

ISRAEL RECOGNIZES INDEPENDENCE OF ALL FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Israel will recognize the independence of the republics that formerly constituted the now-defunct Soviet Union, Foreign Minister David Levy informed the Knesset on Wednesday.

Levy did not make clear whether recognition means that Israel would establish embassies in each of the 11 republics that have just formed the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Political observers expect Jerusalem will continue to follow the lead of the United States and the European Community with respect to the republics.

Israel has just established full diplomatic relations with Russia, the largest of the republics. Its ambassador, Alexander Bubín, presented his credentials to President Chaim Herzog here Monday.

At that time, he was still officially the representative of the Soviet Union, having received his letter of assignment from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on Dec. 16.

Gorbachev resigned Wednesday, and Bubín is now the ambassador of Russia, which has assumed the foreign relations obligations of the former Soviet Union.

While receiving Bubín at the presidential residence, Herzog disclosed that other republics had expressed interest in diplomatic ties with Israel. He referred their messages to Levy.

In Washington, President Bush announced Wednesday evening that the United States was recognizing the independence of all of the former Soviet republics and would immediately establish full diplomatic relations with six of them: Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kirghizia.

U.S. diplomatic relations with the other five members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as Georgia, which has not joined the commonwealth, will depend on their readiness to implement democratic reforms.

Concern About Emigration Flow

In New York, Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said she trusted that Bush "has obtained assurances from the leadership of these newly independent states regarding their commitments to democratic principles and to basic human rights for all their citizens."

Cardin expressed concern for "the well-being of the substantial Jewish minority residing in these (six) states as well as in other areas which were part of the now defunct Soviet Union. Chief among our immediate concerns are that Jewish emigration continue unimpeded," she said.

In Tel Aviv, Ambassador Bubín told reporters that his "new" country, Russia, would seek to play a central role in the Middle East peace process, as the former Soviet Union did.

Russia will now serve as host for the multi-lateral conference on Middle East regional issues set to open in Moscow on Jan. 28.

In Jerusalem, as in many other capitals, there is concern over the disposition of the vast

nuclear arsenal of the former Soviet Union, dispersed as it is among four of the newly independent republics.

But according to highly placed sources here, Israel is not worried that Kazakhstan, the only Moslem republic in possession of nuclear weapons, will participate in the creation of a "Moslem bomb" or otherwise transfer nuclear technology to the Arab states.

"We assume the leadership is far too responsible to dabble in anything like that," a Cabinet-level source told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

But there is serious concern here over the prospect of thousands of former Soviet nuclear scientists and technicians no longer employed and in the "job market."

Some of Israel's most bitter foes, including Syria, Iraq and Iran, are interested in these specialists' know-how and are capable of paying well for it.

In addition, technology and equipment necessary for the production of nuclear weapons may be put on the open market to ease the economic crisis in the new commonwealth. Certain Middle Eastern states could be potential buyers.

Israel therefore expects the United States and other Western nations to insist on the strict tightening of international supervisory machinery by the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, sources here said.

JEWS WILL REMEMBER GORBACHEV AS MAN WHO FREED SOVIET JEWS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Mikhail Gorbachev, whose resignation Wednesday sounded the death knell of the 74-year-old Soviet Union, will be remembered as the man who dramatically improved the lot of Soviet Jews, both those he allowed to leave and those who remained behind.

For it was Gorbachev who thrust open wide the gates of Soviet Jewish emigration and allowed freedom of religious practice for the first time in the atheist nation's history.

When Gorbachev entered office in March 1985, some 11,000 Jews were counted as refuseniks, and more than a score of prisoners of conscience languished in jails and labor camps for the crimes of trying to emigrate or teach Hebrew.

The first omens of the Gorbachev era were not good for Jews. The already paltry emigration figure of 1,140 for 1985 slid even more frighteningly low, to 914, in 1986. Soviet Jewry activists in the West at first feared Gorbachev would be even worse than his reform-resistant predecessors.

Then the numbers of Jews allowed to leave began to grow, reaching 8,155 in 1987, swelling to 18,965 in 1988, then surging to 71,217 in 1989 and 186,815 in 1990.

Few Soviet Jewry activists will ever forget the day of Feb. 11, 1986, when the prison gates swung open and nine-year refusenik Anatoly Shcharansky took his first steps toward freedom.

He was soon followed by other long-term refuseniks, such as Vladimir and Maria Slepak, Ida Nudel and Yosef Begun.

Emigration reforms were eventually codified in a long-delayed law passed by the Supreme Soviet last spring. This led to the lifting of U.S.

trade sanctions against the Soviet Union, mandated by the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

So profound were the changes Gorbachev enacted in the realms of emigration and religious freedom, that not even the most hard-line critics of the Kremlin's treatment of Jews could dismiss the Soviet leader's deeds.

Gorbachev also reversed the Soviet Union's longstanding animosity toward Israel, culminating in the resumption of full diplomatic ties with the Jewish state in October.

'Man Who Let My People Go'

Gorbachev "will go down in history as the man who let my people go," said one strong admirer, Rabbi Arthur Schneider, president of the ecumenical Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

"Not only did Gorbachev remove all restrictions imposed by previous Soviet regimes against Jewish emigration and Jewish religious expression, he was the first leader of the USSR to recognize and publicly state that religious believers were valued and valuable citizens of the Soviet Union," Schneider said in a statement Thursday.

Even the most ardent critics in the Soviet Jewry camp were lauding Gorbachev's legacy.

Lynn Singer, executive director of the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry, described Gorbachev as "a pragmatic politician, who understood" that allowing Jews to emigrate "opened new vistas" for his country.

His pragmatism led him to respond positively to criticism, she said. "Much of what happened from 1985 until even yesterday was the result of Gorbachev's response to the West," she said. "He did in five and a half years to six years what it took decades for us to try to do."

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, perhaps the toughest critic of the Soviet Union, remarked that even "though Gorbachev was late in breaking out of the human rights gate," the "positive changes he ultimately initiated would have been unthinkable to us in the Soviet human rights advocacy movement a decade ago."

Now Gorbachev must "use whatever respect he commands as a statesman in retirement to advocate respect for human rights" in the former Soviet Union, the Student Struggle said in a statement.

Leonid Stonov, a refusenik for 11 years who now works for Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry, welcomed Gorbachev's resignation as marking "the end of the Soviet empire," which was, he said, impossible and undesirable to save.

He pointed out that among the Soviet Union's treacheries were state-sponsored acts of violence against Jews, most recently in the Central Asian towns of Andizhan and Sumgait.

"Gorbachev, the politician, of course did a lot. He really facilitated the end of the system," Stonov said approvingly.

Condemned Anti-Semitism

Myrna Shinbaum, former director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, remembered Gorbachev as "a man who came into power at a time when Jews were still in prison. And for a few years, nothing happened."

Shinbaum remembered that "in terms of the Jewish community, the movement began after the first summit meeting with President Reagan" in Geneva in November 1985.

Gorbachev then understood that Soviet Jewish emigration "was a priority issue for the American president and the American people. He

understood it wasn't just a Jewish issue," she said.

The current chairman of the National Conference, Shoshana Cardin, recalled that Gorbachev had personally met with her in the Kremlin in October, to discuss remaining refusenik cases and other matters of importance to Soviet Jews.

She expressed "my profound gratitude" for that meeting and "for his political courage in subsequently having his personal emissary read a strong statement condemning all manifestations of anti-Semitism at the ceremonies in Kiev" commemorating the wartime massacre at Babi Yar.

"Gorbachev will be remembered as the man who attempted to lead the transformation of the Soviet empire from one characterized by dictatorship and tyranny to one governed by the will of the people and the rule of law," said Cardin.

WHAT DO SOVIET JEWRY GROUPS DO NOW THAT USSR NO LONGER EXISTS?

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- The replacement of the Soviet Union by a Commonwealth of Independent States has raised serious concerns about what the future holds for the Jews remaining there.

But the sweeping transformation also poses a more parochial dilemma for Soviet Jewry advocacy groups in the West: what to call themselves now that the Soviet Union has ceased to exist.

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry is sticking with its present name, which it boasts it has used since it was founded 28 years ago, when Nikita Khrushchev was the Soviet leader.

Glenn Richter, the grassroots group's national director, said changing the name now would be pointless, since there may very well be a "coup of the week" in the new commonwealth.

The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews has yet to make a long-term decision on a name change, but for now will refer to itself merely as the Union of Councils.

"We're not yet ready to complicate our lives with a new name," explained Micah Naftalin, the group's national director. Besides, he added, "Union of Councils is simple."

The National Conference on Soviet Jewry said it is grappling with various options.

"I don't think that we've come up with an easy solution," said Martin Wenick, its executive director. But he added, "The name is less important than the mission."

DUTCH RETURN 9 MORE TO ISRAEL

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Nine more former Soviet Jews seeking asylum in Holland were returned to Israel by the Dutch on Monday.

Three couples with three children were put aboard a regular flight to Tel Aviv just a week after 43 other Soviet Jews who came to Holland from Israel during the past year were sent back there on a charter flight.

Another 50 Russian Jews whose appeals were rejected are awaiting expulsion. A number of them reportedly have gone into hiding.

While Holland has always had a liberal policy toward refugees, Justice Minister Aad Kostos maintained that those who come here from Israel do not qualify for refugee status on humanitarian grounds because they were in no danger of persecution in Israel.

JEWISH SETTLERS ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR MORE HOUSING IN ARAB ENCLAVE
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Militant Jewish settlers, branded "hooligans" by Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, announced triumphantly Thursday that they are expanding their presence in the East Jerusalem Arab enclave of Silwan, with the Likud government's blessings.

The announcement came a day after the 80-year-old Kollek, who has been mayor of united Jerusalem since 1967, participated in a demonstration protesting the occupation of Arab homes by Jews in Silwan.

Kollek joined about 200 academicians, writers and other prominent figures outside Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's office Wednesday to demand that the settlers relinquish the Arab homes they have already taken over.

Observers said it was unprecedented for a highly respected mayor to take sides publicly in this sort of controversy in his own city.

The settlers began moving into Silwan on Dec. 12, occupying buildings they claimed were owned by Jews more than 60 years ago, which they said they had purchased legally.

Kollek explained that in recent weeks, he has been flooded with appeals from the public to "do something" to halt what many Israelis consider a provocative act that could derail the Arab-Israeli peace talks in Washington, which opened Dec. 10 and are set to resume Jan. 7.

Yigal Cana'an, a spokesman for the El Ad settlement organization, announced Thursday that Jewish settlers will occupy four more houses in Silwan and build dozens of new apartments for Jews there.

He stressed that this was being done in "full cooperation with the government."

According to Cana'an, some of the Arab families who sold their property to the settlement organization were given alternative accommodations in Israel.

Extremists Urge Jewish Intifada

But Kollek observed that at least 180,000 Jews have settled in East Jerusalem since the Six-Day War, in an unprovocative manner.

"And here, a few hooligans come out, each one holding a flag, and only cause trouble," the mayor said.

Meanwhile, trouble seemed to be brewing for Shamir's government from Jewish extremists in the administered territories who oppose even limited autonomy for Palestinians.

They have formed a new group called Yesha 92, an acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza. It met for the first time this week and aimed most of its criticism at Shamir, for agreeing to peace talks, and at the right-wing parties, for not quitting the government over that issue.

There were also exhortations to violence.

Yesha 92 was established outside the framework of the Council of Jewish Settlements, the representative body of Jews in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, made up of elected mayors.

At the meeting, Knesset member Elyakim Haetzni of the pro-settlement Tehiya party said he admired the Arabs' devotion to the intifada and urged Jews to resort to the same means to prevent autonomy.

"No one will pay attention to us if Yesha does not spread riots in the same way that Palestinians riot," Haetzni said.

RIVALRIES AMONG SMALLER PARTIES COULD TOPPLE SHAMIR GOVERNMENT
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's coalition government of right-wing and religious parties appeared to be in extremely shaky condition as the new year approached, and with it, the quadrennial Knesset elections mandated by law.

Elections must be held no later than November 1992. But Shamir's government may not survive much beyond the final week of 1991.

If it falls, the failure will not stem from elemental conflicts over the peace process or the stagnant economy. It will lie instead in Shamir's inability to continue to balance the conflicting interests of his small coalition partners and mediate the bitter rivalries among them.

The most serious threat emerged after the Knesset on Wednesday defeated, by a slim three-vote margin, a controversial private members' bill that would have abolished "special funding" for the educational systems of the haredi, or ultra-Orthodox, parties.

The measure was co-sponsored by Avraham Poraz of the Center-Shinui Movement and Shevach Weiss of the Labor Party.

The funding issue put the haredi bloc on a collision course with the National Religious Party, which is also Orthodox but Zionist-affiliated.

The NRP demanded an end to the special treatment, even though its own schools benefit. It threatened otherwise to pull its five Knesset votes out of the coalition.

But if the funding ended, the three haredi parties, with 12 Knesset mandates among them, vowed they would leave the coalition.

Shamir and Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i intervened personally to resolve the crisis. After weeks of meetings, an agreement was reached to keep the funding but in a manner that would simplify its allocation.

Additional Money For Settlements

Moda'i is reported, with Shamir's concurrence, to have offered the nationalist Tehiya and Moleket parties additional money for settlements in the administered territories if they opposed the bill, which they had originally supported.

The measure was defeated 59-56. Two NRP Knesset members supported it, however, and the other three did not vote.

The haredi bloc promptly accused the NRP of betrayal and announced Thursday that it was no longer bound by the agreement slated to be part of the 1992 state budget.

The NRP responded that it would not support the state budget, which the Knesset will vote on next week. Defeat of the budget bill could amount to a no-confidence vote forcing Shamir's government to resign.

Even if the budget is passed, an NRP defection could abolish Shamir's Knesset majority.

Earlier this week, he lost the two votes of the right-wing Tsomet faction after Likud decided to kill an electoral reform bill Tsomet backed.

That reduced the coalition to a still comfortable 64 votes in the 120-member parliament. But should Shamir lose the five NRP mandates, his government would control less than 50 percent of the Knesset.

The departure of Tsomet moreover may trigger defections by the far-right Tehiya and Moleket, with five more votes between them.

OUTGOING AIR FORCE COMMANDER SORRY FOR CRITICIZING ISRAELI GOVERNMENT
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- The outgoing commander of Israel's air force, Maj. Gen. Avihu Bin-Nun, has apologized publicly for sharply criticizing government decision-making on defense matters.

Bin-Nun attacked the government's indecisiveness on defense issues in an as-yet-unpublished interview with the monthly air force journal, excerpts of which were printed by the local press Wednesday.

One example he cited, according to The New York Times, was the last-minute cancellation of air strikes that had been ordered against Iraq in response to its Scud missile attacks on Israel during the Persian Gulf War.

Bin-Nun hinted that Israel's policy of restraint was its own decision, rather than a surrender to U.S. pressure in order to preserve Arab membership in the coalition against Iraq.

The Israeli media concentrated on the upbraiding given Bin-Nun, a much-decorated 52-year-old former fighter pilot, by the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak.

Barak accused him of damaging relations between the military and political establishments in Israel, which is not tolerated from an active duty officer.

A statement issued by the IDF on Wednesday indicated that Bin-Nun might have been dismissed on the spot were he not due to retire shortly.

In those circumstances, his apology was accepted without "additional steps," the statement said.

The article is scheduled for publication in an edition of the air force monthly that will appear after the general doffs his uniform. It is, in fact, his valedictory.

Bin-Nun observed in his letter of apology that "the things that were said should not be uttered by a uniformed officer."

He said he "had no intentions of offending anyone" and charged that "omissions made in the excerpted text made the remarks seem harsher than they really were."

He also accused the media of taking his statements out of context. But he did not retract what was published.

U.S. Had Contingency Plan

Bin-Nun charged that the decision-making processes in Israel are "not clear enough or orderly enough. In the fields with which I am familiar, there isn't enough proper government order.

"Too many decisions are taken late and there are decisions which are never taken," he said.

"The Israeli army doesn't receive policy directives from the defense viewpoint. Without them, chaos is created. We know the scenario: A year after starting a big project, they come and say we haven't the budget," Bin-Nun said.

He referred to a decision in 1987 to scrap the Lavi, an Israeli-built jet fighter plane, after investing seven years and \$1.5 billion in its design and construction of prototypes.

The Lavi, however, was financed by U.S. military grants and was abandoned under U.S. pressure, in favor of purchasing more U.S.-made combat aircraft.

The most sensational aspect of Bin-Nun's

article was his claim that the United States was prepared to allow Israel to retaliate for the Iraqi Scud attacks, which it absorbed with considerable property damage but no loss of life.

According to the air force commander, there was an American "contingency plan" to clear the air space over Iraq to permit Israeli jets to attack without encountering U.S. fighter aircraft.

In Washington, the Pentagon said it was unaware of such a plan.

FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER DUMAS TO MAKE HIS FIRST VISIT TO ISRAEL
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Dec. 23 (JTA) -- French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas will make a three-day visit to Israel next month, the Foreign Ministry has announced.

Dumas, who has not visited the Jewish state since taking office, will be in Jerusalem from Jan. 8 to 10.

The Foreign Ministry said his trip is part of an ongoing effort by France to promote Middle East peace. Israeli observers said Dumas was doing his best to reestablish a French role in the Middle East peace process from which it feels left out.

Dumas has already been to Lebanon and Jordan, but a planned visit to Damascus was abruptly called off last week.

The Syrians were angered when they learned that the French minister intended to raise the question of Syria's treatment of its Jewish population with President Hafez Assad, as well as Syria's haven for wanted Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner.

Dumas will travel to Jerusalem accompanied by Israel's outgoing ambassador to France, Ovadia Soffer. It will be Soffer's last official trip before his tenure ends.

The veteran Israeli diplomat plans to take a leave of absence from the foreign service to run for election to the Knesset next year.

ISRAELI SCIENTISTS ANNOUNCE METHOD TO DETECT AIDS VIRUS
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 26 (JTA) -- Israeli scientists announced Thursday that they have devised a simple, quick, inexpensive method of detecting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, as well as other viruses in the human system.

According to Professor Alexander Honigman, who heads a team of researchers in the Department of Molecular Genetics at the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School, the new method is especially effective in identifying HIV in infants born to parents with the virus.

The technique is based on a gene found in a common firefly and the ease with which the presence of light is detected, Honigman explained.

The gene responsible for the firefly's glow is isolated and, through a bio-engineering process, creates a row of cells in which the gene lights up in the presence of the viruses.

The light shows up on sensitive film within a short time of exposure. It is a positive indication that the virus is in the blood.

In addition to detection, the new method will permit scientists to follow the progress of patients being treated for acquired immune deficiency syndrome and evaluate the effectiveness of AIDS-inhibiting drugs in tissue cultures.