

**PALESTINIANS SEND OUT MIXED SIGNALS
ON WHETHER THEY WILL RETURN TO TALKS****By Deborah Kalb**
States News Service

WASHINGTON, April 15 (JTA) -- Palestinian participation in next week's round of Middle East peace talks remains in doubt, as American officials continue consultations at the State Department with Israeli and Arab representatives.

U.S. officials are publicly optimistic about a Palestinian return to the talks, but Palestinian representatives in the administered territories and elsewhere have been sending mixed signals.

While the consultations at the State Department were originally designed as "pre-peace-talk" discussions of substantive proposals the parties would offer once the talks resumed, the consultations ended up also focusing on what might bring the Palestinians back to the table, sources said.

A group of Palestinians, including the head of their negotiating delegation, Haidar Abdel-Shafi, met Wednesday with State Department officials, including Assistant Secretary of State Edward Djerejian, and some of the Palestinians met again Thursday with American officials.

One Arab American leader commented Thursday that the meetings between the Americans and the Palestinians were hampered by a "discrepancy in terms of the expectations of the different parties."

Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans, said that while the Americans wanted to discuss the substantive issues that would be under consideration once the peace talks resumed, the Palestinians were "not at that stage," and wanted to talk about what they would need to assure their return to the table.

The Palestinians, Jahshan said, were not satisfied with "conditional" proposals premised on a stated Palestinian agreement to return to the talks. Instead, he said, they "would like tangible announcements."

U.S. Official Sees Ambassador

Djerejian and his advisers also met this week with delegations from Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The assistant secretary met Thursday with Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich. According to Ruth Yaron, the spokeswoman at the Israeli Embassy here, the talks focused on gestures Israel could make to advance the peace process once the negotiations had actually started.

Yaron said the discussion focused on "thoughts about gestures or topics that could be raised in the negotiations that might be helpful to advancing the peace process."

The Palestinians have refused to return to the talks until some issues, including the return of the 415 Palestinians deported by Israel in December, are resolved to their satisfaction.

But Yaron said the discussions between Djerejian and Rabinovich did not deal with the deportations or other such issues. She said it was "pretty clear" and acceptable to the Americans that there would not be any discussion of such matters before the talks began.

Israeli officials have previously praised the

Clinton administration for not backing away from a compromise the United States and Israel reached in February on the deportation issue.

Yaron said that the sense was that the Palestinians would return to the talks.

While the State Department would not comment specifically about what was discussed at the meetings, spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters Thursday that the United States does expect all the parties to show up next Tuesday. So far, only the Israelis have accepted the invitation.

The Arab parties were expected to announce their position after a summit meeting in Damascus this weekend.

PLO Rejects Adviser's Statement

The uncertain mood both in Washington and in Israel about Palestinian participation was in sharp contrast to the optimism emanating from the summit meeting that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held Wednesday in Ismailia, Egypt.

From the remarks the two leaders made at a joint news conference Wednesday, it appeared an agreement had already been reached about Palestinian participation, and that it would be formally announced at the meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Damascus.

But in Tunis, the Palestine Liberation Organization distanced itself from a statement made by one of Yasir Arafat's advisers, Bassam Abu-Sharif, that the Palestinian delegation would indeed show up for the talks in Washington next Tuesday.

The PLO issued a statement Thursday saying Abu-Sharif's announcement "did not reflect the view of the Palestinian leadership." Moreover, the statement said measures will be taken against Abu-Sharif "in due course."

And in the territories, a member of the advisory board to the Palestinian delegation, Ziad Abu-Ziad, came up with a new precondition Thursday for the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table: that Israel should allow residents of the territories, which have been sealed off from Israel proper indefinitely, to enter Jerusalem.

The ban on Palestinian entry into Jerusalem has created hardships for the population, because the largely Arab eastern part of the city houses many Palestinian institutions, including the Mokassed Hospital on the Mount of Olives.

Abu-Ziad's demand was supported Thursday by Knesset members Naomi Chazan and Dedi Zucker of the left-wing Meretz bloc.

In Washington, Jahshan of the National Association of Arab Americans, who had previously been optimistic that the problems preventing a Palestinian return could be resolved, said he was getting "a bit nervous" at this point, though he still thought it was possible the Palestinians would come back to the talks.

Gail Pressberg, president of Americans for Peace Now, said Thursday that she thought the Palestinians would return, but that the situation was "pretty dicey."

"It's what I've been saying for months," she said. "You won't know" about Palestinian participation "until the night before."

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem.)

**ARABS FROM TERRITORIES AWAIT PAY,
AS EMPLOYERS AVOID SENDING MONEY**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 15 (JTA) -- Israel's continuing ban on Palestinians from the administered territories from entering Israel proper has left some 23,000 Palestinian laborers waiting to receive last month's paychecks.

Beyond the strain placed on those who cannot reach jobs in Israel proper is their inability to collect back pay.

The government, for its part, has suggested that monies owed be sent directly to workers in the territories.

But it appears that many Jewish employers have been taking advantage of the closure to avoid paying their Palestinian employees.

Labor Minister Ora Namir said she had instructed the Employment Service to take legal action against employers who would not honor wage commitments to their workers.

An estimated 120,000 Palestinians crossed into Israel proper on a daily basis before the closure, which has so far proven successful in ending the wave of violence that claimed 15 Jewish lives last month.

The ban has been partially lifted in recent days to allow small numbers of Palestinians to reach their jobs in Israel, but only a trickle of workers arrived Thursday.

Although the authorities have issued 8,800 permits, only 3,138 entered to work.

This seemed to be due to a combination of reasons, including permits not reaching the laborers, bureaucracy and local pressure on Palestinians not to return to work as long as the general ban remains in place.

So far, the government has allowed only Palestinian farm workers to enter Israel. By the beginning of next week, permits were expected to be given to workers in the construction industry.

The intention is to gradually lift the ban, beginning with the heads of families and veteran workers who have no security record.

At the same time, the authorities intend to create a new infrastructure in the territories which would provide much-needed jobs and revenues in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Cabinet authorized \$40 million this week for such projects, which would enable the employment of some 10,000 Palestinians inside the territories.

**SOLDIER HELD FOR TAKING BRIBES
TO HELP ARABS CROSS INTO JORDAN**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, April 15 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force officer has been arrested on suspicion of taking bribes from dozens of Arabs to help them cross into Jordan without going through routine security and customs checks.

The lieutenant, who served in the Civil Administration as the deputy commander of the Allenby Bridge, was arrested last month. But the information was released by military censors only on Thursday.

Police fear that suspects for crimes and security violations may have escaped to Jordan with the officer's help and are investigating the matter.

Also on Thursday, security forces announced that they have uncovered a network of Israeli Arabs and Gaza Strip residents who helped supply

Palestinian gunmen in the administered territories with weapons.

Meanwhile, the search for wanted gunmen continued in the territories, as they remained closed for the third week.

On Thursday, Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip captured two heavily armed gunmen reputed to be leaders of the Fatah Hawks gang, affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization's mainstream faction.

The men were wanted by security forces in connection with the murders of Palestinians and for attacks on Israeli soldiers.

The capture brought to 30 the number of wanted men caught during the present closure of the Gaza Strip, according to military sources.

**KATYUSHA ROCKETS RAIN ON NORTH
AS HEZBOLLAH RESPONDS TO SHELLING**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 15 (JTA) -- In the latest round of clashes between Israeli and guerrilla forces in southern Lebanon, several Katyusha rockets were fired into northern Israel from Lebanon on Thursday, causing no casualties or damages.

Israeli military sources said they presumed the attack came from the Shi'ite Iranian-backed Hezbollah organization, which claimed responsibility for a bombing earlier this week that killed three Israeli soldiers on patrol in the south Lebanon security zone.

The rocket attack was thought to be a response to Israeli bombardment of Hezbollah bases Wednesday, in retaliation for the earlier bombing.

As soldiers scoured the western Galilee to pinpoint exactly where a round of rockets landed Thursday morning, another Katyusha salvo was fired midday, with rockets landing in the eastern sector of the security zone.

No damage was caused in the second attack either.

Although military sources said Hezbollah was the primary suspect behind the launchings, it was also thought possible that the rockets were fired near Sidon by Palestinian or Shi'ite guerrillas interested in proving to local residents that Hezbollah is not the only group engaged in the struggle against Israel.

Israeli and allied South Lebanon Army gunners again responded by heavy artillery and mortar barrages against suspected targets north of the security zone.

Six SLA soldiers were wounded by the detonation of a road mine in the eastern sector of the zone Thursday.

The bomb was planted on a track frequently used by Israeli and SLA military patrols.

ISRAEL INFLATION CONTINUES TO RISE
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 15 (JTA) -- Israel's cost of living rose 1.3 percent in March, in a further indication that inflation this year will be higher than it was in 1992.

The March increase was slightly higher than February's 1.2 percent rise and the same as the January figure, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

If the trend of this first quarter continues throughout the year, the 1993 inflation rate will hit 16 percent, the bureau forecast.

MANY SLOVAKS HOLD NEGATIVE VIEWS TOWARD JEWS, NEW STUDY CONCLUDES

NEW YORK, April 15 (JTA) -- A substantial portion of Slovaks hold negative attitudes toward Jews, with more than a quarter of them maintaining that "many important events take place as a result of the worldwide Jewish conspiracy," according to a recent survey by the American Jewish Committee.

The study was based on 1,132 face-to-face interviews in which respondents were asked to answer 266 separate questionnaire items, including 22 dealing with Jews.

The survey, which dealt primarily with political change, economic development and anti-Semitism in the newly independent Slovakia, was conducted on behalf of the AJCommittee by the Center for Social Analysis, an independent research organization in Bratislava.

David Singer, AJCommittee director of research and publications, released the findings of the survey Thursday at a news conference in Bratislava, the Slovak capital.

"These findings are disturbing in the level of anti-Semitism that they reveal," said Singer.

"Adding to this sense of concern is the fact, as documented in the survey, that Slovakia is experiencing sharp economic and political difficulties at present. In such a situation, Jews are especially vulnerable," he said.

Among the questions dealing with Jews, the survey found that 63 percent of Slovaks believe that "Jews are mainly concerned about themselves -- their money and their profit."

In addition, 29 percent of Slovaks see "excessive influence of Jews in economic and political life" as one of the "dangers that lie ahead for Slovakia."

Finally, when asked whether they would like to have members of various groups as neighbors, 27 percent of Slovaks questioned said either "I definitely wouldn't like" to have Jewish neighbors (11 percent) or "I'd rather not" have them (16 percent).

Still, in response to a few of the questions, significant portions of the population gave answers that could be considered neutral or favorable to Jews.

Eighty-three percent of the Slovaks questioned maintain that "Jews are no better and no worse than other people."

In addition, 66 percent of Slovaks acknowledge that "Jews have made remarkable contribution to world culture and science."

ITALIAN NEO-NAZIS ATTACK IMMIGRANT, IMPERIL HIS LIFE AND SET HOUSE AFIRE

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, April 15 (JTA) -- Neo-Nazis broke into the apartment of an immigrant leader here and brutally attacked him, carving a swastika on his face, dousing him with gasoline and setting his home on fire.

The attack came one day before a new Italian movie about neo-Nazi gangs was to open in cinemas around the country.

The victim, 48-year-old Mowhideen Nowfer of Sri Lanka, who is the president of an immigrants association, was rushed to the hospital after the attack Thursday and was visited by local dignitaries and politicians who expressed outrage at the incident.

Several unidentified persons broke into

Nowfer's apartment, tied him up and carved a swastika on his face with a knife. They also daubed swastikas on the walls of his home.

Before fleeing the scene, the assailants set a fire, causing an explosion that seriously damaged the building.

Interior Minister Nicola Mancino termed the attack "extremely serious and disquieting."

Italian television said Nowfer was doused with gasoline and that his attackers also opened a gas jet in the apartment.

The new movie, called "Skinheads" and directed by Claudio Fragasso, tells the story of a working-class youth called Marco who joins a gang of skinheads in Rome for want of anything better to do in his life.

"I tried above all to discover the reasons that prompt a young man like Marco to shave his head. The first actions that he carries out are more or less motivated. But in the end he arrives at blind violence, without any reason behind it," the director told La Repubblica newspaper.

The director cast several actual skinheads in minor roles as gang members.

Marco in the film lives a double life. He throws himself into skinhead raids and attacks and prides himself on his physical strength.

But at the same time, unemployed, he lives at home with his mother and even has a black girlfriend.

"The message of the movie is clear," said Gianmarco Tognazzi, who plays Marco.

"If I were a skinhead and saw a story of this type, I would feel like a big zero. But then, this movie was not made to give skinheads pause to think, but to serve as a warning for those young people who could become skinheads," Tognazzi said.

KARLINER HASIDIM GO TO PINKS TO VISIT GRAVE OF THEIR REBBE

By Jed Sunden

PINKS, Belarus (JTA) -- Some 150 Jews from Israel, the United States and the former Soviet Union converged this past weekend on this city to visit the gravesite of the first Karliner-Stoliner rebbe, Aaron Ha-Gadol.

The pilgrimage was made to observe the 221st yearzeit of the revered rebbe, the 19th of Nisan, which fell this year on April 10.

Aaron ben Jacob of Karlin, known as Aaron ha-Gadol, or Aaron the Great, lived from 1736 to 1772 and was one of the founders of Hasidism in Lithuania and Belarus. He was a disciple of Reb Dov Baer of Meseritch.

Aaron ha-Gadol settled in the town of Karlin, near Pinks, and founded one of the largest and most influential Hasidic groups in Eastern Europe, known for shouting their fervent prayers.

The dynasty was transferred to the town of Stolín at the end of the 19th century.

Following the Holocaust, the dynasty moved to New York. Most of its followers now live in the United States or Israel.

Since the end of Communist rule, Karliner-Stoliner Hasidim have taken an active role in reviving Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union. Several Karliner-Stoliner rabbis head communities in Ukraine and Belarus, including Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, an American whom some regard as the chief rabbi of Ukraine.

Today, some 8,000 Jews still live in Pinks out of a total population of 130,000. Before the Holocaust, over 50,000 Jews lived here.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
RUSSIA NOW HAS ITS OWN CHIEF RABBI,
BUT SIGNIFICANCE OF POST NOT CLEAR**
By Alexander Lesser

MOSCOW (JTA) -- For the first time in its history, Russia has a chief rabbi.

But it is not yet clear what significance the new post will have for a Jewish community that is overwhelmingly secular and for a Russian government that no longer attempts to exercise control over religious communities.

Rabbi Adolf Shayevitch, 56, the longtime religious leader of Moscow's Choral Synagogue and the former government-appointed chief rabbi of the Soviet Union, was elected Russian chief rabbi in late February by the Association of Jewish Religious Communities in Russia.

His chief rival for the post, 29-year-old Swiss-born Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, was elected deputy chief rabbi and named chief rabbi of Moscow.

Goldschmidt's candidacy had been championed by some rabbis and a number of Jewish groups outside Russia.

Educated in the United States and Israel, Goldschmidt, who has headed the Choral Synagogue's Beth Din (religious court) for the past two years, is thought of as more scholarly than Shayevitch, who was born in the eastern Siberian town of Khabarovsk and trained as a rabbi in Budapest.

But Goldschmidt is also regarded as an "outsider" who is tied to fervently Orthodox circles. The attempt to elect him chief rabbi of Russia was seen by some as a move to impose Judaism from abroad on the community here.

"The whole idea of electing a chief rabbi was conceived by foreign rabbis who thought they could install their man. In the end, they compromised to enable the status quo to be preserved," said a top secular Russian Jewish activist who requested anonymity.

"We cannot and should not choose the leadership of Russian Jewry," said Rabbi Arthur Schneier of New York, a longtime supporter of Shayevitch who flew to Moscow for the election. "We're there to help but not to rule," he said.

No More Government Control

Schneier was by no means the only foreigner to come to Moscow for the election, which was actually held aboard a cruise ship.

Also present were rabbis from Israel and representatives of such organizations as the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

But the event aroused little attention in the Russian press or among Russia's overwhelmingly secular Jewish population, estimated at about 1 million.

That is because the Association of Jewish Religious Communities represents only a small fraction of Russian Jews. Shayevitch himself admitted that many of the association's 32 member communities have difficulty attracting a minyan, or quorum of 10, on Shabbat.

Moreover, not all of the religious groups active in Russia participated in the election.

The Lubavitcher Hasidism, active in many Russian cities, did not participate, nor did the Reform branch of Judaism, which now has activities in nearly 20 communities throughout Russia.

The chief rabbi is also not expected to wield

the kind of power that he might have under the former Soviet Communist government.

Under Communist rule, the Council on Religious Affairs of the Soviet Council of Ministers oversaw all religious activity, but that body ceased when the Soviet Union broke up in December 1991.

The Russian government now has "no control over any religious organization," said Igor Khramanov, who serves on the Russian parliament's Committee on Freedom of Conscience and Religion.

The situation in Russia differs in a number of respects from that in other ex-Soviet republics with significant Jewish populations.

In Ukraine and Belarus, for example, the Communist-era Council on Religious Affairs still exists at the Cabinet level, although the ideological function of controlling religion has disappeared.

Officials at those councils contacted by telephone from Moscow confirmed that the governments of Ukraine and Belarus do recognize the chief rabbis that were elected by their Jewish communities.

Many Rabbis Are 'Imported'

In Ukraine, the situation is unclear. A Ukrainian official said his government recognizes Rabbi Noyakh Dubinsky, head of the Kiev Jewish religious community, as the country's chief rabbi.

But Rabbi Dubinsky told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that a Lubavitcher, Rabbi Dov Karasik, had been elected chief rabbi at the end of 1991. Yet another rabbi, the American-born Yaakov Bleich, has played a leading role at Kiev's main synagogue for more than two years.

In Belarus, a government official, Terenty Kupcheniya, said Rabbi Yitzchok Wolpin had been elected chief rabbi of the country in January. Wolpin is a 25-year-old native of Monsey, N.Y.

In the Baltic republics of Latvia and Lithuania, foreign-born rabbis also seem to be in charge.

In Latvia, an official of the Justice Ministry's Department of Religious Affairs, Arnold Kublinskis, confirmed that an Israeli, Rabbi Natan Barkan, is regarded as chief rabbi.

Barkan confirmed this, saying, "I'm the official representative of the Latvian Jewish community to the government."

In the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, a leading Jewish activist, Sofia Tzibuzena, said Rabbi David Smith of London is the chief rabbi in that republic, commuting there regularly from the British capital.

Despite the variations in recognition and status, there are nevertheless patterns in synagogue-state relations that emerge in conversations in all of these republics, including Russia.

One is that the level of local Jewish participation in the selection of chief rabbis is low, limited to religious activist circles.

A second pattern is the strong predominance of foreign rabbis.

A third is that the governments concerned regard the matter as internal to the Jewish community, whether or not the government honors the title of "chief rabbi."

In all of these republics, the long years of Communist rule depleted the number of local rabbis. Shayevitch estimated that there are only "five or six" Russian rabbis in all of Russia.

Said a secular activist: "All the rabbis here are imported."