

**PROMISING 'DIRECT ROLE' IN TALKS,
CLINTON NAMES NEW ENVOY TO ISRAEL**

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, June 20 (JTA) -- In a demonstration that his administration is pushing for progress this year in the Middle East peace talks, President Clinton told visiting King Hussein of Jordan on Friday that he would take a "direct role" in the talks and nominated a veteran diplomat involved in the negotiations to become U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Sources said the nominee, Edward Djerejian, who is currently serving as assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, would not be leaving for Israel until the end of the year, because the administration wants to keep its team handling the peace talks in place until then.

Djerejian, who has also served as ambassador to Syria, is well-regarded both by Israelis and by their Arab negotiating partners.

The White House also announced late Friday that Dennis Ross, another member of the American peace talks team, would be staying on at the State Department as special coordinator for the talks.

Ross, who was a key Middle East adviser in the Bush administration, had been expected to return to academia in the near future. Like Djerejian, Ross is well-respected by all sides in the peace process.

White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters Friday that in his two-hour meeting with King Hussein, "the president said he was going to take a real direct role" in the peace talks.

She would not clarify exactly what type of "direct role" the president planned to take in the bilateral talks Israel is holding separately with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians, which are now in their 10th round.

"He's going to just make sure that the process proceeds on track," Myers said. "And we look forward to progress."

'A High-Profile Appointment'

Some observers of the peace process have said that higher-level American participation is needed to achieve real progress in the talks.

Myers said that among the issues Clinton and the king discussed was the leaders' "shared commitment to achieving tangible progress in the Middle East peace process this year."

Sources said William Brown, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel who is serving now as acting ambassador, will stay on until Djerejian arrives at the end of the year.

There were reports in Israel that Daniel Kurtzer, Djerejian's deputy, would be named U.S. consul general in Jerusalem, a post that typically involves diplomatic outreach to the Palestinians in the administered territories. But reliable sources here in Washington said Kurtzer had not been offered any such posting.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said Sunday that the Jewish community welcomes the Djerejian and Ross appointments.

The Djerejian appointment, he said, is "a

high-profile appointment that shows the importance attached to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

"We worked very closely with him," he said, "and will regret his leaving."

But he pointed out that Djerejian's departure would not create a "vacuum" in the administration's group of experts working on the peace talks because of the presence of such veterans as Samuel Lewis, a former ambassador to Israel who now serves as director of the State Department's policy planning staff.

Tough Stance On Sanctions

Hoenlein praised Djerejian's actions on behalf of Syrian Jewry both during his time as ambassador and as assistant secretary.

At the same time, he called Ross' decision to stay in government "a very positive sign."

King Hussein arrived in Washington in the middle of a controversy over a recent congressional report stating that Jordan had passed U.S., allied and Israeli military information to Iraq during the Persian Gulf War, and that Bush administration officials were aware of this.

The State Department has disputed the report's conclusions. "There was no evidence to verify those reports," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters last Thursday.

The Israeli Embassy here had no comment on the controversy.

Clinton told reporters after meeting with King Hussein that the two leaders had "talked a little" about Iraq and "the imperative nature of continuing to enforce" international sanctions against Baghdad by "being very tough on them."

Myers said that Clinton had made it clear to the king that maintaining sanctions against Iraq was "incredibly important to the United States."

"It was a very good meeting," Clinton said of his session with King Hussein, the first between the two. "I enjoyed it very much."

**CHARGES AGAINST DERI ARE ANNOUNCED,
PROMPTING CALL FOR MINISTER TO QUIT**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 20 (JTA) -- In a development that could touch off a new political crisis here, Attorney General Yosef Harish has announced that he intends to press charges of financial corruption against Interior Minister Aryeh Deri.

After almost three years of investigation, Harish notified Deri on Sunday of his decision to press charges against him on five counts: fraud, breach of trust, accepting bribes, accepting benefits through fraud and false registration of documents.

Deri, who heads the fervently Orthodox Shas party, is suspected of improperly channeling public funds to organizations affiliated with his party as well as misappropriating public monies for his own private use.

Harish told Deri that within three weeks he would have the opportunity of a special hearing in front of the attorney general, before an actual indictment is presented in court.

Even so, the hearing would be limited in time and scope.

In his initial reaction to the news, Deri said

he felt "relieved" after reading the draft indictment, since the charges were much less serious than expected.

Deri declared he intends to honor a prior commitment he gave to step down from his ministerial post once an indictment is handed down.

He repeated his view that Shas should not quit the Labor-led coalition once he leaves his post and said he would do his utmost to prevent a coalition crisis.

A similar view was voiced by Shas Knesset member Rafael Pinhasi.

Earlier in the day, Harish met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to show him the charge sheet drawn up against the Shas party leader.

Justice Minister David Libai, reacting to the news, insisted that Deri step down from his ministerial post "within a matter of weeks."

\$500,000 For Private Purposes

Harish's meeting with Rabin was arranged to discuss what position the government should take regarding a petition to the High Court of Justice demanding that Deri be suspended from office immediately.

The appeal was presented to the court by the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, headed by lawyer Eliad Shraga, prior to Deri's reappointment as interior minister at the end of the recent coalition crisis.

Shraga had argued that Deri should not be reappointed while an investigation into his alleged wrongdoings was entering its final stages.

The court did not block Deri's reappointment, but gave the government 45 days to respond to the appeal.

Since Deri heads the Shas party, a junior partner in the governing coalition, it is feared that his indictment could throw the government back into a political crisis.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that according to the charge sheet, Deri used public funds of up to \$500,000 for private purposes.

Libai insisted that if Deri were given the special hearing before the attorney general, the proceedings should be limited in time so that the Knesset would be able to remove Deri's parliamentary immunity before its summer recess begins Aug. 7.

Deri told reporters that, judging from the information in the press, the prosecution has little against him and he has little to worry about.

PALESTINIANS TRAIN FOR POLICE FORCE

JERUSALEM, June 20 (JTA) -- A group of 28 Palestinians left Israel for Jordan this past weekend to take part in a police training course, in preparation for establishing a Palestinian police force in the territories under an eventual autonomy plan.

The group, which traveled to Amman via the Allenby Bridge, followed another group which arrived there last week.

Until a Palestinian police force is actually created, the recruits are being trained to act as bodyguards for Palestinian leaders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to guard Palestinian installations such as Orient House, the eastern Jerusalem headquarters of the Palestinian peace talks delegation.

Jordanian police officers and security officials will be the instructors in the six-month course. The trainees will receive their wages from the Palestine Liberation Organization.

ISRAEL REACHES OUT TO NORTH KOREA TO TRY TO STEM ARMS SALES TO IRAN By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 20 (JTA) -- Israeli diplomats are quietly increasing contact with North Korean officials in an effort to stop that country's sale of missiles to Iran, according to recent news reports here and abroad.

North Korea, which currently has no formal relations with Israel, may also be warming up to Israel in order to improve its relations with the United States, the reports said.

The United States has imposed restrictions on commercial relations with North Korea because of that country's refusal to fully cooperate with the Atomic Energy Commission and allow inspections of its nuclear sites.

Israel, however, sent a delegation last October to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang under the Foreign Ministry's deputy director-general, Eitan Bentsur.

The official purpose of this visit was strictly business; the North Koreans wanted to investigate the possibility of Israel's assistance in operating a gold mine in the north of the country.

Bentsur was accompanied by a number of Israeli geologists to look at a site in Untsan, where five large gold mines were shut down a few years ago.

The visit was partly arranged through an unnamed American Jewish businessman who has ties in North Korea as well as an unofficial trade representative that North Korea posts in Washington.

According to foreign sources, these were not the first Israelis to visit North Korea.

Economic Incentive To Stop Sales

Some reports have said Israel is using the contacts to offer North Korea an economic incentive to stop missile sales to Iran in return for Israeli and Jewish investment in North Korea.

According to this version, Israel has essentially asked the United States for permission to hold these discussions, which America has reluctantly given.

However, a report in the Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz depicts Israel as a middleman being used by both North Korea and the United States to reconcile the one-time fierce foes.

According to Professor Ben-Ami Shiloni of the Truman Institute at the Hebrew University, North Korea, in the tradition of many countries that have recently established relations with Israel, believes that the path to Washington passes through Jerusalem.

Within these countries, the Jewish lobby in the United States is seen to have enormous influence over the U.S. administration.

Along with China, North Korea remains one of the last strict Communist regimes, run tyrannically by Kim Il-Sung, who is 81.

China, a prominent friend of North Korea, has welcomed the contacts with Israel and, according to foreign sources, stands behind the official invitation received by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to visit North Korea.

Shiloni said he believes Israel must accept the invitation and convince America to approve it.

"The mistake we made in the 1950s -- when (then Prime Minister David) Ben-Gurion submitted to the dictates of the United States and canceled the plan to establish diplomatic relations with China -- must not be repeated," Shiloni said.

AJCONGRESS HEAD SLAMS LABOR PARTY FOR NOT CONNECTING WITH U.S. JEWRY

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, June 20 (JTA) -- Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, charged last week that Israel's Labor government is "making a very serious mistake" by not trying to build a consensus among American Jews for its policies in the peace process.

The Labor Party is not bringing Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's "message to U.S. Jews" because Rabin believes he does not need their support, Siegman said.

Rabin, he said, "has excellent relations with the (U.S.) administration and therefore thinks he doesn't need" American Jews' intercession.

"His perception is 'they don't count,' " Siegman claimed.

Likud, Siegman pointed out, never made that mistake, making sure its people persuaded organized American Jewry of its strategic platform that "territory equalled security."

But Labor has utterly failed to counter the well-entrenched Likud resistance to the idea of territorial concessions, Siegman believes.

Thus, the Labor government has laid no foundation to prepare the U.S. Jewish community for what is a cornerstone of its peace plans, he said.

Siegman made his remarks to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency while he was at a conference on relations between Israel and North American Jewry held at Ben-Gurion University.

Siegman's criticism was especially noteworthy given his longtime identification with the Labor Party and its policies.

The American Jewish organizational leader believes Labor's failure to build consensus among American Jews could lead to an uncomfortable position for the Clinton administration in the peace process, placing it between Israel and its own domestic Jewish constituency.

He argued that Israel has left itself open to recent right-wing attacks on its policies, which in turn have a greater impact on American Jews than they otherwise might have.

Blasts Podhoretz's 'Hypocrisy'

One example Siegman cited were recent charges by Norman Podhoretz, editor of the neo-conservative magazine *Commentary*, that the Rabin government's policies jeopardize Israel's security and unwisely depend upon assumptions that there has been a change of heart by the Syrians and the Palestinians.

Siegman has blasted Podhoretz for reversing his long-held claim that it is morally wrong for American Jews to criticize Israel's security policies, now that he finds himself in opposition to the new dovish government.

Last week, Siegman said that while he attacks Podhoretz's "hypocrisy, I will be the first to defend his right" to criticize the Israeli government.

In turn, however, Siegman refuted Podhoretz's charges. He argued that Labor believes retaining the West Bank and Gaza Strip, along with the people who live there, actually diminishes Israel's security.

Furthermore, he argued that such concerns as an Arab state of mind are "ephemeral" and do not form the basis of Rabin's peace program.

"It would be reckless for Israel to plan its security on such ephemeral considerations," he

wrote in an article recently submitted to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*.

Rather, Rabin and the Labor Party "believe that, on balance, given the choice of holding onto these territories or giving them up in favor of very specific military arrangements that are implemented and monitored by Israel, Israel's security is far better served by the latter," he wrote.

ASPIN PLEDGES TO WORK WITH ISRAEL TO COUNTER THREATS IN THE MIDEAST

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- Defense Secretary Les Aspin has pledged that the United States will work with Israel to counter any threats to the Jewish state both from Islamic fundamentalist violence and from the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

"The Clinton administration is deeply committed to helping Israel cope with these dangers to increase the chance of peace," Aspin told leaders of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee here last week.

Viewed as a strong supporter of Israel, Aspin told the pro-Israel group's executive committee that he looked forward to working toward a stronger U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership.

But the secretary warned that there were new challenges on the international scene, including in the Middle East.

Growing Islamic fundamentalism, Aspin said, and the "growing militancy and violence associated with religious extremists," represent one new threat to Israel.

He also cited the search for long-range missiles being conducted by Syria, Libya and Iran. The three countries already have chemical and biological weapons, he noted.

"We cannot allow these deadly pursuits to continue," Aspin said. "It should remain a top priority of U.S. and Israeli security planners to stop the spread of nuclear weapons in the region, deter their use and develop effective counter-measures."

Aspin asked the AIPAC leaders a series of questions relating to the U.S.-Israeli security relationship, and said he looked forward to working with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to find answers to the questions.

The questions involved such issues as seeking to maintain Israel's qualitative edge in the region, especially in light of growing pressures on American resources.

Aspin also expressed concern about Russian arms sales to Iran, which could be seen as one negative result of the economic turmoil in the former Soviet Union. "Those arms sales to Iran worry us a great deal," he said.

The foreign aid bill passed by the House of Representatives last week includes language restricting U.S. aid to Russia if it continues selling arms to Iran.

In addition, Aspin discussed the current situation in Somalia, where U.N. peacekeeping forces, including U.S. forces, have been involved in military activities.

Aspin said the United States regrets any loss of life, but criticized Somalian strongman Mohamed Farah Aideed, the object of the recent U.N. military action.

"If Aideed has his way, the international peacekeeping and relief effort would pack up and go home, but Somalia would be further devastated. The world cannot let that happen," Aspin said.

JEWISH GROUPS SPLIT OVER RULING ON PAROCHIAL SCHOOL INTERPRETER

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, June 20 (JTA) -- In an important test of church-state separation, the Supreme Court ruled Friday that a deaf student enrolled in a parochial school may have access to a sign language interpreter paid with public funds.

The Jewish community was sharply split in its reaction to the court's 5-4 decision Friday in *Zobrest vs. Catalina Foothills School District*, which overturned rulings by two lower courts.

Among the groups supporting the court's decision were the American Jewish Congress, the social action arm of the Reform movement and a number of Orthodox groups.

They argued that the case in question did not violate the separation of church and state that is generally important to Jewish groups.

Expressing disappointment with the court's ruling were, among others, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League.

These groups believe that the presence of a public employee in a parochial school, interpreting information that could include some religious content, would violate the First Amendment clause prohibiting government "establishment of religion."

The case involved a former Arizona high-school student, James Zobrest, who is deaf and required the use of an interpreter to attend classes.

In his majority opinion, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said that the service in question was "part of a general government program that distributes benefits neutrally to any child qualifying as 'handicapped'" without regard to the type of school the child attends.

But in dissent, Justice Harry Blackmun argued that "until now, the court never has authorized a public employee to participate directly in religious indoctrination. Yet that is the consequence of today's decision."

'The Worst Is Over'

Some in the Jewish community were concerned that the court, in deciding the *Zobrest* case, would weaken or overturn a legal doctrine known as the "Lemon test," named after the 1971 case *Lemon vs. Kurtzman*.

The Lemon test requires all government activity and law to meet three criteria: its principal purpose must be secular; its effect must neither enhance nor inhibit religion; and it cannot involve excessive government entanglement with religion.

Many Jewish groups back the Lemon test because it provides a strict standard for ensuring separation of church and state. But some Orthodox groups oppose the doctrine, contending that it has created a climate hostile to religion.

On Friday, groups noted that the Lemon test had emerged intact, and Marc Stern, co-director of legal affairs for AJCongress, said he felt that "probably the worst is over" concerning threats to the doctrine.

Nathan Lewin, a Washington attorney who serves as vice president of COLPA, the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs, which represents the interests of observant Jews in courts and legislatures, said, on the other hand, that the court should have gone further in its decision and "discarded" the Lemon test.

Some in the Jewish community speculated

that the imminent retirement of Justice Byron White, who ruled with the majority in *Zobrest*, could have an impact on church-state cases, especially those decided on a 5-4 basis.

But some Jewish officials also pointed out that in this latest case, two of the dissenting justices did so on procedural rather than constitutional grounds, meaning that only two of the nine justices saw the practice as violating the First Amendment.

The court has decided several recent church-state cases in favor of religious groups, including decisions allowing animal sacrifice in religious rituals and allowing a public school to be used to show religious films after school hours.

COURT ORDERS GOVERNMENT TO EXPLAIN WHY IT WON'T LET IN 4,000 FALASH MORA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 20 (JTA) -- Israel's High Court of Justice has ordered Interior Minister Aryeh Deri to explain within 45 days why he will not allow the immigration of some 4,000 Falash Mora from Ethiopia under the Law of Return.

Many Ethiopians in Israel have relatives among the Falash Mora, Ethiopians whose ancestors were Jews who converted to Christianity, and want Israel to allow these people to make aliyah.

The court was responding to a petition filed by 10 members of the Falash Mora community residing in Addis Ababa. They based their petition on a previous ruling by the High Court that the registration of a certain community as Jewish enables the registration of each of its members as Jews, according to the Law of Return.

The petitioning Falash Mora said that since their religious leaders, the kessim, confirmed their Jewishness, they qualify for aliyah under the Law of Return, just like any other Jew.

However, the government has decided that the Falash Mora may not be allowed to immigrate under the Law of Return, except in specific cases, but that individuals be permitted to enter Israel on the basis of family reunion.

MICHAEL JACKSON CONCERT SWITCHED TO APPEASE THE FERVENTLY ORTHODOX

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- A much-anticipated Michael Jackson concert has been rescheduled from a Saturday night to a Monday at the insistence of the fervently Orthodox, who feared a massive violation of the Sabbath by people traveling before sundown to the Saturday concert.

The superstar's tour producer, Marcel Avram, explained at a news conference that the change was spurred by "our wish to respect the sentiments of the religious community and not to desecrate the Sabbath."

The concert is planned for Sept. 20 in Tel Aviv's Hayarkon Park.

The fervently Orthodox community had vehemently protested another recent Saturday night concert in Tel Aviv by the rock group Guns 'N' Roses.

The incident was a key factor in the decision by a fervently Orthodox rabbinical authority to withdraw a certificate of kashrut from Pepsi Cola, which sponsored the Guns 'N' Roses concert and is sponsoring the Jackson tour. Pepsi still holds two other valid kosher certificates here.

The change in the Jackson concert schedule will not affect the kashrut decision, sources said.