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**NEW SECRETARY OF STATE CONFIRMED
HOURS AFTER CLINTON TAKES HIS OATH****By Deborah Kalb
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Just a few hours after William Jefferson Clinton was sworn in Wednesday as the 42nd president of the United States, the Senate voted to confirm Warren Christopher as his secretary of state.

The Senate also confirmed former Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (D-Texas) as treasury secretary and former Rep. Les Aspin (D-Colo.) as secretary of defense.

Christopher is expected to make reinvigorating the Middle East peace process one of his top and earliest priorities.

There were unconfirmed reports this week that the new secretary would travel to the region next month. And the administration reportedly has expressed interest in Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's request for an early meeting with the new president.

The administration has signaled its desire for continuity in the peace talks by asking Edward Djerejian to stay on as assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs.

It has also decided to retain Dennis Ross, a top aide to former Secretary of State James Baker who has played a key role in facilitating the peace talks, as a special adviser.

Named to replace Ross as director of policy planning at State was Samuel Lewis, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. His appointment was lauded by the pro-Israel community.

Advocates for the Jewish state will also undoubtedly be pleased if the new administration nominates Richard Schifter to become U.S. ambassador to Israel. The New York Times reported Wednesday that the administration was considering such a move, but there was no confirmation from administration officials.

Schifter, who is actively involved in the Jewish community, served as assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs in the Bush and Reagan administrations.

There were also reports that the Clinton team was close to naming Martin Indyk, head of the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy, to a National Security Council post responsible for at least part of the array of Middle East issues. Such an appointment would be welcomed by many Jewish groups.

**FROM AS FAR AWAY AS HOT SPRINGS, ARK.
JEWS COME TO CELEBRATE INAUGURATION****By Deborah Kalb
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Among the thousands who came to Washington this week to celebrate the inauguration of Bill Clinton as president were Rabbi Matthew Friedman and about 15 others from the 100-strong Jewish community of Hot Springs, Ark.

Rabbi Friedman, who leads Congregation House of Israel in Hot Springs, where Clinton spent his boyhood, said his flock is proud and happy.

At least, "the ones who are here are

happy," he amended. Anyone who is not happy, he supposed, was back in Arkansas.

Like the rabbi, Jews from all over the country gathered in Washington in a celebratory mood. After all, over 80 percent of Jewish voters had supported the Clinton-Gore ticket.

At a breakfast reception Tuesday sponsored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the atmosphere was joyous and the food lavish.

Members of Congress joined with representatives of the Jewish community and others in eating lox and bagels, drinking orange juice, and basking in the Democratic victory.

Dr. Ruth Westheimer and actor Richard Dreyfuss were among the crowd that turned out for the reception, held in a capacious hotel room just up the street from the Capitol.

James Carville, Clinton's Cajun campaign strategist, received a large round of applause from the assembled hundreds, as he gleefully pumped one fist in the air.

Carville was one of the featured speakers, along with newly appointed Democratic National Committee Chairman David Wilhelm, who told the crowd of his experiences on a trip to Israel.

On the trip, Wilhelm said, he found that the Israelis were "fighting for something larger" than themselves, and this attitude, he felt at the time, was missing in America. Maybe, he said, it had been around at the time of the Revolution.

The Clinton election, he said, recaptured a little of that feeling.

'Hands-On Attention' Urged

Across town from the AIPAC affair, Americans for Peace Now held its own reception Tuesday, at a private home in Washington's Dupont Circle neighborhood. The reception, attended by about 100 people, honored Peter Edelman and Sara Ehrman, Peace Now members who have been very active with the Clinton campaign.

Actor Dreyfuss showed up there too, along with various Peace Now members including Co-chair Letty Cottin Pogrebin, who discussed a recent trip to Israel and the administered territories she made with a group of American Jewish and Palestinian women.

According to many in the Jewish community, Peace Now has taken on new importance with its connections to the Clinton inner circle.

Another Jewish group feeling triumphant this week was the National Jewish Democratic Council, which formed two years ago to build Jewish support for the Democratic Party.

The NJDC hosted a fund-raiser Monday morning for newly elected Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.). Over 100 people crowded into a room near Dupont Circle to hear Feinstein, NJDC Vice Chair Stuart Eizenstat and others.

In strongly pro-Israel remarks, Feinstein discussed the importance of the peace process and the need to curb arms sales to the Middle East.

"Without hands-on attention from the president and the secretary of state," Feinstein warned, "the peace process will disintegrate."

Jewish leaders also were in evidence at a luncheon this week for ethnic groups co-sponsored by the public liaison office of the Presidential Inaugural Committee.

Dubbed the American Reunion Luncheon, the

event featured brief remarks from luminaries representing the full constellation of American ethnic groups.

Hyman Bookbinder, the former longtime Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee who helped found the NJDC, was the Jewish speaker at the event.

Other Ethnic Groups Seek Advice

Bookbinder, like many at the event, which took place on Martin Luther King Day, referred to the late civil rights leader and his work for justice.

"For more than half a century," Bookbinder said, "Jewish Americans have given the preponderance of their support to the Democratic Party, because, despite differences now and then, they have been persuaded that the dream King dreamed for all of us could best be achieved by Democratic leadership."

The hundreds of people in attendance, who feasted on chicken, rice and sherbet, then had a chance to ask questions.

An Indian American woman asked Bookbinder how Asian Indians as a group could be more involved in the American "mainstream." Bookbinder referred the woman to Jason Isaacson, director of government and international relations for the AJCommittee.

After the event ended, Isaacson said, he was surrounded by people of varying ethnicities, from Indian to Indochinese, all interested in discussing how their respective ethnic groups could be more involved.

Isaacson, like many in Washington this week, was pleased.

REPEAL OF BAN ON PLO CONTACTS TOUTED AS GESTURE OF GOOD WILL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli officials are hoping that new momentum will be injected into the peace process in the wake of the Knesset's decision this week to lift a long-standing ban on contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Although the government remains firm in its position that the PLO not take part directly in the negotiations, officials hope the Knesset's action Tuesday night will be interpreted as a goodwill gesture to Palestinians and will deflect some of the criticism leveled at Israel since its expulsion last month of 415 Moslem fundamentalists from the administered territories.

The ban on contacts with the PLO, which until now has been regarded as a terrorist organization, was repealed by a comfortable 39-20 margin.

But the late-night vote took place only after stormy debate and numerous attempts by members of the opposition Likud bloc to introduce amendments that, in effect, would have left the ban intact.

Under the law as now changed, Israeli citizens can still be prosecuted for meeting with PLO members, but it must be shown that damage to the security or interests of the state was intended or later resulted.

Under the previous ban, enacted in 1986, any meeting with PLO members was illegal.

The new law, as successfully amended last week by opposition parties, also stipulates that civil servants get prior authorization to meet with "representatives of terrorist organizations."

According to other conditions imposed by the opposition, a complete ban will still apply to meetings with representatives of three Moslem fundamentalist groups: Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Hezbollah.

The vote was the result of months of work by members of the Labor Party and left-wing Meretz bloc that began soon after the new government was formed last summer.

"Tonight it has been proven that a political turnover took place last summer," said a triumphant Haim Ramon, minister of health, as he watched the vote tally being recorded on an electronic screen.

Abie Nathan Headed For Tunis

Veteran peace crusader Abie Nathan, one of just two Israelis ever to be jailed under the old law for meeting with the PLO, watched the Knesset vote from the visitor's gallery with obvious satisfaction.

Nathan said he would fly to Tunis to deliver the news personally to Yasir Arafat and that he would also ask the PLO chief to make a reciprocal gesture.

Energy Minister Amnon Rubinstein of Meretz climbed up to the visitor's gallery to embrace Nathan after the vote, telling him, "We have won the fight."

Although the new measure was hotly debated throughout various stages during the past months, the final vote was conducted in the absence of several key players in both the ruling coalition and opposition parties.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing Tsomet party's Rafael Eitan were all absent from the chamber when the vote was taken.

Rabin is known to be concerned that the Knesset action might encourage the United States to support calls for the PLO to play a more direct role in the peace talks.

According to the rules agreed to by all parties at the start of the peace talks in Madrid last year, the PLO was officially shut out of the negotiations.

However, it is well-known that the Palestinian negotiators from the West Bank and Gaza Strip take their cues from the PLO leadership based in Tunis.

WOMAN BRUTALLY MURDERED IN HOLON

JERUSALEM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Police detectives suspect that the brutal murder of a Jewish prostitute found dead Wednesday in Holon, near Tel Aviv, was carried out by Arab nationalists with political motivations.

The victim, 37-year-old Sarah Sharon, was repeatedly and viciously stabbed to death. Her body was discovered Wednesday morning in Holon's industrial area.

A note in Arabic, left pinned to her, promised further killings "unless the Hamas deportees are returned."

The note apparently referred to the more than 400 Palestinians connected to the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement who were deported by Israel last month to Lebanon.

The note, together with the fact that the victim's money was not taken, led police to suspect a nationalist motive. The country's domestic intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, has been called in to investigate the case.

ISRAEL AGAIN GETS MIXED REVIEWS IN ANNUAL U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Israel received mixed reviews in the State Department's annual human rights report, issued Tuesday on the last full day of the Bush administration.

The report found that the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the administered territories rose sharply last year. But it also noted "some improvements in the human rights picture" there.

The report, covering the human rights situation in 189 countries, reserved its sharpest criticism for the Serbian-led "ethnic cleansing" campaign of forcible relocation, rape, torture and murder in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It said the massive scale of the atrocities "dwarfs anything seen in Europe since Nazi times."

Jewish groups have been active in urging the U.S. government to take stronger action on Bosnia, because many Jews see parallels between the Nazi Holocaust and events in the former Yugoslav republic.

In Israel, there was no official reaction to the report, which is prepared by the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, with input from international human rights groups.

But Israeli officials said the report had failed to take into consideration the country's need to crack down on the continuing spate of intifada-related violence, which endangers the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The report found that despite an "overall reduction in intifada violence," the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces rose to 158 last year from 98 in 1991, a 62 percent increase.

Killings By Undercover Units Cited

But it found that an even greater number of Palestinians were killed by fellow Arabs in the territories. This number also rose, from 140 in 1991 to 182 last year, due to an escalation of "internecine violence" in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians were also responsible for killing 23 Israelis last year. The number of Israelis wounded by Palestinians was estimated at between 322 and 700, an increase over 1991.

Of the 158 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in 1992, "at least 45 were killed by undercover units operating disguised as Palestinians," the report said.

The report also noted charges by some human rights groups of undercover units targeting "certain activists for execution."

While Israeli government policy does not permit this, the report said, "numerous reports suggest that the (undercover) units frequently killed suspects under circumstances in which it may have been possible to apprehend them without killing."

The State Department report also included some bright spots concerning Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the territories. It noted a decreasing use of house demolition and administrative detention as punitive measures, and said that curfews were used "less extensively" in 1992 than the prior year.

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

CLINTON PICK FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL BACKS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM LEGISLATION

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Attorney General-designate Zoe Baird has come out strongly in favor of legislation that would make it harder for the government to encroach on free exercise of religion.

The legislation, known as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, has wide support in Jewish and other religious communities. It was designed to circumvent a 1990 Supreme Court ruling permitting Oregon to prosecute Native Americans for using the hallucinogen peyote in religious rituals.

Jewish groups consider the case a dangerous precedent for laws that could restrict other ritual practices, such as kosher slaughter.

The issue came up during Baird's confirmation hearings this week before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In response to a question from Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Baird said she thought that returning to the pre-1990 standards "should be one of the highest priorities in the early days of the administration."

She added that there was "an anxiety now that really just need not exist" that states will begin examining and possibly regulating "the practices of various religious groups, and particularly religious minority groups in different communities."

"The legislation is a top priority for virtually all religious communities, and it's gratifying to see that it will be for the attorney general as well," commented Mark Pelavin, Washington representative for the American Jewish Congress.

President Clinton has also said he supports the legislation, which adds to Jewish groups' optimism that the current Congress could enact the bill.

KYRGYZSTAN TO OPEN JERUSALEM EMBASSY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- The president of the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, a Moslem stronghold, has announced his country will open an embassy in Jerusalem rather than Tel Aviv, where nearly all other foreign embassies are located.

Because the legal and political status of Jerusalem is the subject of a dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbors, only Costa Rica and El Salvador have put their nation's embassies in Israel's declared capital of Jerusalem.

Askar Akayev, president of Kyrgyzstan, made the announcement after lunching with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Wednesday, the second full day of his three-day state visit to Israel.

Although Israelis were pleased and surprised by the statement, they also noted that Akayev had mentioned a day earlier that he hoped the "Palestinian nation" would soon achieve independence.

For its part, Israel announced it would open an embassy in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan.

Akayev's visit to Israel is the first by a president of one of the Moslem republics of the former Soviet Union.

Israeli officials said the republic is interested in developing economic and scientific ties between the two countries.

POLICE STOP 1,000 ANTI-SEMITIC FANS FROM ATTENDING DUTCH SOCCER GAME

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Riot police prevented 1,000 soccer fans who were singing anti-Semitic songs and shouting neo-Nazi slogans from attending a soccer match last Sunday in Diemen, an eastern suburb of Amsterdam.

The fans had traveled from Utrecht to Diemen to cheer on their home team, which was playing against the Amsterdam team Ajax.

As the fans got off their train in Diemen yelling anti-Semitic slogans and saluting in Nazi style, police ordered all the Utrecht fans to return home immediately by train.

Two fans who resisted police were arrested.

Police also found leaflets with anti-Semitic song lyrics distributed on the train.

This is not the first time the Ajax team has been the target of anti-Semitic epithets. Some consider it a Jewish team because in the past it has had leading players of Jewish origin and because the father of its chairman is Jewish.

Fans from opposing soccer teams are known not only to shout anti-Semitic slogans but also to scream out racist epithets at the black players of Ajax while throwing bananas at them and making jungle noises.

Anti-Semitism has become almost commonplace at soccer matches here and in other European countries, notably Italy.

In November, Dutch police arrested 20 people at a soccer match after the group erupted in anti-Semitic and racist catcalls and made hissing sounds to imitate Nazi gas chambers.

Last August, another Dutch soccer team, the Go Ahead Eagles, took measures to prevent anti-Semitism at its matches. The team installed closed-circuit video in its stadium and pledged to expel those found expressing racist views for at least six months.

After last Sunday's incident, the chairman of the Utrecht team's fan club said it was unjust that the police ordered all fans back to Utrecht, including those who did not join in the anti-Semitic singing.

Another Utrecht club official said the trouble-makers did not belong to the club's regular fans.

Police have opened an investigation to find out who distributed the anti-Semitic leaflets.

FRENCH SKINHEADS WHO VANDALIZED JEWISH CEMETERY GET 8 MONTHS JAIL

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Two French skinheads who desecrated a Jewish cemetery in the southeastern city of Lyon last September were sentenced Monday to eight months in jail.

The two soccer fans had been drinking heavily in a bar after watching a soccer match and later broke into the city's Jewish cemetery where they broke gravestones and daubed them with anti-Semitic slogans such as "Adolf Hitler is our father" and "Death to the Jews."

The two youths, Gregory Tomitch, 19, and Nicolas Mounier, 20, were arrested a few weeks after the episode during scuffles with police.

During the trial, the two skinheads did little to conceal their anti-Semitic attitudes. They described their behavior as "nationalistic" and explained their actions in the Jewish cemetery as a "simple joke" meant to "bother people."

Tomitch added that he was attracted to Adolf Hitler's ideas.

In addition to the eight-month sentence, the court gave them an eight-month suspended sentence and ordered a three-year probation period.

The two were also barred indefinitely from soccer matches and ordered to pay fines of about \$2,000 to each of four plaintiffs: the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the local Jewish community, the Movement Against Racism and for Peace, and the city of Lyon.

Alain Jakubowicz, who represented the plaintiffs and who is also a close aide of Lyon's mayor, Michel Noir, told the court that it was judging "kids, but not kid stuff."

Comparing recent events with Germany in the 1930s, Jakubowicz warned that "it was the very same youngsters, in flight jackets and army boots, who in 1933 threw stones through the windows of Jewish shops."

JEWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES FIGHT ATTEMPT TO BAN KOSHER SLAUGHTER

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- The Jewish community in New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, has pledged to "do everything possible" to stop the introduction of a law to outlaw shechitah, the kosher slaughter of animals.

Professor Graham de Vahl Davis, public relations chairman of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, said a report on cruelty to animals issued by the state government's Agricultural Ministry, which recommended shechitah be banned following the example of "several European countries," was wrong in its interpretation of how to humanely slaughter animals.

The Jewish community has reacted angrily to the recommendations contained in the report, which was prepared by a team led by Professor John Egerton of the New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council. It insisted all animals be electronically stunned prior to slaughter.

Animals that have been physically harmed by stunning are not regarded as acceptable for kosher consumption.

In 1992, the Australian Jewish community successfully blocked efforts to have shechitah outlawed on a national level, arguing that shechitah was not only humane but that to outlaw the practice would constitute an infringement on the human rights of kosher consumers.

However, each state government has the power to regulate its own farm industry, and the New South Wales report specifically concluded that the welfare of animals should take precedence over religious beliefs.

The number of people in New South Wales who observe kashrut is in dispute, with the state government estimating 3,500 to 4,000 people would be affected by the change. But the Jewish Board of Deputies says that as many as half of the state's 40,000 Jews "observe kosher food laws strictly."

Michael Marx, president of the Board of Deputies, said he had written to state Premier John Fahey to express the community's concerns and that a meeting with the government was currently being scheduled.

The recommendation was contained in a comprehensive discussion paper which called for a series of changes intended as amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.