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**RELEASE OF SWEDS FROM SYRIAN JAIL
SEEN AS PROOF ADVOCACY IS WORKING**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, April 20 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are crediting international pressure with bringing about the release this week of the last two Jews held in Syrian prisons.

Eli and Selim Swed, jailed since 1987, were set free on Sunday, the second day of Passover. Four other Jews had been released from prison in December, as part of a general amnesty.

News of the Sweds' release was first reported by French and Canadian diplomats to Judy Feld Carr, chairman of the National Task Force on Syrian Jewry of the Canadian Jewish Congress, at the behest of the Syrian Jewish community, which would not telephone because of the Passover holiday.

The information was later confirmed by the U.S. State Department.

Advocacy groups for Syrian Jewry, which have brought the plight of the country's 4,000 Jews to an increasingly high public profile over the past year, hailed the Sweds' release and said it was the outgrowth of mounting support for the cause worldwide.

"I very clearly believe the Syrian government is responding to a growing interest and concern about the plight of Syrian Jews," said Gilbert Kahn, executive director of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews.

Though the main objective of the movement is to allow free emigration for Syrian Jews, the Sweds had provided a focus for Syrian Jewry advocates parallel to that of Soviet "prisoners of Zion" in the 1970s.

Eli Swed, a pharmacist in his 30s, was arrested in November 1987 at Damascus Airport while returning from abroad. His brother, Selim, in his 50s and the father of seven children, was arrested the following month.

Both were held incommunicado for almost two years. After 3½ years in a secret police prison, they were tried in May 1991 with neither public charges against them nor the presence of their lawyer. They were sentenced to 6½ years.

U.S. Continuing Visa Efforts

According to reports, Syrian President Hafez Assad recently reiterated that the Sweds would not be released until the end of their jail term. It is not known whether any reason was given for their release now.

In another apparent gesture to world public opinion, Assad last week met with leaders of the Syrian Jewish community. This was the first such meeting in at least a decade.

"They're making a serious effort to show that Jewish life in Syria is fine," said Kahn.

In Washington, Edward Djerejian, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, who was previously the U.S. ambassador to Syria, said the United States is continuing its efforts to obtain exit visas for young Jewish women living in Syria for whom there are no potential husbands.

He made the remarks in a telephone conversation with Seymour Reich, chairman of the National Task Force on Syrian Jewry of the

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"We cry out for the release of all the Syrian Jews and await their reunification," said Reich.

He noted the representations on behalf of the Sweds made to Syrian officials by the American and Canadian governments, supported by such international bodies as Amnesty International and the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in Geneva.

"The Syrians must understand that only when they abide by internationally recognized human rights norms will an improvement in relations with the United States be possible," said Maynard Wishner, chair of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

Desire To Be In 'Good Graces'

Daniel Pipes, an expert on Syria and the director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, said that Syria's desire for good relations with the United States is the main reason the Sweds were released.

He speculated that the release may have been timed to balance the negative press Syria is receiving for its planned violation of the U.N. embargo imposed against Libya.

He said that would fit in with a two-track policy, in which Damascus takes steps to be seen as friendly to Washington but also keeps open its options and does not sever its alliances with radical Moslem states, such as Libya and Iran.

Assad's goal is "to appease us and the West in general, and be in our good graces," while at the same time being "prepared for any eventuality," said Pipes.

Pipes said that public advocacy has been instrumental in helping Syrian Jews. That advocacy has included not only mass rallies, such as that held last week in Los Angeles, but also appeals made to Assad by major public figures, such as Secretary of State James Baker, Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) and Rep. Wayne Owens (D-Utah).

Might Assad someday relent and allow the Jewish community to leave Syria?

"I wouldn't rule it out," said Pipes. "It's something that doesn't hurt him. If it wins him enough good notices, he could do it."

"I hope so," said Alice Harary, president of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews. "These people have suffered long enough."

(JTA correspondent Gil Kezwer in Toronto contributed to this report.)

**U.S. DENIES GIVING SAUDIS THE OK
TO TRANSFER WEAPONS TO IRAQ, SYRIA**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 20 (JTA) -- The State Department has labeled as "false" reports that the Reagan administration secretly allowed Saudi Arabia to provide U.S.-made bombs to Iraq.

The department also denied charges that it allowed the Saudis to transfer U.S.-made weapons to Syria and Bangladesh at the end of the Persian Gulf War.

Both charges were made in a Los Angeles Times story last Friday, which said the report

was based on classified documents and unidentified sources.

When asked about the allegations Saturday, President Bush told reporters during a "power walk" on the beach in Kennebunkport, Maine: "No, no."

On Monday, the State Department's deputy spokesman, Richard Boucher, confirmed that the United States "did receive reports that Saudi Arabia may have transferred to Iraq some U.S.-origin equipment along with large quantities of non-U.S.-origin equipment in 1986."

But when questioned about this, the Saudis replied that the transfer was "inadvertent," Boucher said.

He said the same reply was given by the Saudis when the United States learned that Syria and Bangladesh had taken with them some "non-lethal" equipment that had been supplied to them by the Saudis during the Persian Gulf War.

Boucher said that in all three cases, there was "prompt notification to Congress," as required by the Arms Export Control Act. He said the Saudis were reminded in 1986 and again after the Gulf war that they are not allowed to transfer U.S.-made arms without Washington's permission.

Deal On Loan Guarantees Denied

The Saudi arms transfers were revealed several weeks after the State Department's inspector general accused Israel of "unauthorized transfer" of "U.S. items and technology" to other countries.

Supporters of Israel have pointed out how Israel was pilloried in the press for weeks, compared to the low profile given the story about the Saudis.

The Israeli Embassy here had no comment on the Los Angeles Times report.

Meanwhile, Boucher also rejected a charge by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that Bush denied Israel's request for U.S. loan guarantees because he had already promised Arab countries not to provide the backing until Israel stopped building settlements in the West Bank.

"There was some kind of promise. The Arabs say so," Shamir told The Jerusalem Post in an interview published last Friday. He said there was "no doubt about it, no doubt about it."

In denying Shamir's charge, Boucher stressed that the United States "discussed loan guarantees in good faith" with Israeli Ambassador Zalman Shoval.

He said the United States offered a proposal that would have provided Israel guarantees for more than \$10 billion in loans over six years.

FLOW OF REGULAR U.S. AID TO ISRAEL CONTINUES DESPITE DEADLOCK ON LOANS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 20 (JTA) -- While the Bush administration and Israel remain at odds over the Jewish state's request for U.S. loan guarantees, the flow of regular American aid to Israel continues unimpeded.

An agreement to provide Israel with another \$600 million in U.S. economic aid was signed at the State Department last Friday. It represents the second half of the \$1.2 billion grant in U.S. economic assistance that Israel receives annually.

The signatories were Reginald Brown, the U.S. Agency for International Development's assistant administrator for the Near East, and

Amnon Neubach, the Israeli Embassy's minister for economic affairs.

A similar agreement had been signed a week earlier for \$900 million, representing the second installment of the \$1.8 billion grant in U.S. military aid Israel receives each year.

Israel normally receives its annual aid package from the United States at the beginning of the fiscal year.

But this year, half the money was held up, because instead of adopting a regular foreign aid bill last fall, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the continuation of 1991 funding for another six months.

Passage of a foreign aid bill covering the rest of the year was delayed as members of the Senate unsuccessfully sought to get President Bush to agree on a compromise for the loan guarantees.

Bush has demanded that Israel stop building settlements in the West Bank before the United States approves the guarantees for the loans, which are needed to aid in the absorption of Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

But Brown stressed that the \$3 billion in annual aid to Israel is proof of the solid relations between Israel and the United States.

Neubach expressed Israel's appreciation for the economic aid, which has helped Israel's economy over the last decade.

SYRIAN BOAT IN DANGER OF SINKING TOWED TO HAIFA PORT FOR REPAIRS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 20 (JTA) -- A Syrian merchant vessel in danger of sinking was towed last week to Haifa port for repairs by Israeli navy missile boats, which sped to its aid in response to distress signals.

Israeli longshoremen worked shoulder to shoulder with Syrian seamen transferring cargo to barges in order to lighten the motorship Kayess and return it to an even keel.

Navy and port authorities said they had no problems dealing with the Syrian-flag ship and its crew, although Israel and Syria are technically in a state of war.

"Maritime tradition says you don't worry about the nationality of a vessel and mariners when you receive a distress signal. You just rush to aid the stricken vessel," a port spokesman said.

The Kayess had sailed from Alexandria, Egypt, bound for Beirut, Lebanon, with a mixed cargo of vegetables, sugar and cement.

It sent out an SOS about 35 miles northwest of Haifa on the night of April 16, after a leak flooded its engine room and threatened to capsize the vessel.

The signal was picked up by the Haifa Marine Communications Center, which relayed it to the Israeli navy. Within minutes, missile boats were speeding to the rescue.

They towed the badly listing Kayess to Haifa, where harbor tugs took over and eased it into shallow water. There the task began of pumping the ship dry and returning it to an even keel.

Crew members reportedly said the ship was overloaded and leaking when it left Alexandria.

Its master, Capt. Abdul Kadr Mansur, told reporters that this was the second time in a year that he was rescued at sea by the Israeli navy under similar circumstances.

BIR ZEIT, ARAB ACTIVIST CAMPUS, BEING REOPENED ON A TRIAL BASIS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 20 (JTA) -- Israel has announced the reopening of Bir Zeit University, a center of fierce Palestinian nationalist activity, which it closed down for security reasons more than four years ago, shortly after the intifada began.

Bir Zeit, 14 miles north of Jerusalem in the West Bank, will be the last to reopen of the six Palestinian universities in the administered territories that were closed down after the intifada started.

Classes there will be resumed on a trial basis in the science and engineering departments on April 29.

If all goes well, the other faculties will be reopened at regular intervals, Defense Minister Moshe Arens announced Monday.

Arens said the purpose was to "return to normal life in the territories."

He said the authorities had assurances from the university administration that the students would confine themselves to their studies and not engage in violence. The university authorities will be held strictly responsible, the defense minister stressed.

The Israeli authorities closed Bir Zeit on Jan. 8, 1988, barely a month after the intifada started. It had become one of the main centers of agitation, rioting and rock-throwing.

Even before the intifada, the university, which is near Ramallah, was closed frequently for long intervals because of the intense nationalism of its students and many faculty members, which often manifested itself in overt acts.

But Israel has come under strong world pressure to ease its restrictions on the 1.75 million Palestinians under its rule.

Protests From The Far Right

Bir Zeit is to reopen two days after bilateral peace talks are scheduled to resume in Washington between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and between Israel and Syrian and Lebanese delegations.

Israel is expected to press hard for its autonomy plan for the Palestinians, and the reopening of Bir Zeit could be cited as one measure preparing the way for Palestinians to take control of some of their affairs.

Bir Zeit, with an enrollment of about 2,500, is the most prestigious of the Palestinian institutions of higher learning because of its high academic standards.

The others are Bethlehem University, Hebron University, A-Najah in Nablus, Al-Quds in East Jerusalem and the Islamic University in Gaza. More than 14,000 students are enrolled in the six universities.

Although the campuses were closed for years, studies were continued at alternative premises. The Israeli authorities were aware of those activities but shut their eyes to them as long as they did not disrupt the public peace.

Arens' announcement of Bir Zeit's reopening drew angry protests from the far-right wing in the Knesset.

Rehavam Ze'evi of the Moledet party and Elyakim Haetzni of Tehiya criticized the move. Moledet and Tehiya quit the Likud-led coalition government in January to protest its participation in direct peace talks with the Palestinians.

BREAKTHROUGH IS EXPECTED SOON ON VATICAN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 20 (JTA) -- A breakthrough is expected soon in relations between Israel and the Vatican.

Official bilateral talks will begin shortly, possibly next month, leading eventually to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Jewish state and the Holy See, according to informed sources here.

The Vatican says it recognizes Israel de facto, but it has withheld formal diplomatic representation. Lately, contacts between them have warmed, a development officials attribute to the improvement in Israel's international standing.

China and India recently established full diplomatic relations with Israel, toward which both had long been hostile. With the end of the Cold War, Israel also has re-established diplomatic ties with the former Soviet Union and its successor states, as well as with all of the Eastern European countries that, following Moscow's lead, severed ties with Israel in 1967.

"Some circles in the Curia itself were beginning to feel a sense of lagging behind the international trend," said one source here.

Those circles have worn down the traditional resistance to ties with Israel, which was usually grounded in fear of adverse effects on Catholic communities in Arab countries.

The Vatican has relations with 18 of the 21 Arab League member states. It has no ties, however, with Israel's neighbor, Jordan, on the grounds that its borders have not yet been finalized under international law.

Recognition Never At Issue

The same reason has often been cited for denying Israel diplomatic recognition. The sources believe the Vatican will announce diplomatic relations with Israel and Jordan simultaneously.

They say talks between the Vatican and Israel would be the culmination of several helpful developments.

They cite the Vatican's January 1991 statement of sympathy for Israel's suffering under Iraqi missile attacks during the Persian Gulf War.

That statement denied that the Vatican does not recognize Israel. It insisted that recognition was never at issue, only diplomatic relations.

But its most significant portions were the assertion that there is no theological bar to recognition of Israel and the acknowledgment of Israel's special place in the Jewish world.

Further hints of improved relations were contained in an interview with Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, who is known as the Vatican's foreign minister, in the October 1991 edition of the German news magazine Die Welt, in which he held out prospects of diplomatic recognition if the Palestinian and border issues were resolved.

More recently, Israel was visited by a group of cardinals, including Cardinal John O'Connor, the archbishop of New York.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, president of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, is currently on a private visit to Israel. He has met with Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem.

The sources add to those developments the especially warm conversation between Pope John Paul II and Israel's new ambassador to Italy, Avi Pazner, who paid a courtesy call on the pontiff two weeks ago.

SHARANSKY SAYS HE WANTS TO FOUND PARTY OF IMMIGRANTS AND OLD-TIMERS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 20 (JTA) -- Natan Sharansky has finally thrown his hat into the political ring, and the pundits are already assessing his chances.

Sharansky's weekend announcement was a Passover surprise, inasmuch as the famous ex-refusenik, who came to Israel in 1986 after nine years in the Soviet Gulag, had for months warded off offers from established political parties and aspiring new Knesset lists alike.

In an interview with the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, which he initiated, the famous "prisoner of Zion" said he wants to found a party made up of new immigrants and veteran Israelis alike. He called on business leaders, distinguished government officials and retired military careerists to join him.

Sharansky's weekend announcement was welcomed by leaders of the recently formed immigrants party Da, headed by Yuli Kosharovsky, another former longtime refusenik from Moscow.

Kosharovsky said upon his recent election to head the party that he hoped Sharansky would eventually assume leadership of the movement. He urged him to head Da's election list for June 23.

Though Sharansky did not make clear whether he considered Da part of his base, he is known to oppose an olim-only party.

He told Yediot that the new party he hopes to found would represent newcomers and old-timers alike. It would support a restructuring of national priorities with immigration and absorption at the top.

The immigrant activist did not name any supporters in his interview. Sources close to him later listed as possible running mates Yitzhak Hofi, a former Mossad chief; Reuven Merhav, a former director general of the Foreign Ministry; and businessmen Danny Gillerman and Rolando Eisen.

But most immigrant leaders and veteran political observers are skeptical of Sharansky's chances. His announcement got a cold reception from Abba Gefen, head of a combined immigrants-pensioners party, Yad b'Yad (Hand in Hand).

Gefen, a former ambassador to Romania, called Sharansky's move "nonsense." He compared it to the short-lived Democratic Movement for Change, founded in 1977 by the late Yigael Yadin, a prominent archaeologist but a political amateur.

"It reflects political naivete," Gefen said of Sharansky's announcement.

And Robert Golan, chairman of the Soviet Immigrants Association, who heads a separate olim list, said Sharansky is "kidding himself" if he believes he can win broad support.

POLISH PRIME MINISTER PROMISES JEWS HOLOCAUST WILL BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS

NEW YORK (JTA) -- "Polish children will learn about the Holocaust," the prime minister of Poland, Jan Olszewski, pledged at a meeting with Jewish leaders at the World Jewish Congress headquarters here last week.

Poland's educational curriculum and textbooks will "faithfully and honestly" portray the tragic fate of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust, the visiting prime minister said April 15, according to Elan Steinberg, executive director of the WJC.

That will end four decades of silence on the subject during which Polish youth learned nothing in their schools of the history of the Holocaust or even of their own national history, while Poland was under Communist rule, the prime minister said.

He was responding to Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering/Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, who urged the Polish leader to make sure Polish children are properly taught about terrible events of the Holocaust.

When Ruth Popkin, president of the Jewish National Fund, spoke of seeing swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti on a recent visit to Poland, Olszewski blamed the lack of education of Polish youth on the history of those times.

Speaking for members of his own generation, he said the sign of the swastika was as horrible for them to behold as it was for Jews.

Olszewski recalled that this month marks the 47th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which he witnessed as a 13-year-old.

He said he saw ghetto fighters defy the Nazis by hanging Star of David banners alongside the red and white national colors of Poland.

ARGENTINE JEWS OUTRAGED BY NAMING OF LIBRARY ROOM FOR NAZI-SUPPORTER

By Victoria Verlichak

BUENOS AIRES, April 16 (JTA) -- The naming of a room in Argentina's National Library in honor of a notorious anti-Semitic pamphleteer of the 1930s has outraged the Jewish community here.

The center of controversy is the first new building added to the library in nearly 30 years, which Argentine President Carlos Menem dedicated this month.

A room in it is named for Gustavo Martinez Zuviria, who wrote several anti-Semitic novels as well as pro-Nazi pamphlets under the pen name of Hugo Wast.

B'nai B'rith of Argentina telegraphed a strong protest to the secretary of culture, Jose Maria Castineira de Dios. There was no immediate reply, but the news media picked up the story.

The honor given Martinez Zuviria "insults all of those who support democracy and fight against prejudice," the B'nai B'rith message said.

"To walk into any room of the National Library or any other repository of culture that bears the name of the author of 'El Kahal' (The Secret Government) and 'Oro' (Gold) is to stir in us, and in many other Argentines, deep feelings of uneasiness and discomfort over a bad memory and insensitivity to human dignity."

The books mentioned were fiction derived from "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," an anti-Semitic forgery that originated in czarist Russia.

Martinez Zuviria was made director of the National Library in 1935, at about the same time he published the novels which became classics of their kind. Though a mediocre writer, he was admitted to the Academy of Literature and to the PEN Club.

Far from being relegated to the fringe, he successfully entered politics with a strong boost from the Catholic establishment. He was elected to Congress and appointed minister of education after the extreme-right military coup in 1943.

But Martinez Zuviria quit the government when Argentina declared war on Nazi Germany shortly before the end of World War II.