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CHRISTOPHER ARRIVES IN ISRAEL, IS EXPECTED TO FOCUS ON GOLAN

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived here Monday evening amid expectations that his talks with Israeli officials would focus on the future of the Golan Heights, rather than the fate of the Palestinian deportees in Lebanon.

Israeli officials said they were encouraged by public remarks made by the Syrians after discussions with Christopher in Damascus, but were waiting to be briefed by Christopher directly.

Syrian President Hafez Assad reportedly told Christopher his country would not condition resumption of the peace talks on the return of the deported Palestinians to the administered territories.

At a news conference Sunday in Damascus, Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa called the peace process "broader and more important" than the controversy over the deportees.

That appeared to be a different line than the one taken last week by Egyptian officials, who told Christopher that Israel would have to make further concessions on the issue if the stalled peace talks were to resume.

In the aftermath of those statements, Israeli officials had expected to come under at least indirect pressure from Christopher to speed up the return of the deportees.

But in the wake of the Syrian statement, the Palestinian deportees in Lebanon said Sunday that they would accept a compromise solution that would have them return to Israel in stages, and not all immediately, as originally demanded.

The report said they would accept that compromise only if Israel announced it would stop using deportation as a means of punishment.

The feeling in Jerusalem after hearing the statements from Damascus and Lebanon was that Christopher would focus on the Golan instead in his talks Tuesday with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

U.S. To Play More Active Role

Christopher was expected to press Rabin on how far Israel is willing to withdraw on the Golan.

Rabin's position so far has been to agree in principle to at least some withdrawal from the Golan. But he has said he would discuss it only once the Syrians have declared their readiness to sign a full peace treaty with Israel.

Christopher is now expected to try to accelerate the negotiating process by hearing Israel's bottom line on the Golan.

In recent days, the secretary of state has also indicated that the United States will take a more active role in the peace process than did the Bush administration. In Damascus, he indicated the United States might present its own proposals to bridge gaps between Israeli and Arab positions.

This was something of a change of tone from a statement last week, in which Christopher said he was going to the Middle East merely to listen to the various parties. Some interpreted the remark to mean that Washington would take a relatively passive role in the talks, allowing the respective parties to work their problems out among themselves.

This in the past has been Israel's preference. The Palestinians, on the other hand, would like Washington to play a more active role that would include pressuring Israel to make concessions.

Israel's new ambassador to Washington, Itamar Rabinovich, said the Americans would only become "active partners" in the peace process if they feel there is a good chance for success.

Rabinovich has been heading the Israeli team negotiating with Syria.

Golan Settlers Plan Protest

Christopher landed in Tel Aviv on Monday night, after making a previously unannounced visit to Beirut, the first by a U.S. secretary of state in nearly a decade.

In anticipation of his arrival, Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met Sunday and Monday to consult and coordinate with each other on the pending talks.

Rabin also spoke with Christopher by telephone Sunday during the U.S. secretary's visit to Jordan.

Christopher was expected to begin his Israel working tour Tuesday morning in a meeting with Peres, to be followed by a meeting with Rabin.

Christopher was then scheduled to visit Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and museum, and meet later in the day with a Palestinian delegation.

Palestinians were hoping that, in a break from the past, the meeting would be held in Orient House, the headquarters of the Palestinian delegation in eastern Jerusalem. Past meetings between U.S. secretaries of state and Palestinians have been held at the American Consulate in western Jerusalem.

Christopher was expected to begin his second day here Wednesday with a helicopter tour of the north, to be followed by a meeting with former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, head of the opposition Likud.

Israelis fearful of concessions on the Golan Heights have prepared an unusual protest to coincide with Christopher's visit.

Settlers from a moshav in the Golan are trucking tons of snow from the Golan mountains to Jerusalem, where they plan to build an igloo in front of the Prime Minister's office.

The intended message is that Rabin should freeze any discussions with Syria regarding Israeli concessions or withdrawal from the strategic plateau.

HEZBOLLAH MILITARY EXERCISES NOT SEEN AS A SERIOUS THREAT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- Israeli officials and military affairs experts have downplayed the importance of large-scale military training exercises reportedly being carried out by Hezbollah forces in northern Lebanon.

According to reports from the area, some 500 Hezbollah guerrillas took part in the largest "war game" maneuvers ever performed by the Iranian-backed extremist organization. The exercise, on Sunday, was carried out with funds and

equipment supplied by Teheran under the guidance of Iranian military personnel.

The practice included the use of heavy equipment and sophisticated explosives in a simulated attack on an Israeli village, the reports said.

But Yossi Olmert, an Israeli expert on Lebanon and Syria and former member of an Israeli peace negotiating team, said there was no cause for concern and that reports of the maneuver were inflated.

Olmert said he thought Hezbollah was trying to send a message to U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher during his visit to the region.

The organization, Olmert said, was reminding Christopher that he should be aware of those regional forces opposed to the peace talks and recognize the aims of Hezbollah and its Iranian backers.

"And he should bear this in mind when talking to the Syrians in Damascus, as the Syrians have a major say on what happens in Lebanon, where Hezbollah operates," Olmert said.

Olmert said he did not think much of reports about "moderation" being shown by Hezbollah. "I am fully tuned in to what the Hezbollah says. But one should pay less attention to what Hezbollah and its leaders say than to what its members do on the ground.

"There may have been a recent change in the tune of Hezbollah, but on the ground they have exacerbated their terrorist attitudes and activities," Olmert told Israel Radio.

U.N. BODY RECOMMENDS SENDING INVESTIGATOR TO TERRITORIES
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 21 (JTA) -- Israeli officials say they doubt a recommendation by the U.N. Human Rights Commission to send an investigator to the administered territories will be acted upon by the U.N. General Assembly.

Political sources here described the resolution, passed last week in Geneva, as a "routine decision adopted by this forum almost every year."

Moreover, political observers say the move was adopted this year with the support of 26 countries, compared to 30 last year.

The Human Rights Commission resolution to dispatch an investigator has never been acted on in the past, and Israel regards the resolution mainly as politically motivated statement, explained by the high number of Arab and Moslem countries belonging to the commission.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Eviatar Manor said the resolution is detached from reality, since it does not include "even one word" in favor of the Middle East peace process.

The commission called for a special emissary to be appointed who would investigate suspicions of human rights violations by Israel in the territories. Formally, the resolution will be brought as a recommendation to the U.N. General Assembly.

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 26-16. Among those voting against the resolution were the United States, Russia, Japan and European countries. Five members abstained.

The Human Rights Commission has also been the target of Jewish criticism for failing to condemn anti-Semitic violence as well as for its inclusion of an offensive statement by the Palestine Liberation Organization that was included as part of the commission's official records.

TERRITORIES' DEPENDENCE ON ISRAEL POSES CHALLENGE FOR AUTONOMY PLAN
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- A new study done by Tel Aviv University has shown that the infrastructure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is too underdeveloped to independently sustain the residents' current standard of living.

Economic studies of the territories, such as the present one, have taken on added importance as policy-makers try to project what type of autonomy arrangements for Palestinians might be feasible.

The economic life of Palestinians in the territories is highly dependent and intertwined with the more modernized economy of Israel proper, said the study by Yihai Dror. It was recently published by Tel Aviv University's Armand Hammer Fund for Economic Cooperation in the Middle East.

Dror said it would cost $10 billion to develop the territories' infrastructure to a level close to Israel's own.

According to the latest data available, per capita gross domestic product in the Gaza Strip reached $700 in 1990. However, per capita consumption was $870 in the same year.

In general terms, this means that more money is spent in Gaza than is made. The difference is made up with money earned by Palestinian laborers who work in Israel proper.

The same is true of the West Bank. The per capita gross domestic product in the West Bank was $1,335 in 1987, the last year for which reliable data are available. However, that was $130 less than the per capita consumption during the same year.

For the territories to develop a more solid, independent industrial and economic base, the electrical infrastructure would require a major overhaul.

Bad Phones, Water Shortages

Dror's report noted that the Arab-owned East Jerusalem Electric Company is capable of producing only 5 percent of the electricity it provides. The company buys the rest from the Israel Electric Company.

In addition, the stations that relay the electricity are already operating at maximum capability.

Within the West Bank, many villages are not connected to the electric grid, and elsewhere the electrical lines are poor.

It would cost $1.5 billion to add 1,000 megawatts of electricity and improve the network in the territories, the report says.

Communication systems in the territories are also poor. The telephone system in the Gaza Strip is in poor condition, being operated manually and lacking spare parts.

The West Bank's telephone system is automatic, but neither modern nor sophisticated.

Finally, both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip suffer from a shortage of water. The shortage in the Gaza Strip is particularly acute because the area is densely populated.

The report calculates that a per capita investment of $6,000 is needed to raise the local infrastructure to Israel's level. But that is roughly four times the per capita gross domestic product.

Hence, several years and much foreign aid will be needed to raise the territories' infrastructure to that of Israel, Dror concludes.

JEWISH GROUPS WELCOME CREATION OF A BALKAN WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL
By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are welcoming news that the United Nations will set up a war crimes tribunal to prosecute those committing atrocities in the former Yugoslavia.

Organizational officials say the tribunal will send the proper message to war criminals in the Balkans and around the world, causing them to think twice about their actions. But at the same time, they caution that the practical results of such an international tribunal are not yet clear.

The U.N. Security Council voted Monday to create the tribunal, which would be the first such entity since the aftermath of World War II.

Over the past few months, Jewish groups have been among those calling for the United States and the international community to take stronger action to curb atrocities taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Many in the Jewish community feel the Serbian "ethnic cleansing" campaign in Bosnia is reminiscent of some of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

At its annual plenum last week, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, an umbrella group of national and local Jewish organizations, passed a resolution calling for an international war crimes tribunal.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, said the Security Council's decision to do so is "very pivotal," whether or not the tribunal succeeds in prosecuting war criminals.

If the tribunal fails, Cooper said, "Nazi-like behavior" could increase, and if it succeeds, it "might force people around the world to take a look" at such behavior.

"The U.N. has taken an important step," he said.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, said that even if the tribunal, like the Nuremberg trials, succeeds only in bringing a small fraction of the war criminals to justice, it will have merit.

"Sometimes a symbolic action, for the sake of history, is almost as important as the degree of justice meted out," he said.

'A Moral Message Of Conscience'

Steinberg said the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which has been prosecuting Nazi war criminals, will likely play an important role in lending its expertise.

Abraham Foxman, a Holocaust survivor who is national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said that "every Jew and every human being with a memory of the Holocaust welcomes this decision."

He said he wished there had been a United Nations or a similar body with the power to set up a war crimes tribunal in 1933, when the Nazis first came to power in Germany.

Foxman said there is "always a need to deliver a moral message of conscience, and at the very least, that's what this decision will do."

"It's an important first step," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative for the American Jewish Congress. Pelavin said his group has called repeatedly for the creation of a war crimes tribunal.

"We're pleased to see that the U.N. has taken steps necessary to constitute a tribunal," he said.

AJCongress recently took the lead in sending a letter to Madeleine Albright, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, calling for full funding of a U.N. war crimes tribunal.

"We think this is an important step being taken now," said Rabbi Andrew Baker, director of European affairs for the American Jewish Committee, which has also called for a tribunal.

It is "the right thing to do," Baker said, adding his group hopes it will provide "some evidence, some help in moving along efforts to bring an end to the conflict."

YUGOSLAV IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL DIVIDED OVER BOSNIAN REFUGEES
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- Israel's absorption of 83 Moslem refugees from war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina has stirred up debate among Israelis originally from the various former republics of Yugoslavia.

Jews from Serbian regions have pointed to the Croatian government's behavior during World War II to make their case that the Serbs treated Jews better than the Bosnians and Croatians. They feel the current conflict has unfairly maligned the reputation of the Serbian people.

Jews from Bosnia have countered by making similar statements against Serbian treatment of Jews.

Rabbi Zvi Azariya, chairman of the Association of Jewish Warriors in Yugoslavia, has said that Israel's decision to absorb only Bosnian refugees is an affront.

In taking that action, Azariya told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the Israeli government failed to recognize the fact that the Croatian-Bosnian government collaborated with the Nazi occupation army and was directly responsible for the extermination of Yugoslav Jews in World War II.

"We Jews are known as merciful," said Azariya, "and therefore one cannot come out against the absorption of Bosnians who were rescued from the present chaos in former Yugoslavia. However, Israel should have at least absorbed an equal number of Serb refugees," he said.

Azariya, who served as an officer in the Yugoslav army during World War II, charged that the local Croatian-Bosnian government helped round up the Jews of Bosnia and Croatia and transport them to the Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia, where many were murdered.

But Shlomit Lussic, a Bosnian Jew who is a member of the Association of Yugoslav Immigrants in Israel, told JTA she was highly offended by such comments.

Lussic said that Azariya and other pro-Serbian voices are ignoring the fact that some of the Bosnians absorbed in Israel were virtually rescued out of concentration camps operated by the Serbs.

Furthermore, Lussic said that just as evidence existed regarding Bosnian and Croatian collaboration with the Nazis, there was similar evidence of Serbs who had done the same.

Lussic warned that bickering and accusations among the different factions in the Yugoslav Jewish community in Israel would ruin the positive effect of Israel's humanitarian act.

ZIONISTS AND FUND-RAISERS FAIL TO RESOLVE DISPUTE OVER 2 POSTS
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- The standoff between the "Zionist" and "fund-raiser" factions of the Jewish Agency for Israel continues, despite efforts by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to intervene.

In a meeting last week, Rabin asked the top fund-raisers to drop their demands that two posts in the quasi-governmental body be eliminated to avoid duplication.

His request was refused by Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, and Max Fisher, its founding chairman.

Instead, in a compromise announced Sunday that promises to keep the controversy simmering, Rabin will study the issue and recommend a solution after Passover.

This was agreed upon by a six-member committee of top leaders of the two sides. Both sides are represented equally on the committee, explaining the deadlock.

A similar situation prevails in the Jewish Agency as a whole, where the leadership and governance is split evenly between representatives of the World Zionist Organization -- made up of Diaspora Zionist groups, such as Hadassah, and Israeli political activists -- and representatives of the United Jewish Appeal and similar fund-raising bodies around the world.

The Zionists have charged that the effort to eliminate the department heads reflects the desire of the fund-raisers to "de-Zionize" the Jewish Agency and assume full control.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres weighed in earlier this month on behalf of the Zionists, issuing a sharply worded attack on the fund-raisers.

While the fund-raisers refused to heed the requests from Rabin and Peres to drop their demand to eliminate the department heads, their willingness to let Rabin find a solution could reflect a desire to quietly retreat.

It was hoped in Jewish Agency circles that their decision would enable the Board of Governors session taking place here in Jerusalem this week to proceed with other matters, without being overshadowed by this acrimonious dispute.

In a statement issued by the committee of six, they spoke of progress on four other structural issues: the size and structure of the Board of Governors, the budget of the World Zionist Organization, the committees of the Board of Governors, and the "advise and consent" process by which the fund-raisers approve or veto candidates for Jewish Agency posts put forward by the Zionists.

JEWISH AGENCY HEARS ROSY FORECAST ON ECONOMY FROM FINANCE MINISTER
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- Finance Minister Avraham Shohat told the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors this week that a strong economy is "the best and main solution" for absorbing immigrants and that the new government's policies are spurring economic growth.

But Shohat conceded that the government's best efforts to create jobs have not yet made a dent in the 11 percent unemployment rate.

"We're doing the best we can," said Shohat. He pointed out that 75,000 new jobs were created last year and argued against short-term quick fixes advocated by some politicians here.

Shohat pointed to recently stepped up spending on infrastructure, education and investment incentives, saying it would lead to a healthier investment climate, a more competitive work force and long-term job growth.

The finance minister acknowledged that unemployment is key. "It means 200,000 who want to work can't find work," he said.

"And it affects the decision to make aliyah," he said. "The fact that it is quite hard to find a job here," especially in potential immigrants' professions, directly influences their decision to come to Israel, he said.

But Shohat emphasized the positive in his presentation to the Jewish Agency leaders. He cited last year's growth rate of 7 percent, an export increase of 11 percent and progress toward privatization of state-owned industries.

Shohat also predicted a boon in foreign investment in Israel in response to prospects for regional peace agreements. The desire to invest here is "unbelievable," he said.

SOIL FROM 39 HOLOCAUST SITES REBURIED AT WASHINGTON MEMORIAL
By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (JTA) -- In a moving ceremony at the still-incomplete U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, soil from 39 Holocaust sites was interred this week in the museum's Hall of Remembrance, where it will rest beneath an eternal flame.

The hour-long soil dedication ceremony Monday, attended by several hundred people, including Holocaust survivors and U.S. military personnel, is part of a series of events leading up to the museum's long-awaited opening April 26.

Soil from concentration camp sites was mingled in Monday's ceremony with soil from the gravesites of U.S. military liberators of the camps, including Arlington National Cemetery, in a literal and symbolic joining of survivors with liberators.

The ceremony was dedicated to "the memory of those without graves."

Over the past year, survivors and others traveled to sites in Eastern and Western Europe to gather the soil. It was placed in urns, one for each site. On Monday, the names of the sites were read out as people reverently spilled the ashes into the spot over which the eternal flame will burn.

The last set of ashes, from Arlington cemetery, was spread over the ashes from the other sites.

Harvey Meyerhoff, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, welcomed visitors and told them about his trip to Europe to gather soil.

Also making remarks was Miles Lerman, a Holocaust survivor who is the Holocaust council's chairman of international relations.

"We dwell on the past not to inflame fury," said Lerman, "but because we believe that in the ashes of this horrible chapter lies a lesson essential to our collective future as a democratic and free society -- a society where, thank God, human differences are respected and human rights are preserved."

The U.S. Army Band played selections including "Ani Ma'amin" and "The Partisan's Hymn," as a few in the audience quietly wept.