to take these steps that is the obstacle to peace and not, as the Bush administration has said, Jewish settlements in the West Bank. He has also repeatedly said that the United States should support Israel and not try to be even-handed in the Middle East.

The two governors in the race, Douglas Wilder of Virginia, who announced earlier this month, and Bill Clinton of Arkansas, who officially entered the race Oct. 3, have records of reaching out to the Jewish communities in their states.

Wilder, the first black to be elected governor since Reconstruction, has particularly sought to contrast himself with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who is not considered supportive of Israel. Jackson has not yet ruled out making a third effort at the Democratic nomination.

Both Wilder and Clinton have supported aid for Israel. Clinton was critical of Bush's request for delaying the loan guarantees until next year.

Former Gov. Jerry Brown of California, who has said he will enter the race, was considered a supporter of Israel while governor and during his unsuccessful attempt at the presidency in 1976.

Another announced candidate is Larry Agran, the former mayor of Irvine, Calif., who is Jewish. Agran entered the race when his first choice, former Sen. George McGovern, who lost to Richard Nixon in 1972, said he would not make another try. Agran said he wants to stress in his campaign the problems faced by the cities and towns.

The positions of the candidates on Israel will be made clearer as the race gets under way. But the candidates, facing a president who has high marks on foreign policy, are expected to stress domestic issues, which the Democrats charge have been neglected during the 11 years of the Reagan and Bush administrations.

RUSSIAN SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF LUBAVITCH BID FOR HISTORIC LIBRARY
By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Oct. 8 (JTA) -- A three-judge panel of the Russian Supreme Court ruled Friday that the Lenin Library in Moscow must turn over to the Chabad Lubavitch movement some 12,000 books confiscated by the Communists in 1916.

The unanimous decision was obtained after a marathon of meetings between four Lubavitch rabbis and various Moscow bureaucrats.

The court's ruling was followed by a written order, issued Tuesday.

In December, Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed that the entire collection legally belongs to Chabad and should be returned to it. Since then, the four rabbis have been in Moscow trying, with the help of Moscow lawyer Veronica Irina, to recover possession of the books.

The rabbis are Boruch Shlomo Cunin, Los Angeles Chabad director; Sholom Ber Levine, another American and the movement's chief librarian; Yosef Aronov, Lubavitch director in Israel; and Yitzhak Kagan, a former refusenik once known as "the tzaddik of Leningrad," now an Israeli citizen.

Among those who went to bat for the Lubavitchers were the late industrialist Armand Hammer and Hollywood producer Jerry Weintraub, a friend of President Bush.

Fears Of Pilfering Confirmed

Following 10 months of wrangling with both Soviet and Russian officials, the rabbis were led to believe that they would finally be given the books the Friday before Rosh Hashanah. But after a day's waiting and seemingly countless last-minute discussions among various high-level officials, Culture Minister Nikolai Gubenko ordered that the books not be released.

Meanwhile, Lubavitch fears that books from the collection were being pilfered have been confirmed, according to Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, spokesman for the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Schneerson. The fears arose when some of the books were found in the office of a man fired from his position after the aborted August coup.

And only a week ago, he said, a librarian found several Hebrew books from a valuable 400-year-old collection in a garbage can near the library. Putting books in the garbage is believed to be one method of surreptitiously removing books from the library. In this case, someone presumably hoped to sell the books later.

According to Krinsky, one reason behind official reluctance to release the books may well be the fact that some of the books have been spirited away.

"We won't know what is missing until we have the whole collection," he said.

Because of the Columbus Day holiday in the United States, the JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published on Monday, Oct. 14.
