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**KNESSET PASSES BUDGET BILL,
AVERTING GOVERNMENT COLLAPSE**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- The Knesset's adoption late Thursday of a \$50 billion state budget for the 1992 fiscal year ended a week of what veteran observers called unprecedented parliamentary pandemonium and haggling among the religious parties of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's coalition government.

The measure was adopted Thursday night by a comfortable margin of 60-53, with one abstention. It was two days late, according to Israeli law, which requires the state budget to be in place by midnight Dec. 31.

But its passage rescued Shamir's contentious coalition of right-wing and religious parties, at least temporarily, from dissolution.

Had the bill failed, Shamir would have almost certainly handed his resignation to President Chaim Herzog and called for early elections.

As it turned out, he bought time in a very literal sense by promising hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds to subsidize the schools run by constituents of the religious parties.

The prime minister also pledged additional hundreds of millions of dollars for an accelerated settlement building and expansion program in the administered territories. This issue has already gotten Israel into trouble with Washington and could seriously jeopardize future U.S. aid for immigrant resettlement.

No sooner had the budget become law than the Knesset plunged into another divisive debate over an electoral reform measure that would provide for the popular election of the prime minister by separate ballot not linked to party lists.

Contains 6.2 Percent Deficit

Under Shamir's prodding, the huge Likud Central Committee voted almost unanimously last month to oppose the reform measure. The bill was thus doomed, according to political observers. But Laborites still hoped for a majority in favor.

That was far from certain as debate continued late into Thursday night. Uriel Lynn, the Likud chairman of the Knesset Law Committee, was expected to pull the measure off the floor and into committee limbo if it showed the slightest signs of advancing.

Lynn has the power under the rules, though the tactic is rarely used and has earned the opprobrium of legal academicians and jurists.

The entire opposition walked out of the chamber Thursday afternoon to protest what it charged was Likud filibustering to avoid a vote on electoral reform.

The result was that many clauses of the budget bill were passed with no opposition members present.

Apart from the unseemly bickering by the ultra-Orthodox parties over their access to the public purse, the budget measure was controversial on economic grounds.

It has a built-in deficit of 6.2 percent of the gross national product, which economists say borders on recklessness. The Treasury said that massive immigrant absorption costs necessitate this policy.

In their final deal, the three haredi or ultra-Orthodox parties -- Shas, Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah -- withdrew their demand for a \$17 million reserve fund in the Prime Minister's Office, to which they would have recourse should they feel the ministries and Education and Religious Affairs are short-changing their institutions.

Both ministries are controlled by the National Religious Party, which is Orthodox, too, but Zionist-affiliated and a rival for the allocation of state money.

The NRP had precipitated the crisis by refusing to support the budget unless "special funding" for the haredi parties was channeled through the appropriate ministries, instead of dispersed directly without accountability.

**ARENS DECIDES TO DEPORT 12 ARABS
AFTER SETTLER IS SHOT DEAD IN GAZA**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- Defense Minister Moshe Arens announced Thursday he would order the deportation of a dozen more Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities.

He made the announcement as Jewish settlers, seething with fury, buried one of their own, Doron Shushan of Kfar Darom in the Gaza Strip, who was gunned down by an Arab on Wednesday.

Shushan, 35, was the fourth and latest victim of Arab gunmen in the administered territories since October. The Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas, in its latest leaflet, called for attacking "settlers everywhere."

Security forces said 40 suspects were arrested for questioning.

The defense minister did not immediately disclose the names of those slated for deportation. He said they were known members of groups involved in the intifada and other anti-Israel activities in recent months.

Arens' announcement was clearly intended to mollify settlers and other militants, who have accused the defense establishment recently of lax security measures and have repeatedly demanded the deportation of all intifada activists.

But he was said to have ordered the removal of the handful of mobile homes which settlers of Kfar Darom immediately installed at the site of the killing, with the intention of erecting a new settlement, to be called Doron.

West Bank settlers have reacted similarly to three earlier shootings in that vicinity, in each instance creating a nucleus of a settlement named after a murdered settler.

Shushan, a former member of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha who had moved to the Gaza Strip with his wife after turning religious, was driving home from his tomato hothouse Wednesday when an unidentified man approached his car outside the Deir el-Balah refugee camp and fired five shots at point-blank range.

Bleeding heavily from the head and neck, the mortally wounded settler drove on for a few minutes before his car halted on the pavement. He was found by a passing military vehicle, which rushed him to a hospital, where he later died.

The killing occurred on the 27th anniversary of the founding of Al Fatah, the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

**SNOW BLANKETS MUCH OF ISRAEL,
CUTTING POWER AND CLOSING ROADS**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- Israel greeted the new year with large areas buried under snow, or inundated by flood waters and buffeted by high winds.

It was the latest in a succession of fierce storms which meteorologists say were the worst to strike the Holy Land in well over a century.

Scores of highways were closed, including the one linking Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Dozens of stranded families had to be evacuated and power outages blacked out much of the two cities.

According to the Israel Electric Corp., power lines were downed by the wind and falling trees.

Jerusalemites woke up to 10 inches of snow Thursday morning, which delighted children but rendered the streets impassable to traffic.

Snow covered the Golan Heights and Galilee, the mountainous spine of the West Bank and much of the Negev, reaching almost as far south as the Red Sea resort of Eilat.

Tel Aviv, which enjoys the moderating temperatures of a maritime climate, was spared snow but not rain.

Cloudbursts caused the Wadi Ayalon, normally bone dry, and the usually sluggish Yarkon River to become seething torrents and overflow their banks.

Scores of families had to be extricated from flooded homes in Petach Tikva and in the Ezra Quarter of Tel Aviv, where, a year ago, Scud missiles rained down, courtesy of Iraq.

Flatlands became lakes, covering roads and highways in and around Tel Aviv. Over 40 main roads and highways all over the country were closed by floods Wednesday, including most roads leading out of Jerusalem and those throughout Galilee and the Golan.

Wettest December In 130 Years

By nightfall Thursday, about 20 highways were still awash with flood waters or closed to traffic because of structural damage.

The New Year's storms were the climax of the freak weather that beset Israel in the final month of 1991.

According to the meteorological service, it was the wettest December in Palestine since the ruling Turks began to keep records of rainfall in 1880 -- 130 years ago.

The record precipitation raised the level of Lake Kinneret, Israel's largest natural reservoir, by nearly 5 inches in 24 hours.

But that was far from recouping the losses of three successive years of drought. Water authorities say the lake must rise another 9.5 feet before it is back to "normal."

Weather forecasters said the storm would taper off Thursday night, though rain and snow would continue for another day or so. Still another storm is lurking, so far, out of the range of the radar screens, the forecasters said.

Meanwhile, Israel Defense Force helicopters plucked two Egyptian sailors out of the Mediterranean Sea, off the port of Ashdod on Thursday.

Their small freighter, Maya, foundered in 75 mph winds while enroute from Port Said to Beirut with a cargo of vegetables. Three other seamen were reported missing.

The Maya sent out distress signals but rescue ships could not approach it because of the hurricane-force winds and towering waves.

**END OF USSR MEANS HARDSHIPS
FOR JEWS AND OTHERS IN CUBA**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- For the 892 Jews of Cuba, the disappearance of their country's protector and patron, the Soviet Union, means pretty much what it means for the other 10 million inhabitants of the island: shortages.

"It is very, very hard for all the Cubans," said Moises Asis, Cuba's lone teacher of Judaism, said in a recent interview here.

Asis, a scientist and writer, has traveled to the United States in recent years for training as a Jewish educator. In December, he made his first visit to Israel.

According to Asis, 83 percent of Cuban Jews live in Havana, where they suffer less than in other parts of the country from the shortages of food, clothing, electricity and fuel that plague the Communist stronghold now that the flow of rubles has stopped.

But even in the capital city, Cubans must wait in long lines for most goods. With fuel scarce, cars and buses are becoming increasingly rare sights. This has taken a toll on Jewish communal life, which revolves around four synagogues and a community center.

The community numbers 305 families by Asis' count, most of which include non-Jewish spouses. About 100 families buy kosher meat, but with oxen filling in for disabled tractors, "we're going to become vegetarians," said Asis.

This comes at a time when the last restrictions on Cuban Jewry are being lifted.

In October, the Communist Party lifted the ban on religious believers joining the party. This had discouraged some young Jews from affiliating with the community and blocked the professional rise of those that did so identify.

But with only a minority of Cubans as party members even before the retreat of communism elsewhere in the world, these restrictions had not kept Jews from attaining high positions in the scientific community.

Anti-Israel Line Continues

However, Cuba has not renounced its staunchly anti-Israel diplomatic line, being one of the 25 states that voted last month against the repeal of the U.N. General Assembly's 1975 resolution branding Zionism as racism.

Asis says the anti-Zionism party line does not bleed over into anti-Semitism. But it does restrict the entry of Jewish and Hebrew-language textbooks into the country.

This anti-Zionism dates back to 1973, when Cuba sought to lead the non-aligned bloc. Prior to that time, a sympathy for Israel and Zionism kept Cuba as one of the few Communist countries with ties to Israel after the Six-Day War.

But in 1978, in what was touted as a gesture to the Arab delegates of the 11th World Festival of Youth and Students, Fidel Castro closed down the Zionist Union, where Asis studied Hebrew.

International Jewish organizations keep up close ties with the Cuban community, generally through Latin American affiliates not bound by the U.S. trade and travel embargo. The Canadian Jewish Congress sends provisions for Passover, as does a B'nai B'rith lodge in Washington.

And next month, a delegation of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress will fly to Havana for what is described as the first formal visit to Cuba by a Jewish organization.

**MORE THAN 145,000 JEWS FROM USSR
MADE ALIYAH DURING ITS FINAL YEAR**

NEW YORK, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union may have ceased to exist, but the stampede of Jews surging from its 15 former republics continued without interruption in 1991, despite a slight dip this fall.

According to the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, a total of 145,005 Jews from the former USSR made aliyah in 1991, bringing overall immigration to Israel to a grand total of 170,740.

The figures failed to match the peak year, 1990, during which a record 186,815 immigrants arrived in the Jewish state, 181,759 from what was still the Soviet Union.

But the monthly decline that began in July and hit a low of 8,090 arrivals from the Soviet Union in November appears to have been reversed, as 10,359 Soviet Jews came to Israel in December, during the one-time superpower's final days. That represents a 28 percent increase in one month alone.

1991 was also the second-biggest year for Soviet immigration to the United States. According to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a total of 34,715 Jews from what was the Soviet Union arrived here last year under the U.S. refugee program.

That figure fell short of the 1989 total of 36,738 and was considerably lower than expectations at the outset of the year. But December's total of 4,350 U.S. arrivals was more than triple the number that came last January.

All immigration is sensitive to changing conditions. If in 1991, Soviet aliyah was down about one-fifth from the previous year, it should be remembered that 1991 was a more tumultuous year.

It began with the Persian Gulf War, which bred uncertainty and paralyzed travel to the Middle East. Then midyear, the Soviet government changed its emigration laws, requiring passports to leave the country. By year's end, the country had split up into 15 separate republics.

'A Steady Stream'

Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said it was gratifying that "despite a year of dramatic upheaval -- both in the Middle East, where Operation Desert Storm threatened to interrupt normal emigration, and later in the year, with the demise of the Soviet Union -- Soviet Jews continued to arrive in Israel in a steady stream."

A continuing disincentive with longer-term repercussions is the rising unemployment in Israel. An estimated 40,000 new olim are on the dole. Of those who find work, few are employed in the professions or skills they were trained for.

Inevitably, letters home advise relatives and friends to postpone emigration until conditions improve.

Nevertheless, at the year's end, the Jewish Agency said it expected between 150,000 to 170,000 to arrive in Israel in 1992, virtually the same as in 1991, though it could handle greater numbers if required.

Agency officials noted that about 105,000 Jews already hold Soviet exit visas, and 45,000 of them also have Israeli entry visas. It is expected that the individual republics will honor the Soviet visas.

But Cardin said she is still concerned with free Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union's

successor states. She referred to still-unresolved cases of refuseniks and the problem of "poor relatives" holding up the departure of would-be emigrants.

There seems to have been some attrition. Jewish Agency sources claim that more than 9,000 Soviet Jews left Israel for South Africa in 1991, and that another 3,000 are seeking South African entry visas.

The Absorption Ministry claims that only 500 emigre families -- about 1,500 people -- have left the country.

4.7 Percent Population Growth

Ethiopia continued to be the second-largest source of aliyah.

About 20,000 Jews arrived in Israel from that country during 1991, some 14,200 of them in a single 36-hour period last May by an emergency airlift known as "Operation Solomon."

Some 4,500 Jews are left in Ethiopia. But the Jewish Agency is optimistic they can be gotten out soon and reunited with families in Israel.

Immigrant absorption problems persist. About 11,300 Ethiopian olim are still living in hotels. The Jewish Agency hopes to move all of them into permanent housing by next June.

Summing up, Israel's population now stands at 5,050,000, swollen by the 340,000 Jews who have arrived from the former Soviet Union since the aliyah wave began in 1989.

The population grew at a rate of 4.7 percent in 1991, a slowdown compared to 1990, when the growth rate was 5.7 percent.

(JTA correspondent Yehonathan Tommer in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

**HEAD OF RED CROSS HAS LITTLE HOPE
MIDEAST PROBLEMS WILL BE RESOLVED
By Tamar Levy**

GENEVA, Dec. 31 (JTA) -- The head of the International Red Cross was critical this week of both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

His chief complaints against the Jewish state, he said, were its continued settlement-building in the West Bank and the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Both are problems of long standing and there is little progress toward resolving them, Corneliu Sommaruga, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a year-end interview Monday.

He acknowledged that his organization has an "open dialogue" with the Israelis. But that apparently has not improved conditions for Palestinian prisoners or eased the problems connected with their family visits, he said.

Sommaruga insisted that settlement-building is clearly in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which expressly forbids the settlement of nationals of an occupying power in the territory it has taken by force.

Sommaruga said he was bitterly disappointed that the ICRC conference scheduled to be held in Budapest in November was called off for political reasons, and held the PLO responsible.

The conference was canceled because the PLO insisted on attending as a government delegation, the ICRC president said. He said he spent 90 minutes meeting with PLO chief Yasir Arafat in Tunis trying for a last-minute compromise, but to no avail.

JEWISH LEADER JOINS FRENCH OFFICIAL ON INTERFAITH MISSION TO YUGOSLAVIA

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- The head of the European Jewish Congress accompanied a French Cabinet minister this week on a peace mission to Yugoslavia that is an outgrowth of interfaith efforts initiated by the congress in November.

Humanitarian Affairs Minister Bernard Kouchner asked Kahn Jean to join him and to continue efforts undertaken by the World Jewish Congress to foster peace in war-torn Yugoslavia.

On Monday, Kahn and the other members of the interfaith group went to Sarajevo, the capital of the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the Jewish leader paid homage at a monument to the Yugoslav Jews killed during the Holocaust by the Nazis and their Ustashi Croatian allies.

There, Kahn also lashed out against the anti-Semitic writings of Croatia's current president, Franjo Tudjman, which have recently appeared in various publications.

The interfaith group, which comprised Catholics, Protestants and Moslems, continued to Dubrovnik without Kahn. He returned to Paris rather than go to the war-ravaged Croatian city, so as not to indicate a preference for either Serbs or Croats.

Serge Cwaajenbaum, secretary-general of the EJC, said that had Kahn accompanied the group to Dubrovnik, he "would have had to visit a Serbian city, too, turning this trip into an awkward expedition, while Sarajevo can be considered neutral ground."

In November, the heads of Serbia and Croatia agreed to attend a peace conference sponsored by the interfaith group. Although no date has been set for such a conference, it is believed it would take place in Paris.

The members of the interreligious group broached the idea for the conference in Belgrade, where they met with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, and in Zagreb, where they met with Tudjman.

SLOVAK TO SEEK REMOVAL OF TISO PLAQUE

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- A Slovak minister has agreed to seek the removal of a plaque recently dedicated to the memory of Father Josef Tiso, the Roman Catholic priest whom Adolf Hitler installed as leader of the Slovak puppet state created by the Nazis when they occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939.

Tiso deported 72,000 Jews from Slovakia between 1942 and 1944. He was hanged as a war criminal after the war.

The plaque was put up in his hometown, Bytca, by the Hlinka Youth Party, a direct descendant of Tiso's fascist Slovak Nationalist Party.

The European director of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, Shimon Samuels, met in Bratislava with the Slovak minister of culture, Ladislav Snopko, to protest the honoring of a war criminal.

Snopko, founder of the Public Committee Against Violence, the Slovak branch of the Czech Civic Forum Party, agreed the plaque was a disturbing challenge to the democratization of Czechoslovakia.

He promised to do what he could to have it taken down.

GREEK INSCRIPTION FOUND IN BEIT SHE'AN SHEDS LIGHT ON TOWN AND ITS SAMARITANS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- A Greek inscription found recently in Beit She'an by archaeologists from Hebrew University sheds new light on the status of a prominent Samaritan family that lived there, and on the date of the construction of the town's magnificent commercial street.

Beit She'an was the central city of northern Israel under the Romans and was known at the time by its Roman name of Scythopolis. It later became the capital of what was known as the Second Palestine under Byzantine rule.

The inscription is one of only a few archaeological finds ever uncovered in Israel that talk about people who have been known until now only from historical texts of the period.

The eight-line inscription was etched into a large stone block about 3.5 feet wide, which sat atop an archway that was part of a stone portico lining the front of a row of shops along the main thoroughfare of Byzantine-era Beit She'an. The portico collapsed during the severe earthquake that shook the town in the year 749.

The inscription was discovered during restoration efforts along the main street, when the collapsed portico's stones were raised. The restoration is one phase of an extensive, years-long archaeological dig being conducted on the site, under the supervision of Professor Gideon Foerster and Professor Yoram Tsafrir of the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology.

The inscription tells of the construction of the portico between 500 and 515, with funds provided by Byzantine Emperor Anastasius. Initiators of the project are given as the brothers Salustius and Silvanus, the sons of Arsenius, all jurists from the city of Scythopolis.

Silvanus, known from historical sources as the owner of substantial properties and also a high city official, was a member of an important Samaritan family with close ties to the Byzantine emperors of those days.

ISRAELI RABBI LEARNS WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES COKE THE 'REAL THING'

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 2 (JTA) -- The giant Coca-Cola Corp. has yielded to an Israeli rabbi a secret hitherto known only to the soft drink's founding family and a handful of the corporation's most trusted executives: the formula for making Coke.

There was a need to know, says Rabbi Moshe Landau of Bnei Brak.

The Israeli businessmen who just acquired local bottling rights applied to him for a "hechsher," or kashruth certificate.

But first the rabbi had to be sure Coca-Cola is indeed kosher according to strict Orthodox standards. To do so, he had to be told the ingredients it contains -- knowledge Coke's competitors presumably would die for.

The would-be bottlers contacted Coca-Cola headquarters in the United States, where it was finally decided to let the rabbi in on one of the great corporate secrets of all times.

Still the rabbi, to satisfy himself, had to visit Coca-Cola plants in Europe and the United States, where the syrupy liquid is produced. Some of his aides also got free trips to the Far East to examine how a secret herbal root essential to the formula is processed.