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**ACCUSED SPIES FREED FROM CAIRO JAIL,
ARRIVE HOME WITH TALES OF TORTURE**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- Four Israelis imprisoned in Egypt since February returned home Wednesday with tales of torture and humiliation during their three months' incarceration on suspicion of spying.

Their release culminated weeks of high-level, behind-the-scenes diplomatic activity which reportedly included U.S. intervention and a telephone conversation between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

David Ovitz, 33, a furniture dealer from Givatayim who was arrested in Cairo on Feb. 8, charged that "the entire affair was planned and timed by the Egyptian government" for the purpose of smearing Israel.

He added that his arrest was "an attempt to jeopardize Israeli-Egyptian relations."

The others released are Fares Mussarti, 41, an Arab resident of Ramla; his son Majid, 21; and 17-year-old daughter, Faya. They claimed torture and intimidation forced them to confess to false accusations of espionage and to implicate Ovitz.

According to Ovitz, the Mussartis were forced to incriminate him because the Egyptians wanted to include an Israeli Jew in the case "to make their suspicions of the Mussartis more credible."

Ovitz, who speaks neither Arabic nor English, occasionally had employed Fares Mussarti as an interpreter on furniture-buying trips to Egypt.

But that connection cost him dearly. "I will never talk to that family, and they know why," he told reporters at Ben-Gurion Airport on his return from Egypt on Wednesday. He did not elaborate.

Mussartis Say They Were Tortured

He said he was treated fairly in jail but there were times he believed he was fated to stay behind bars for a very long time.

Faya Mussarti said she was tortured by electric shocks applied to her mouth and was deprived of food for days.

Her father, Fares, said he was tortured by his interrogators. He said he would be awakened at 3 a.m., tied by his arms to a pole and ordered to confess.

"I would tell them whatever they wanted. How much could I suffer?" the elder Mussarti said.

He and his daughter were accused of espionage. At first they were linked to Mossad, the Israeli secret service. Later the Egyptians insinuated a connection to other, possibly Libyan, elements, Mussarti said.

He admitted to exchanging blows with Egyptian police who raided his rented apartment in the heart of Cairo at the beginning of February.

Majid Mussarti was arrested a few days later after crossing the border from Libya. The family was first accused of traveling in Egypt with false documents, a charge to which they confessed.

Ovitz said he went to Egypt in February to bid on used furniture at the American Embassy in

Cairo. He was trucking a shipment of furniture from Alexandria to Cairo when he was stopped by a police roadblock outside the Egyptian capital and arrested.

Foreign Minister David Levy's optimistic remarks about the case Tuesday raised hopes in Israel that the prisoners would soon be released. But few expected them to return home so soon, in time for Israel Independence Day.

Ovitz was embraced at the airport by his wife Yael, 5-months pregnant, whose persistent badgering of the Israeli political establishment is credited in large measure with expediting the efforts to gain his release.

His brother, Moshe, was also helpful, as was lawyer Uri Slonim, who is experienced in negotiations concerning Israeli prisoners in Arab countries.

Their collective efforts included pressure on the political echelon and frequent contacts with Mohammed Basyouni, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv.

According to Slonim, they also initiated contacts with New York City Councilman Noach Dear, who "pulled strings" in the U.S. administration to have American pressure exerted on the Egyptians.

Slonim credited discreet diplomatic efforts at the highest levels for the successful outcome. He said he failed to understand what motivated the Egyptians to arrest Ovitz, who had violated no Egyptian law.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz meanwhile reported from Cairo that the Egyptians are now more likely than before to carry out the death sentence pronounced on Israeli Yosef Tahan three years ago for drug dealing, a capital offense in Egypt.

Ha'aretz, quoting Israeli sources in Egypt, said the authorities could not execute local drug dealers as long as they refrained from taking the same measures against an Israeli.

Tahan's last hope was the mufti of Egypt, the country's highest religious authority, who has the power to commute death sentences to life imprisonment.

But the mufti has rejected an appeal to exercise his authority on Tahan's behalf.

**ISRAEL CONFIRMS EARLIER REPORTS,
WILL BOYCOTT SOME REGIONAL TALKS**
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- Israel will not attend two of the five sets of multilateral talks on Middle East regional issues next week because diaspora Palestinians will be participating, an Israeli Embassy official said.

The talks Israel will boycott are the May 11-13 economic development talks in Brussels, to be held under the chairmanship of the European Community, and the refugee talks in Ottawa on May 13-15.

"If Palestinians from outside the territories participate in deviation from (an earlier) formula, then Israel won't participate," the Israeli official said.

As of Wednesday, "It seems we won't be participating," the official said, adding that a formal response would be sent within a few days to the co-sponsors, the United States and Russia,

and the host countries, Belgium and Canada.

The United States and Russia announced in January that they would support a non-indigenous Palestinian presence in the two working groups that Israel now intends to boycott.

The Israeli embassy official here said that the Israeli ambassadors to Canada and Belgium are "not going to be attending those talks in any form."

U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher said Wednesday that he would not comment on the issue until there is a formal Israeli response.

Secretary of State James Baker, in a meeting Monday with the American Jewish Congress, played down a possible Israeli boycott, one of the Jewish leaders present said. He said Baker spoke of how some of the other Middle East parties "have not gone to other meetings."

Baker also told the AJCongress that the United States won't try to force Israel to talk to Palestinians it finds unacceptable.

In January, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian delegation boycotted the Moscow session, hosted by Russia, that launched the multilateral issues talks. Russia refused to seat an expanded Palestinian delegation such as the one Israel is objecting to now.

Syria apparently will be staying away from the five multilateral sessions on grounds that the five rounds of bilateral talks with Israel since last October lacked substantive progress.

A pro-Israel lobbyist minimized the multilateral talks as "seminars" in which the Mideast parties "won't be negotiating with each other." The lobbyist noted that the agenda for the Washington-based arms control talks May 11-13 includes speeches by officials from non-Middle East countries.

Diaspora Palestinians Not Invited To Some Talks

Diaspora Palestinians have not been invited to the arms control talks, nor to the talks in Vienna on water resources May 12-14 or the environmental talks the week of May 18 in Tokyo.

"It is fair to say that all of the multilaterals are going to get off to a rather slow start by design, whether the Israelis are there or not," the lobbyist added.

But Hassan Abdel Rahman, director of the Arab League's Washington-based Palestine Affairs Center, who will be in Ottawa for the refugee conference, said, "I believe that progress is going to be made because there will be a discussion of one of the most important components of the Palestinian issues, namely Palestinian refugees."

Israel is opposed to the participation of diaspora Palestinians because it might convey symbolic acknowledgment of a Palestinian right of return to the territory that is now Israel.

In defending their position, Israelis argue that the multilateral talks should reflect the ground rules for the bilateral talks, which do not allow diaspora Palestinian participation.

Israel was reported to have proposed a compromise that would allow diaspora Palestinians to be included among the delegations of the Arab countries where they legally reside, for example Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

But the Arabs objected and Israeli officials in Jerusalem vehemently denied last week that they had offered any such proposal.

The refugee negotiations may be the most emotional of all the talks. Abdel Rahman said the six-member Palestinian delegation in Ottawa will

include three diaspora Palestinians: Mohammed Hallha, director of the Washington-based Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine; Elias Sanbar, a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris; and Eli Zureick, a professor at Queens College in Kingston, Ontario.

ISRAELI RESERVIST SHOT DEAD IN CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- A case of mistaken identity resulted in the death of an Israel Defense Force reservist Sunday night and the suspension of his commanding officer for negligence.

Reserve Sgt. Ya'acov Scheinman, 24, of Rishon le-Zion was fatally shot by the mukhtar, head man, of the Fara refugee camp near Nablus, an appointee of the Israeli civil administration in the West Bank.

He told questioners after the incident that he mistook an IDF unit approaching his house for intifada activists aiming to harm him for collaboration, and fired in self-defense.

He possessed his gun legally for protection.

Maj. Gen. Danny Yatom, commander of the central sector, which includes the West Bank, suspended the commanding officer in charge of the operation and another officer after IDF investigators concluded that it had been inadequately planned and executed.

An army communique said the commanding officers were insufficiently familiar with the details of the operation and the officer in direct charge "did not prepare his mission adequately."

He failed to recognize the house his men entered as the mukhtar's house, the army said.

Meanwhile, the assistant commander of the Gaza police, Yosef Avni, escaped unhurt when an unidentified gunman opened fire with an automatic weapon on his car on the beach road south of Gaza on Monday. The assailant escaped.

FAMILY OF MISSING AIRMAN ARAD ASKS FOR NEW NEGOTIATING TEAM By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 6 (JTA) -- The family of missing Israeli air force navigator Ron Arad urged the government on his 34th birthday Tuesday to call in a new team to negotiate his release with a group in Lebanon believed holding him hostage.

Arad's wife and other family members met with Defense Minister Moshe Arens to discuss ways to refocus national attention on his plight.

They said a new team might have more success than those who have been conducting quiet negotiations for the last few months without results.

Arens reportedly assured the family that the defense establishment and other negotiators are continuing with their best efforts.

The family held high hopes that Arad would be freed when the remaining U.S. and British hostages held in Lebanon were released late last year. They had been buoyed by the optimistic statements of U.N. officials at the time.

But those proved groundless, and after the Americans and Britons were freed, world attention drifted away from the hostage crisis.

Arad, whose plane was shot down over Lebanon in 1986, is believed to be the only prisoner still alive of seven Israel Defense Force personnel missing in Lebanon since 1982.

ISRAEL SOMBERLY OBSERVES MEMORIAL DAY, THEN SHIFTS GEARS FOR INDEPENDENCE DAY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 6 (JTA) -- The mood in Israel was somber on Yom Hazikaron Wednesday, despite the thousands of blue-and-white flags flapping from utility poles, building and cars in preparation for the joyous celebration of Israel's 44th Independence Day the following day.

More than 50,000 family and friends of Israel's war dead gathered under gray skies at 40 military cemeteries and monuments around the country on Yom Hazikaron to pay their traditional tribute to loved ones who gave their lives in time of war.

Memorial Day was, as always, a somber occasion. At 11 a.m., a 2-minute siren was sounded in every city, town and hamlet calling the nation to attention.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir delivered his eulogy at the central national cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. Defense Minister Moshe Arens spoke at the military section of Tel Aviv's sprawling Kiryat Shaul cemetery.

Other Cabinet ministers and Knesset members, public figures and senior military officers addressed crowds elsewhere.

Although Israel is in the midst of a bitterly fought election campaign, the speakers refrained from political references. Their common theme was the sacrifices made by soldiers, police and members of other security forces, men and women, who died to achieve Israel's independence 44 years ago and subsequently to protect and preserve it.

The mournful strains of bugles playing "Taps" signaled the end of Memorial Day.

And then suddenly, the atmosphere was transformed, as people got down to the serious business of merrymaking in celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut. The flags which had been flying at half-mast were raised high, beacons were lit and a massive fireworks display brightened the skies over Jerusalem.

There was singing and dancing in the streets. Cafes and nightclubs sprang to life and radio and television switched from dirges to pop tunes and comic skits. Teenagers engaged in an Independence Day ritual: hitting other people over the head with plastic toy hammers.

For 24 hours, the country's 5 million citizens will be united in patriotism and good will. Then, just as suddenly, the fierce political wrangling of the election campaign will resume.

In the meantime, Israelis who preferred the quiet of their balconies on Independence Day sat back to enjoy the fireworks, hope for a mild summer, fewer days of reserve duty and peace.

(JTA correspondent Michele Chabin in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

DINITZ PREDICTS ISRAEL WILL BE HOME TO HALF OF WORLD'S JEWS BY YEAR 2000

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- Israel will be the largest Jewish center in the world by the year 2000, Jewish Agency Chairman Simcha Dinitz has predicted.

If that prediction holds true, about half the world's Jewish population would then be living in Israel. For the first time, there would be more Jews in Israel than in the United States, Dinitz told the Jewish Agency Executive this week.

According to the most recent statistics, there are about 12.8 million Jews in the world, of whom 4,175,000 reside in Israel and 5,535,000 in the United States.

Dinitz warned, however, that the number of Jews is decreasing rapidly because of intermarriage and a low birthrate.

Israel's total population is 5,090,000, according to figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday, the eve of Independence Day.

Jews make up 82 percent of that total; Moslems, numbering 700,000, represent 13.8 percent. The rest of the population is composed of 132,000 Christians, or 2.5 percent, and 85,000 Druse, or 1.7 percent, the government statistics agency reported.

The population grew by 4.3 percent in 1991, compared to a 5.9 percent growth rate the previous year. Two-thirds of the increase was due to immigration.

Dinitz disclosed Tuesday that 2,228,444 immigrants have come to Israel since the state was established in 1948. The most recent aliyah, from 1989 through April 1992, brought in 418,661 olim, 87.6 percent from the former Soviet Union and 6.8 percent from Ethiopia.

About 1 million Jews are left in the 15 republics of the former Soviet Union. The rest are scattered in Jewish communities around the world.

The Jewish Agency reported that a total of 43,103 Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel since the state was founded. Of that number, 7,345 were brought in by Operation Moses between 1985 and 1986 and 14,103 by Operation Solomon last May.

Since then, another 3,016 olim have arrived from Ethiopia.

About 1,300 Jews are believed still to be living in that country -- 200 in Addis Ababa, the capital; 450 in Gondar province and the rest scattered in villages throughout the country.

According to the World Zionist Organization and the British Olim Society, the United Kingdom provided the highest percentage of immigrants from any Western country -- 10 percent of its Jewish population.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

STATE MAY PROSECUTE CIVIL SERVANTS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- The state may take legal action against a number of civil servants as a result of irregularities exposed in the latest comptroller's report.

State Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat, a former member of the High Court of Justice, has passed on material to the attorney general in six cases cited in her annual report on government agencies released last month. She recommended legal action in those cases.

It was the second batch of such material turned over to the state prosecutor since the report was made public April 27.

The Justice Ministry has refused to specify the nature of the cases, but it is believed that most of them involve the Housing Ministry, headed by Ariel Sharon, and state-owned companies doing business with it.

Ben-Porat's report contained allegations of corruption, poor administration and professional incompetence at the ministry, which Sharon has denied.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
DIGGING FOR HER ROOTS IN POLAND,
U.S. JEW TURNS UP ANTI-SEMITISM**

By Michele Chabin

WARSAW (JTA) -- For novice tour guide and translator Swarek Yerka, a day spent guiding Miriam, a young American Jewish woman searching for her family's roots, turned into a personal confrontation with anti-Semitism.

At a time when Polish officials are openly denouncing anti-Semitism, many Poles still harbor anti-Jewish sentiments.

On an official level, the country has done much to combat anti-Semitism, according to Polish journalist Stanislaw Lopuszanski.

"Children learn about the role Poland played in the Holocaust. They view films and take school trips to the concentration camps. Every year there is a tribute to the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. We've come a long way in educating our young people," he said.

Today there are relatively few overt acts of anti-Semitism in Poland. The small Jewish community, which numbers less than 15,000, is free to worship in the country's seven synagogues. Last year, to promote greater cross-cultural understanding, President Lech Walesa set up the Council for Polish-Jewish Relations.

Furthermore, the Polish Episcopate has established a Commission for Dialogue with Judaism.

Yet despite these measures, anti-Semitism appears to be alive and well in Poland, at least among the older generation.

Such was clearly the case in the tiny village of Radzilow, in the northeastern province of Lomza. The village was once home to hundreds of Jews and Gentiles who lived side by side.

With its cobblestone streets and picturesque farmhouses, it appears to have changed little during the last century. As Swarek, the tour guide, and Miriam quickly learned, the villagers' attitudes toward Jews haven't changed much either.

Though at first friendly and open, a gray-haired farmer turned reticent upon hearing that the woman with the camera was a Jew whose family had lived in Radzilow before the war. "No, I've never heard of that family," he said, despite Miriam's proof to the contrary.

"When the Jews were taken away, some of my neighbors stole things from their homes, but I never took a thing." He then asked Swarek, "Are you a Jew?"

The next woman they encountered, also elderly, noted that "we went to school with the Jews, lived with the Jews. But my mother used to ask, what kind of a Pole doesn't wear a cross around his neck?"

And then she asked Swarek, "You're Jewish, aren't you?" When asked where the synagogue and Jewish cemetery were located, another woman said they had been destroyed by the Communists after the war.

"The Communist Party leader took the gravestones and built a house with them," she remarked.

When Miriam asked Swarek to approach another group of villagers, he became hesitant. "They're all anti-Semites. I don't think you'll want to hear what they have to say. They all seem afraid, as if they think you'll claim their property, take back what they stole."

When Miriam pressed on, Swarek finally

approached the group. No, they said, no one by that name had ever lived here.

And is it true that in Israel, they have a place with the names of the Poles who were good to the Jews, and a place for those who were not? they asked.

At the town center, the pair inquired whether any Jews remained in the area. Yes, they were told, a Jewish Holocaust survivor had married the man who had hidden her during the war.

In a small, crumbling farmhouse next to a stream, Hanna lives with her husband Stanislaw, who was named a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem two years ago. Hannah, who is nearly blind, welcomed in the visitors, obviously pleased to have "out-of-town company."

Her entire family, she said, was murdered by the Nazis. Stanislaw saved her life and the lives of other Jews by hiding them in the forest and giving them food. As she wrote her Hebrew name, and that of her mother, in flawless Hebrew, Miriam noticed the pictures of Jesus on the wall.

At 77, Hannah remembers the war as though it had happened yesterday. "I stayed in Poland because my husband is here," she said. "If I were younger, I would move to Israel, where I have some cousins."

She took out a letter with an Israeli stamp and postmark: Holon, Israel.

On the trip back to Warsaw, the young tour guide confessed: "I hated when those villagers asked me whether I was Jewish. In Australia, we Poles were made to feel like outsiders, even though I had an Australian passport.

"But some people are good and others aren't. That man saved a Jewish woman and risked his life. I think, for the first time, I understand anti-Semitism. I'm ashamed of my own people," the young Pole said.

**JUDAICA COLLECTED BY ANSKY
PUT ON DISPLAY IN AMSTERDAM**
By Hearlette Boas

AMSTERDAM, May 6 (JTA) -- An unusual exhibition of Jewish relics and artifacts collected by the Russian-Jewish writer known as Sh. Ansky more than 80 years ago went on display at the Jewish Historical Museum here.

It is being seen for the first time outside Russia and will remain in Amsterdam until November. The exhibition will travel afterwards to Cologne, Frankfurt, New York and Israel.

Many museums abroad had been competing for the honor of being the first to mount the exhibition. But it was the Jewish museum here that managed to convince the State Ethnographical Museum in St. Petersburg, formerly Leningrad, to lend it the material that had been hidden away for years.

Much of it had to be repaired in St. Petersburg before it was fit for display.

Ansky -- or S. An-Ski, as it is sometimes written -- was the pen name used by writer and ethnographer Solomon Rapoport. He collected a vast amount of material on his expeditions to southwestern Russia between 1911 and 1914, including the 300 objects on display here.

Rapoport, who was born in Vitebsk, Russia, in 1863, was educated among the Hasidim but schooled himself in the literature of the Jewish Enlightenment. In Yiddish, he wrote short stories, novels and dramas, incorporating Hasidic themes.

He is best known for one drama above all: "The Dybbuk."