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U.S. JEWISH DELEGATION URGES ISRAEL TO SHOW FLEXIBILITY TO OBTAIN LOANS

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- A visiting American Jewish Committee delegation is urging the Israeli government to be flexible in order to obtain U.S. guarantees for \$10 billion in loans badly needed for immigrant absorption.

They seemed hopeful, after a private meeting last Friday with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, that Israel and the United States would work out their differences over loan guarantees, provided Israel shows flexibility on the issue of settlements.

"There is room for optimism that a common formula will be found," said Alfred Moses, the group's president.

"According to our discussion, the prime minister believes that the United States is looking for a common formula acceptable to both sides and added that if this were the case, he was quite optimistic that an agreement could be reached," Moses said.

However, no agreement will be forthcoming without compromise, asserted David Harris, the agency's executive vice president.

"The United States and Israel must work out a formula that addresses both American and Israeli concerns," said Harris. "While the Americans are worried about new Israeli settlements and the country's ability to pay back loans, the Israeli government must be satisfied that it is not compromising its own principles.

"That's the challenge and the conundrum," he said. "However much support and identification there is in America with Israel's daunting and vital challenge to absorb immigrants, the settlements issue will not go away."

The AJCommittee leaders seemed taken aback by Health Minister Ehud Olmert's negative prognostications about the loan guarantees and his attack on the Bush administration.

Likud Minister 'Not Very Optimistic'

Addressing the delegation Monday, the Likud minister, a close ally of Shamir's, said he was "not very optimistic on the chances to agree on the loan guarantees" and accused the U.S. administration of taking the Arab side in the dispute over the territories Israel captured in 1967.

"It is almost impossible to do anything that will gain approval or sympathy from the American government, which seems to try to antagonize Israel," Olmert said.

He said that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker insists that Israel must make territorial compromises, "but to my knowledge, no secretary of state in the last 25 years has said that America favors such compromise" from the Arab side.

"The ultimate goal of the administration is to force Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders," Olmert claimed, adding that Shamir's government "will never accept this position, no matter how much pressure" the United States tries to assert.

Moses said afterward that he was "disappointed by the fact that Olmert expects the United States to state its belief in territorial compromise, but when asked whether he believes

in it, the health minister was unwilling to say that he was."

The AJCommittee delegation, which arrived here from Germany, is the third major American Jewish leadership group to meet with Shamir in recent weeks.

An American Jewish Congress group met with the prime minister two weeks ago, and prior to that, top officials of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations saw the Likud leader.

All discussed the loan guarantees issue.

Speaking of the role of American Jewish organizations, Harris said, "We have an obligation to try and help create an atmosphere conducive to solving the stalemate."

He explained that "on Capitol Hill, we maintain that the United States must not lose sight of the fact that Israel remains a friend and ally.

'A Compelling Humanitarian Need'

"Furthermore, there is a compelling humanitarian need for these guarantees, and the United States has a tradition of conferring humanitarian assistance without linkage in every corner of the world.

"Finally, these guarantees are financially manageable," Harris stressed. "Israel is credit-worthy; the risks are low. The guarantees are neither loans nor grants."

Harris said the AJCommittee delegation's obligation has been to convey to Israeli officials, including Shamir, "the American mood and atmosphere with respect to Israel's positions."

"We're here to talk with government officials, not only about bilateral discussions but to get a fuller appreciation, first-hand, of Israel's needs," said Moses.

Israel's biggest challenge, said Moses, is to demonstrate to the American government and people that it truly needs the guarantees if it is to successfully absorb hundreds of thousands of new immigrants.

"The need for aliyah and thus the guarantees is real," he said. AJCommittee has done "extensive polling in the Soviet Union and found a great deal of anti-Semitism. There is real danger to Jews there, and they should be encouraged to move to Israel."

But to encourage other Jews to make aliyah, Moses said, "we must successfully absorb the ones who are already here."

ALIYAH FROM SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES CONTINUING DECLINE SEEN IN JANUARY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- Immigration from the republics of the former Soviet Union, which last month reached its lowest level in two years, is continuing to plunge, and aliyah officials here disagree sharply about the causes.

Some blame deteriorating economic conditions in Israel. Others cite the expectation of improved conditions in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the other successor republics to the Soviet Union.

Still others point to a more generous U.S. refugee quota this year.

The reasons seem to vary with the officials'

political affiliations. But none can deny that a crisis is at hand.

Only 975 olim arrived in the first nine days of February, compared to about 2,000 during the same period last month. And January was the worst month for aliyah since the Soviet Union flung open its gates in the fall of 1989.

While 6,000 former Soviet Jews came to Israel last month, 4,300 went to the United States. The concern here is that if this trend continues, soon more Jews will be going to America each month than to Israel -- a return to the situation that existed for most of the 1980s, when the Soviet authorities tightly rationed exit visas and the United States was willing to admit all Jews who got out as refugees.

Subsequently, a quota was imposed of 40,000 Jewish refugees a year. It was raised to 53,000 this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz and Uri Gordon, director of the agency's Aliyah Department, both staunch Laborites, blame the decline on the Likud government's failure to take measures to create jobs for the newcomers.

Government officials concede that unemployment may be a "minor" deterrent to aliyah. But they insist the main reason fewer Jews are coming from the former Soviet Union is the expectation of improved living conditions at home.

They point out that with the abandonment of communism, the republics allow citizens to own homes, while Western aid and investments are expected to improve overall economic conditions.

ISRAELI ARAB'S CONFESSION TO SPYING UPSETS FRAGILE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN TIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- Israel's fragile relations with Egypt suffered another blow this week when an Arab citizen of Israel, arrested in Cairo, allegedly confessed to spying for the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service.

Whether or not the confession was genuine became irrelevant. The damage to relations between the countries was done once Egypt's interior minister, Abdul Halim Mussa, announced officially that "the Israeli has confessed that he was acting on behalf of the Mossad."

Actually, three Israeli Arabs are suspect. Farres Mussarti, a 41-year-old resident of Ramla, and his daughter, Faya, 17, were arrested while visiting Cairo last week and reportedly confessed to espionage after several days of questioning.

Mussarti's son, Majed, 21, who returned to Cairo from Libya on Sunday, reportedly turned himself in to Egyptian authorities.

The case is the first since Israel and Egypt signed their peace treaty in 1979 in which Israeli nationals have been detained by Egypt as suspected spies.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry refused to comment on the allegations. But it is furious over the way the Egyptians have handled the matter, leaking information to the media but refusing to inform Israel through official channels of what is going on.

No Israeli representative has been allowed to meet with the detainees.

Ronni Porat, the Israeli consul in Cairo, met Sunday with a senior official of the State Prosecutor's Office in Cairo, who told him he could not discuss the case as long as it was under investigation.

There had been some earlier speculation that

the suspects may have been spying for a third country, possibly Egypt's western neighbor, Libya.

The interior minister's announcement linking the Israelis to Mossad surprised and angered the Israelis, because they had to learn about it from the media. The Egyptians did inform them in advance of their suspicions.

The Israeli Embassy in Cairo is trying to find out why Israel was refused information on grounds of an investigation in progress while the Egyptian -- and world media -- was quoting the interior minister's accusations.

"We insist on the basic consular right to visit detainees and to receive relevant information," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

He Was 'Only Traveling'

Mussarti and his wife, Sara, parents of four children, live in a poor neighborhood of Ramla. They previously lived in Kafr Kasim, an Arab village near Kfar Sava, where Farres had been a blacksmith and did odd jobs.

Last year, they sold their apartment in the village and moved to the Ramla house, owned by Farres' parents. They used the proceeds of the sale to take the entire family on an extended tour of Egypt, where they "stayed with friends," Sara said in an interview last week.

A month ago, Sara said, she returned home with her youngest daughter, Hadije. Since then, she said, she has not heard from her husband or other children. She said doctors had advised her husband to stay in Egypt because the climate was good for his asthma.

But he was "only traveling," she has said repeatedly. The idea the he was spying was incomprehensible, she insisted.

Apart from its effects on Israeli-Egyptian relations, the Mussarti affair could escalate into an internal issue of the kind that has bedeviled Israeli politics in the past.

Because Mussarti is accused of spying on a friendly country, some Israelis see a parallel with the Jonathan Pollard case.

Pollard, an American Jew employed by the U.S. Navy as an intelligence analyst, confessed to spying for Israel and is now serving a life sentence in a U.S. penitentiary.

Israel officially dismissed his activities as a rogue operation for which it was not responsible.

Fallout From 1956 Scandal

The political fallout at home was much worse after the 1956 spy scandal that tarnished the reputation of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and plagued the Labor Party for years.

In that case, a number of Israeli agents were detained in Egypt and several were hanged on charges of planting bombs at the American Library in Cairo and at a local movie house.

Israel and Egypt were officially in a state of war at the time. The alleged mission of the spies was to sabotage U.S.-Egyptian relations by having the explosions, and whatever damage or injuries they caused, blamed on the Egyptians.

The episode became known in Israel as "The Blunder" or simply "The Affair."

"If eventually it turns out that someone here had instructed Israeli citizens to spy in Cairo, a new 'affair' will blow up here and someone will be required to explain and to pay the price," the daily Yediot Achronot said Monday.

The newspaper observed that "no information collected today in Egypt is worth the dangers that this affair can cause."

MENGELE FILE IN ARGENTINA SHOWS AUTHORITIES KNEW HIS WHEREABOUTS

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- The trail of German war criminal Josef Mengele, the sadistic Auschwitz death camp doctor, was familiar to government officials and police in South America and former West Germany during the decades after World War II, when his whereabouts seemed a dark mystery and many doubted he was alive.

That is clear from documents Argentina has handed over to the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center for study and analysis.

They are part of Argentina's war-criminal files personally unsealed by President Carlos Menem at a ceremony in Buenos Aires on Feb. 3.

Mengele entered Argentina as an "Italian" on a Red Cross passport in 1949 and apparently felt secure enough in 1956 to go to the German Embassy in Buenos Aires and identify himself by his correct name.

At this point, both the German and Argentine authorities knew beyond doubt where Mengele lived and could be found.

His sense of security lasted until 1959 when Mengele left his second wife, Martha, in Buenos Aires and made tracks for Paraguay.

On Nov. 18, 1959, the Argentine police asked their Paraguayan counterparts for the identification number issued to Mengele. The Paraguayan police furnished the information.

It appears that by Nov. 18, if not before, Mengele changed his residence from Argentina to Paraguay, said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Wiesenthal Center, who is studying the files of suspected Nazi war criminals released by Menem.

The date, which precedes the first publication of Mengele's whereabouts by only a few days, is of some importance in the acrimonious debate between former Mossad chief Isser Harel and Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal.

Harel, who led the 10-member Israeli team that captured Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires in May 1960, angrily contested Wiesenthal's longstanding claim that he had furnished the leads that led to the success of Harel's mission.

Was Mengele Tipped Off?

Not only was Wiesenthal's information worthless, Harel insisted, but the Vienna-based Nazi hunter had in effect signaled Mengele that his whereabouts were known.

As a result, Mengele left Argentina for Paraguay two weeks before the capture of Eichmann and thereby eluded the Israeli team, Harel wrote last year in a 278-page private manuscript obtained by the Jerusalem Post.

But if the information in the Argentine documents is correct, Mengele apparently fled to Paraguay at least six months before the Israelis went into action in Buenos Aires.

Who tipped him off? There is no certain answer, but Hier speculates that clues can be found in two books on Mengele: "The Last Nazi" by Gerald Astor and "Mengele: the Complete Story" by Gerald Posner and John Ware.

In the 1950s, Mengele divorced his first wife, Irene. She returned to Germany where she stated, in a deposition, that her ex-husband's domicile was in Argentina.

The information was obtained by Hermann Langbein either independently or with Wiesenthal's help. Langbein was an Auschwitz inmate, originally from Vienna, who worked as a clerk in

Mengele's office and compiled a dossier on his boss' activities.

Langbein spent months pressing German authorities to indict Mengele. On June 7, 1959, the Lower Court of Freiburg issued an order for his arrest and the information was sent on to the German Embassy in Argentina.

Hier guess is that someone at the German Embassy tipped Mengele off.

An international team of forensic experts found in 1985 that the body of a man drowned in a swimming accident in 1979 was Mengele's.

ARAFAT TO ADDRESS U.N. PANEL, DESPITE DISMAY OF U.S, ISRAEL

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- The U.N. Human Rights Commission announced Monday that Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat would address its annual session now in progress here.

It will be the first time since the Persian Gulf War, when Arafat sided with Iraq, that the PLO chief will address the 53-member commission from the podium, an honor reserved for heads of state. His last appearance here was in 1988.

The announcement followed an address to the commission by U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle, who delivered a sharp attack on the commission's admission of countries that "are themselves gross violators of human rights."

He singled out Iraq, Iran and Cuba.

American diplomats are clearly unhappy over the invitation to Arafat, although Quayle himself offered no criticism. "We will be interested to hear what he has to say on terrorism and we hope he will reject it," the vice president told a news conference.

In the course of his speech, Quayle observed that "a month after the U.N. General Assembly redeemed its credibility by repealing overwhelmingly the so-called 'Zionism-is-racism' resolution, we can speak of moral suasion and the growing weight of world opinion."

The Iraqi and Cuban delegates walked out of the hall before Quayle spoke, apparently aware their countries would be attacked. But Iran, one of the countries assailed as the antithesis of human rights practices, remained seated. Its chief delegate, Cyrus Nasser, was just elected chairman of the commission.

Daniel Lack, representative of the World Jewish Congress, which has non-governmental-organization status on the commission, addressed the world body last Friday.

He warned of nationalist extremism, religious prejudice and growing intolerance in Europe and other parts of the world subject to political, economic or social upheavals.

Lack was particularly disturbed by emergent anti-Semitism in the republics of the former Soviet Union. One especially alarming phenomenon is the spread of anti-Semitic hatred by extremist, nationalist and xenophobic groups of which more than 100 have sprung up in Russia alone, he said.

Lack also spoke of the plight of the Syrian Jewish community in Damascus, Aleppo and Kamishli, confirming to the commission that Jews are not permitted to emigrate from Syria and are allowed to travel abroad for only short periods.

The practice is a blatant violation of Syria's obligations under Article 12 of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which grants everyone the right to emigrate, Lack said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

**JEW STAYING BEHIND IN FORMER USSR
WANT HELP IN REBUILDING JEWISH LIFE**
By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 10 (JTA) -- American Jewry has been generous in assisting the emigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union, but it should do more to support those who wish to stay, Jewish activists there believe.

"The 10 percent who make aliyah get half a billion dollars, while the 90 percent who don't get nothing," Michael Chlenov complained in a recent interview.

Chlenov is co-president, with Yosef Zisels, of the Vaad, the Confederation of Jewish Organizations and Communities of the former Soviet Union.

While thousands of Jews are streaming out of the newly independent republics each month, tens of thousands have postponed their departures and many others have no plans to leave.

Those who have decided to stay are apparently convinced that the threat of anti-Semitism is either not imminent or manageable. One member of the Vaad recently compared that threat to the intifada in Israel.

"It's like an allergy you can live with for a long, long time," Evgeny Satanovsky said in a separate interview.

In fact, the problem of anti-Semitism is only in third place on the Vaad's list of priorities.

Like Chlenov, Satanovsky feels that aliyah is not the only alternative for Jews in the Soviet successor states. Both believe it is possible to resuscitate Jewish life after 70 years of Communist suppression.

While many American Jewish organizations have set up operations in the former Soviet republics to promote Jewish culture, activists like Chlenov and Satanovsky feel American Jews should support existing indigenous groups.

Population Estimates Keep Growing

Satanovsky, a longtime Jewish cultural activist and a successful Moscow businessman, wears several organizational hats.

Among them, he directs the Ariel Jewish Information Center. Founded as a samizdat, or underground, publishing house, Ariel last year printed 200,000 copies of 10 different titles on such subjects as Jewish ethnology, history, cooking and folk tales. It is a money-losing venture, Satanovsky said.

"If you bring to the Soviet Union now science fiction, there is a profit. You bring Jewish stories -- all right," he said with a shrug.

The finely printed folk tales are jarring to an American eye, featuring illustrations of hook-nosed, bearded Jews that echo of anti-Semitism.

But Satanovsky cautioned that imported Jewish material, written in the West and translated into Russian, is similarly inappropriate in the East.

The Jews of the former Soviet Union, he said, "are really Jews of one country, and very seriously changed from the Jews of other countries in their mentalities and their life situations."

Just how many Jews of the former Soviet Union are taking part in the now above-ground Jewish culture is uncertain -- as is, for that matter, the number of Jews there altogether.

Even after 700,000 Jews have left the country, most in the past four years, population

estimates continue to rise. Jews are coming out of the woodwork, say leaders of the Vaad.

"According to the Jewish Agency, 200 percent of the Jews in Baku have applied to leave. That means the official number of Jews is not correct," said Chlenov, an ethnographer.

He estimates the number of Jews involved in Jewish life is in the hundreds of thousands.

"The democratic movements that are taking place now are bringing to active Jewish life more and more participants," he said.

A Shift To The Communities

Satanovsky explained that with the demise of central government, services such as education and security are being taken over by communities.

"You must be a member of a community for a normal life, for the life of your children," he said. "You must have help from somebody for your life. For Jews, this makes them build communities."

Chlenov said about 80 percent of Jewish organizations in the states of the former Soviet Union are under the Vaad's umbrella. The exceptions are the Union of Synagogues and extremist groups such as the Communist Party-sponsored All Union Organization of Jewish Soviet Culture, on one end of the spectrum, and the pro-aliyah Irgun Zioni, on the other.

The Chabad movement of Lubavitcher Hasidim, which maintained an underground network during the decades of Soviet oppression and has since stepped up its activities, takes a mixed view toward the Vaad: Some Lubavitch groups and rabbis affiliate, while others do not. One Lubavitcher rabbi sits on the Vaad's internal court.

The biggest controversy over Vaad membership comes from the non-Russian republics, where there is fear that affiliation with an organization whose reach corresponds to that of the hated Soviet empire will offend local sensitivities.

One response has been the formation of Jewish communal structures on the republic level in the Ukraine and the Baltic states. This intermediate layer, Chlenov hopes, will insulate the Vaad from nationalist criticism.

There has been concern that nationalist sentiment will strengthen as food shortages worsen, and that the resulting demonstrations will turn ugly, with anti-Jewish overtones.

Concern About A Mob Uprising

But Chlenov said he was not worried about this. "The whole of last year we also had shortages, and I wouldn't say anti-Semitism has grown immensely over the past year," he said.

More worrisome for him are right-wing political forces, but he sees the main danger as "simply a blind uprising of the mob." And even that, he said, is "a possibility, not a probability."

He also dismisses, at least for now, the danger of a radical Islamic takeover in the Central Asian republics.

"The governments, at least on the level of formal declarations, have been quite friendly to Jews," he said, "though we've been told in Uzbekistan that our relations are so good because we're leaving."

So far, Azerbaijan, which has joined the worldwide Islamic Conference, has not yet changed its attitude toward the Jewish community and Israel. "But we can expect it," said Chlenov.

Zisels said that in his native Ukraine, both the government and the democratic opposition have good relations with the Jewish community.