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**SYRIA MAY SOON ALLOW ITS JEWS
TO LEAVE COUNTRY, EMIGRES SAY**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, April 26 (JTA) -- Syria may soon permit its 4,500 Jews to emigrate, according to reports circulating among Syrian Jewish emigres here and in Israel.

Syrian Jews, long denied permission to emigrate, reportedly were given word on April 23 that they are now free to leave.

Radio Damascus later reported that their release was imminent.

Israel Radio reported Sunday that three Jewish families left Syria for the United States last week.

There was no confirmation, and the radio admitted it was too early to say if that was the start of an exodus.

The anticipation and excitement in emigre circles here and in Israel is tinged with fear, as Syrian Jewry activists caution that only seeing is believing.

There has so far been no official confirmation from Syrian government sources.

In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir confirmed that there are "indications" that the Syrian government is prepared to permit Jews to travel freely abroad or emigrate if they wish.

Shamir spoke at the weekly Cabinet meeting, where the issue was raised after the morning's newspapers ran the reported Syrian policy change on their front pages.

The reports made their way to Israel from Brooklyn's large Syrian Jewish community.

Damascus Jews had telephoned relatives in Brooklyn with the news that senior police officials have informed them that henceforth Jews would have the same travel rights as all Syrian citizens.

According to those who received the calls, the Damascus Jews sounded free of fear and inhibitions over the telephone, which in itself suggests that a major policy change is under way.

'Test Is Seeing People Come Out'

"We're hoping it's true," said Seymour Reich, chairman of the Task Force on Syrian Jewry of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

But he added: "We have not had any confirmation from Damascus or our State Department."

Reich said the indication of a real policy shift would be if whole families are permitted to leave, without being required to leave a family member behind.

Currently, Syrian Jews are permitted to travel abroad, but only if they leave behind both a deposit of several thousand dollars and a family member who can serve in effect as a hostage for their return.

In addition, the process of applying for the required passport and visa can take years.

"At this point, the litmus test is seeing the people come out in numbers," said Alice Harary, president of the Council for Rescue of Syrian Jews.

"The Jewish community in Brooklyn is ready for them," she said.

Observers in Israel said that if Syria does

indeed show that its Jews can leave, that could have a favorable effect on the bilateral talks between Israel and Syria, which resume Monday in Washington.

Israel is also meeting with Lebanese, Jordanian and Palestinian negotiating teams.

There has also been speculation that Syrian President Hafez Assad may be making gestures to the Jewish community and Western public opinion to balance his overtures to Libya and threatened defiance of the American-led sanctions against the North African country.

The reports that Syrian Jews have been given the right to leave followed by a week the release on Passover eve of the last two Syrian Jews held in prison, Eli and Selim Swed, brothers who had been jailed since 1987.

Jewish groups credited international pressure for their freedom. Four other imprisoned Syrian Jews were released in December as part of a general amnesty.

In Canada, longtime activist Judy Feld Carr refused to be caught up in euphoria.

"The only worthwhile news story respecting the emigration of Syrian Jewry is when they're actually leaving. Until that exodus, everything is sheer speculation," said Carr, who has been involved in the Syrian Jewry movement for 21 years.

(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents David Landau in Jerusalem and Gil Kezwer in Toronto.)

**ISRAEL ESTABLISHES FULL RELATIONS
WITH ARMENIA, AND NIGERIA IS NEXT**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 26 (JTA) -- Israel has established full diplomatic relations with Armenia and is expected to announce shortly the resumption of diplomatic ties with Nigeria, the most populous black African state.

Israel's ambassador to Moscow, Arye Levin, will serve as emissary to Armenia, one of the 15 former republics of the now-defunct Soviet Union.

Levin presented his credentials April 23 to the Armenian foreign minister in Yerevan, the capital of the republic, and also met with the president.

The ceremony was broadcast and prominently featured in the local news media.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy will fly to the Nigerian capital of Lagos next week to participate personally in restoring the ties broken by Nigeria in a gesture of solidarity with Egypt after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Nigeria, with an area of nearly 400,000 square miles and a population exceeding 115 million, is one of the leading nations of Africa.

Full diplomatic relations with another African nation, Angola, were established April 16 by the two countries' envoys to the United Nations.

In another diplomatic development, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens began an official visit Sunday to Finland and to the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which declared their independence from the Soviet Union last year.

Arens will participate in Holocaust Memorial Day events in Riga, the Latvian capital.

AN ISRAELI ARAB IS FINED \$3,100 FOR POETRY PRAISING INTIFADA

By Gil Sedan

ACRE, Israel, April 26 (JTA) -- The magistrates court here has given an Israeli Arab an eight-month suspended sentence, fined him the equivalent of \$3,100 and put him on three years' probation for writing poetry extolling the intifada and criticizing the behavior of Israel Defense Force troops.

The penalties against Shafik Habib marked the first time in Israel that a poet was punished for the content of his poetry.

Habib's lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, announced he would appeal.

Judge Rahamim Tsemah had no sooner passed the sentence Sunday when he was defending it against charges of suppressing free speech leveled by a prize-winning Israeli Arab author.

Emil Habibi, who was selected to receive the 1992 Israel Prize for his contributions to Arabic literature, was in court along with family and friends of the accused and a handful of other Israeli Arab poets, who came to demonstrate solidarity with him.

Habibi begged the court to "help me" accept Israel's most prestigious award, which is to be presented on Independence Day next week.

He said he is under severe attack from his own people for agreeing to accept a literary prize as an Arab poet is sentenced for his poetry.

The judge replied that the defendant had abused the freedom of speech granted Israelis "without any limitation" and at best misinterpreted the liberty.

In fact, the judge considered himself lenient for suspending the prison portion of the sentence.

Habibi suggested that the defendant receive a symbolic fine of one shekel. He recalled a military trial in 1957 at which an IDF officer who killed 49 Arab civilians in the Kafr Kasim village massacre was fined a symbolic 1 piastre, predecessor of the agorah, valued at less than one cent.

The author said that he would join the appeal. He will also accept the Israel Prize, which will be presented by President Chaim Herzog.

VIOLENT CLASHES REPORTED IN GAZA AS IDF CLEARS SOLDIERS OF SHOOTING

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 26 (JTA) -- A weekend of intifada violence ended when the Israel Defense Force clamped a curfew on the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood in Gaza on Sunday, while disputing the cause of death of an elderly Arab woman.

At least 20 people were wounded in the clashes. Fatmah Hawajeh, 85, was the only fatality. Relatives said she suffocated from the fumes of a tear gas grenade thrown into her house.

Army sources claimed she died of a heart attack.

A high-ranking IDF general, meanwhile, defended the behavior of an undercover squad under his command that shot and wounded two young Arabs smearing nationalist graffiti on a wall in the West Bank last week.

The shootings, in Dura village near Hebron, attracted international attention when an Israeli couple, Aviva and David Elimelech, charged that the soldiers, who were dressed in civilian clothing, fired without warning.

It was the first time Israeli civilians have

disputed the army's version of such an incident in the administered territories.

But Maj. Gen. Danny Yatom, commander of the central sector, which includes the West Bank, claimed that a "thorough investigation of the incident" showed that the Arabs had been warned before the soldiers opened fire.

According to Gen. Yatom, the Jewish couple, who were spending the day with Arab friends in Dura and witnessed the incident from their terrace, exaggerated.

EL AL FLIGHT ARRIVES FROM TOKYO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 26 (JTA) -- El Al's first direct flight from Tokyo arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport on Sunday with 200 Japanese tourists and pilgrims aboard.

They are the first of 1,200 visitors from Japan that the Israeli air carrier is scheduled to bring here on six charter flights over the next few weeks. A refueling stop was made in Moscow.

Israel and Japan are negotiating an aviation agreement that will permit regularly scheduled air service between the two countries.

Israel and China have been negotiating a similar agreement. But the start of service between Tel Aviv and Beijing has been delayed by security complications in China.

Security seems to be Israel's major preoccupation in establishing air service to East Asia. The El Al plane that flew to Japan carried airline security personnel who will set up safety procedures in Tokyo and other Far East destinations.

ISRAEL ALLOWS SYRIAN OVERFLIGHT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 26 (JTA) -- Israel helped Syria on a humanitarian mission recently but got no thanks.

In response to a request relayed through a third party, the Israeli authorities readily agreed to let a Syrian military helicopter fly over Israeli territory to rescue a group of Syrian soldiers stranded on Mount Hermon, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported.

The soldiers were snowed in at a military outpost on the Syrian side of the peak, where severe winter weather blocked all access routes.

Several died, and the survivors were in poor condition.

Israel suggested the establishment of a "hot-line" with Damascus for similar situations in the future but has gotten no response, Ma'ariv said.

SHABBAT BLAZE INFLAMES BNEI BRAK

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 26 (JTA) -- Sabbath-observers who consulted with a rabbi before summoning the fire brigade to their burning apartment in Bnei Brak may have trouble collecting insurance.

When the fire broke out Saturday in the strictly Orthodox township near Tel Aviv, the residents walked to the home of their rabbi to get his consent to sound the alarm.

By the time the firefighters arrived, the blaze had spread to two other apartments. All three were gutted, but no one was hurt.

Legal experts said the insurance company could refuse payment or reduce it on grounds of negligence.

QUAYLE, ADDRESSING COMMEMORATION, AFFIRMS STRENGTH OF U.S.-ISRAEL TIES

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, April 25 (JTA) -- Vice President Dan Quayle has sought once more to allay doubts and fears among Jews that the Bush administration has veered away from its strong alliance with Israel.

Giving the keynote address at the 49th annual commemoration here of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Quayle, sporting a yarmulke, called Israel "our most dependable ally that we have in the Middle East."

The phrase "never again," he told the 4,000 people assembled at the Javits Convention Center, "is more than the vow of Jewish survivors. It's the deep, unshakable resolution of the world's sole military superpower, the United States of America."

The vice president and his wife, Marilyn, sat on the dais at the convention center, watching as lines of children bearing candles approached the stage and illuminated a big Magen David.

He recalled how he and Marilyn had visited the site of the Auschwitz death camp in Poland last year with their two children, wrestling with a manner in which to explain what had happened there.

He spoke, too, of his friendship with Elie Wiesel, the Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor, who was seated next to them.

The vice president said he had told Wiesel he wants to "be remembered as a Christian who helped make Israel more secure and who helped make the world a little more tolerant."

Speaking next, Wiesel pleaded with Quayle to "be our intercessor" in the international efforts to stop a German development company from razing and covering an old Jewish cemetery in Hamburg to construct a shopping mall.

"If they didn't honor the living in Hamburg," said Wiesel, "let them at least honor the dead."

Quayle was introduced by Jewish Republican leader George Klein, who sought to explain to the vice president that his audience was composed of "people who remember what every survivor personally saw," and that Judaism enjoins Jews to remember.

"The world was indifferent" to the plight of the Jews during World War II, Klein said, "because the British wanted no Jews to go to Palestine," and America "didn't want immigrants. We remember President (Franklin) Roosevelt's indifference" to the Jews who needed saving, shelter and recognition.

"Mr. Vice President," said Klein, "all the survivors have taken a sacred oath: We will never be silent again."

Wiesel sought to point out America's cumulative indifference to the plight of Jews through history. "How come, in all those years, the White House was so insensitive to Jewish pain?"

The specter of Jews being called upon to refrain from expressing their pain and for Israel's need to be a secure haven for immigrating Jews was reaffirmed by Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

She drove a polite but direct broadside at the mayor of New York, David Dinkins, who was seated on the dais and one of the afternoon's speakers, along with New York Gov. Mario Cuomo.

"Here, in New York City, a tragic automobile accident" that occurred in the racially mixed Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn and resulted in an accidental killing of a black child "is equated with a deliberate, violent murder," of a yeshiva student, she said.

"And otherwise audible and clear voices are silent or muted for the better part of several days -- a serious lapse of moral courage and requisite civic action on the part of all involved."

"Here in the United States," she said, "anti-Semitic statements, whether by a valid presidential candidate or influential decision-makers, are largely unchallenged by those who shape public opinion."

She also reminded her listeners that Jewish leaders had "immediately conveyed to President Bush, in clear and direct language, our concern at the forces inadvertently unleashed on Sept. 12," after the president linked loan guarantees to settlements in the territories.

"And unlike 50 years ago," she said, "President Bush apologized publicly and affirmed that which Vice President Quayle reiterated just three weeks ago: that we have every right to exercise our democratic prerogative to advocate to our elected officials, at all levels, those issues which are of deep concern to us as American Jews."

"For we have learned that silence is our enemy and advocacy is our strength," she said. "We will not abandon any Jew in distress."

CABINET MEMBER DENOUNCES ATTEMPT TO VINDICATE FRENCH COLLABORATORS

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, April 26 (JTA) -- Attempts to vindicate Nazi collaborators were denounced by a French Cabinet minister Sunday at a ceremony in memory of a French couple murdered by them.

Louis Mexendeau, who heads the Veterans Affairs Ministry, spoke at a memorial in Lyon for Victor Basch and his wife, killed in 1944 by the pro-Nazi Vichy militia.

Basch, who was Jewish, was president of the League of Human Rights. He and his wife were both 80 when they were slain.

Mexendeau lashed out at the Paris Court of Appeals for recently dismissing all charges against Nazi collaborator Paul Touvier, former head of the Vichy militia in Lyon, who was accused of crimes against humanity.

The court "was supposed to render justice and not rewrite history by whitewashing the Vichy regime of its anti-Semitism and of its repression of democracy and human rights," Mexendeau said.

The court's decision, announced on April 13, touched off mass protests in Paris, Lyon and other French cities. It is being appealed before the Supreme Court of Appeals.

Touvier, 77, was twice sentenced in absentia to death after World War II. A close associate of the late Klaus Barbie, who was Gestapo chief in Lyon, Touvier was particularly brutal toward Jews and Resistance fighters.

He personally handed over seven Jews from Rillieux-le-Pape, near Lyon, who were shot in reprisal for the assassination of a Vichy minister by the Resistance.

But the Paris court claimed there was no evidence to prove that Touvier's acts were crimes against humanity, enacted within a framework aimed at persecuting or trying to eradicate a people.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: IMMIGRANT INFLUX POSES A CHALLENGE FOR ISRAELI UNIVERSITIES, INSTITUTES

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Recent immigrants have quickly made their mark on many aspects of Israeli life, from the sciences to music. In few places is their impact more discernible than in the country's universities and science institutes, where researchers seek employment and students go to acclimate to their new country.

The universities must absorb into their faculties scientists and academicians whose expertise is concentrated in a handful of disciplines and woefully lacking in others, as well as students who require training in Hebrew language and other basic skills.

And in order to build the classrooms, labs and dormitories needed to accommodate the rapid growth, the universities must raise millions of dollars from private sources.

The sheer number of immigrants who need to be absorbed, combined with the students born during Israel's baby boom of 1968-1973 who are now of university age, daunts even those over-seeing the task.

Haifa University, in the north, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in the south, are absorbing most of the new immigrant students.

Ben-Gurion is planning to double its population, which two years ago was 6,000 students, to 12,000 by 1996. Haifa University is expanding its student body by 80 percent, to 11,000, over the same time period, while increasing faculty by 60 percent and administrative staff by 30 percent.

The financial needs are great. Ben-Gurion President Avishay Braverman must raise \$150 million over and above his annual operating budget to meet the task.

Half, he expects, will come from the government. The rest must be provided by donations from overseas.

Most Going North Or South

The crush of new students "is creating a terrible headache, financially and in other ways," said Roland Schild, Haifa University's president. "It's a challenge in physical development and to find the right faculty."

According to Avner Yaniv, Haifa University's vice president for administration, "the university has been thrust into an enormous expansion program. We'll have so many more students in four years in the same number of buildings."

The universities in Israel's center, like the towns themselves, are already crowded. So, Tel Aviv University, Bar-Ilan University, the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Hebrew University are adding new immigrants to their campuses, but not in the same magnitude as the schools in the north and south.

At Tel Aviv University, for example, 10 percent of the 20,000 students were born in the Soviet Union, a proportion not expected to leap dramatically over the next few years.

When Israeli university officials talk about olim, they speak of Jews from the former Soviet Union, rather than Ethiopians, because emigres looking for positions are almost all Russians.

The Ethiopians "don't opt for science and technology to begin with," according to Zehav Tadmor, president of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. "Not many apply."

There was a special program for Ethiopians

at the Hebrew University after the Operation Moses immigration in 1985, "but they had great difficulty adapting to the Western system," said Jerry Barash, a Hebrew University spokesman.

All of the universities and institutes offer immigrant students preparatory programs to allow them to get their language and study skills up to a competitive level.

'Exploding' With Talented Students

At Bar-Ilan and Ben-Gurion universities, the mathematics and computer science departments have a special curriculum for Russian olim.

For the first year, the students are taught in Russian and receive Hebrew and English classes in addition to the regular courses. Once they pass their exams, they join the regular studies.

Ben-Gurion, which has natural science, social science, engineering and health faculties, is also starting a music department and a program in Russian literature to better accommodate the strengths of its new Russian emigre population.

And at Tel Aviv University, the music faculty "is exploding with students with major talents," according to Itamar Rabinovich, the university's rector.

The stress of absorbing the immigrants extends beyond administrators' offices.

The difficulties faced by the new students, problems of "language, differences in orientation and emphasis, and of adjustment, forced us to invest in a counseling service we did not plan for," said Haifa University President Schild.

And there is occasionally friction between the immigrants and veteran Israeli students.

The veteran Israelis are "not resistant to the new immigrants, but they feel the discomfort of crowdedness and shortages," said Haifa Vice President Yaniv.

Most of the universities and institutes have hired at least a handful of recent immigrant faculty members.

And they have been able to temporarily hire many more researchers, because the salaries are mostly paid by the Ministry of Absorption.

Once the introductory year or two is up, however, and the universities are required to kick in more than 20 or 25 percent of the cost, most of these researchers will likely be laid off.

The Russian olim beyond student age who look to the universities for employment, especially in the sciences, are strong in subjects like mathematics, physics and aeronautics, and weak in computer science and biology.

Some Being Retrained

The universities are handling the surplus of talent in two different ways: by creating "incubators" for scientists to develop their ideas into commercial viability and by retraining the olim in new fields.

Through the Technion, for example, 50 immigrant scientists are working in an incubator on projects from special glass technology to a chemical refining process.

Most of the universities try to retrain some scientists for other disciplines, if there is a need in somewhat related fields.

At Bar-Ilan, Hebrew University and Technion, Russian scientists are being retrained as high school math and science teachers. Hebrew University is retraining 30 olim to be social workers.

"They are such good learners that they are easy to switch," said Chaim Harari, president of the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot.