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**PROGRESS IN ISRAELI-SYRIAN TALKS
PERSUADES CHRISTOPHER TO STAY ON**

By Gil Sedan and Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Aug. 5 (JTA) -- U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher appears to be making headway in his role as Israeli-Syrian intermediary.

He returned here Thursday carrying what was characterized by Israeli officials as "good news" from Damascus, and announced, after meeting with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, that he would make a second, unscheduled trip to Damascus on Friday.

The announcement gives additional weight to the optimistic assessments Christopher has made of his discussions this week with leaders in Jerusalem and Damascus.

According to an aide to Christopher, the secretary had taken on the role of intermediary at the request of both the Israelis and Syrians.

Christopher also made a stop in Jordan on Thursday, where he discussed the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation with King Hussein.

Before leaving for Amman, Christopher told his Israeli hosts that the peace process had been "salvaged" and was back on track. He had praise for "the serious engagement of all the parties."

Christopher spent some two hours meeting with Rabin, reporting on his talks Tuesday in Syria and Lebanon.

No details of the talks were disclosed, but speaking to reporters after the meeting, Rabin struck an optimistic note.

The prime minister later told a Labor Party meeting that there were positive changes in the positions of the Syrians, Lebanese and Jordanians with regard to the peace process. He added, however, that Israel might have to make decisions that will not be easy.

Rabin also criticized the Palestinians, saying it is difficult to know to whom one is talking when negotiating with them. He was reported to have called them unstable and less than serious.

Palestinian chief negotiator Faisal Hussein made a surprise visit Thursday morning to Christopher at the King David Hotel. No details of their discussion were disclosed.

Upbeat About Session With Palestinians

Immediately after the meeting with Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Christopher left for Jordan to meet with King Hussein.

During his visit in Amman, Christopher is reported to have requested clarifications from Hussein regarding Jordan's position on a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

Hussein reportedly responded that it is too soon to discuss a confederation since an agreement has not yet been reached to establish a Palestinian entity.

Upon his return from Amman, Christopher held meetings with the Palestinians at the American Consulate in Jerusalem.

But the head of the Palestinian delegation, Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, boycotted the meeting in apparent protest over American positions.

But Christopher was upbeat as he left the meeting, saying it had accomplished "exactly what we had hoped."

"As you know," the secretary said, "the United States has been hoping the parties -- the Israelis and the Palestinians -- would develop a declaration of principles related to the interim self-governing authority."

Christopher said he had received written comments from the Palestinians in response to some guidelines submitted by the United States a few weeks ago.

"It's useful to have those, and I think it's a reflection of the seriousness of purpose of the Palestinians," he said.

The secretary added that his team would study the comments and then respond to the Palestinian delegation.

While upbeat in his comments about the Israeli-Syrian negotiations, Christopher maintained earlier this week that this is "a difficult time" for the Palestinian talks. They and the Israelis are deadlocked over the extent of Palestinian autonomy to implement at this stage.

**RABIN REPORTED TO HAVE APPROVED
HIGH-LEVEL MEETING WITH PLO AIDE**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 5 (JTA) -- A political storm has erupted here in the wake of reports that a Cabinet minister and a Knesset member met recently with a senior Palestine Liberation Organization official in Cairo.

Although such meetings have been held before -- ever since the law banning meetings with the PLO was abolished last year -- this time the discussions reportedly were made with the approval of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Such a meeting would be the first ever at such a high level with the approval of an Israeli leader.

According to Israel Radio, Environment Minister Yossi Sarid and Knesset member Dedi Zucker, both members of the dovish Meretz bloc, met in late July with Nabil Sha'ath, a senior adviser to PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

The meeting reportedly took place shortly before Israel's weeklong shelling of southern Lebanon began July 25.

The news touched off heated debates between those Israelis who believe that peace will be achieved only with PLO involvement in the negotiations and those who object to any discussions with what they view as a terrorist group.

Officially, neither the Prime Minister's Office nor Meretz would confirm or deny the reports. Meretz, however, did issue a list of reasons justifying such a meeting.

Another Meretz Cabinet member, Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban, said every such meeting can contribute to the peace process.

But some Labor Party hawks, such as Economics Minister Shimon Shetreet and Transportation Minister Yisrael Kessar, said such meetings undermine Israel's stand in the peace process.

Shetreet said such meetings conflict with a basic tenet of Israeli policy, which excludes the PLO from the peace negotiations.

The Cabinet is said to be almost equally divided between ministers recognizing the role of the PLO in the peace talks and those who oppose their involvement.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: 'JERICHO FIRST' IDEA IS POPULAR BUT NOT IN WEST BANK TOWN ITSELF

By Gil Sedan

JERICHO, West Bank (JTA) -- In the heat of the day, when temperatures can climb to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the residents of Jericho prefer talking politics to doing work. It is simply too hot to move a finger.

This small town of 15,000 Palestinian residents has suddenly found itself near the top of the region's political agenda. Speculation is running freely about a possible Israeli withdrawal from Jericho that is take to take place at the same time as a similar early withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

One no longer talks of "Gaza First," the proposal that Israel unilaterally withdraw from the area before implementing other elements of an eventual peace settlement.

The new political game in town is "Gaza and Jericho First."

But, surprisingly, as soon as the new idea came into being, the residents of Jericho seemed more determined than anyone else to reject the idea.

Why would Palestinians determined to establish an independent state reject such an idea? Because they distrust the Israelis. They want the entire West Bank, and they fear that "Jericho First" will become "Jericho Last," as well.

The "Jericho First" idea was first raised several weeks ago by Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat.

Asked in a newspaper interview whether the Palestinians were ready to take over Gaza first, Arafat said yes, but added that he wanted "something else" in the West Bank -- like "Jericho, for example."

Then last week, in a surprise statement, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres accepted the challenge. He said he believed the idea should be discussed.

Now that Israel's second-in-command has embraced the idea, it has emerged as a political given in the complex Israeli-Palestinian puzzle.

The "Gaza and Jericho First" idea has several apparent advantages: It could break the present deadlock in the peace talks; it puts the PLO on record for supporting an interim solution to the territorial compromise question; and it calms fears that Israel will not give the Palestinians anything beyond limited autonomy in the territories.

Arafat No Longer Popular

But quite surprisingly, all -- absolutely all -- residents of Jericho asked about the idea have rejected it.

"We oppose a partial settlement," said Sadek a-Salaime, a retired teacher. "We need an overall settlement for the entire region."

"If we receive Jericho," added Nasser Khalil, a money-changer, "what about Nablus and Hebron? And most important, what about Jerusalem?"

It did not seem to matter to Khalil that negotiating over the status of Jerusalem at this time would virtually guarantee a stalemate in the peace talks.

The young man nodded smilingly and said without any hesitation: "Without Jerusalem, there is nothing to discuss."

Even the fact that it was Arafat himself --

the so-called president of the Palestinian people -- who raised the idea first does not impress anyone here.

"We are a democratic society," one Jericho resident said in complete seriousness. "Arafat is entitled to hold his views."

A statement like this would never have been made until several months ago. But Arafat is no longer accepted as the final decision-maker. His authority is weakening, along with the financial status of the PLO, which means the flow of money into the territories has all but dried up.

The vacuum created by Arafat's diminished standing has been filled by the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement and, at the other end of the spectrum, by Palestinian leftist radicals.

The rising star for the people here is none other than Dr. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, head of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, who boycotted this week's talks with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Abdel-Shafi said he was against discussing the Gaza-Jericho option without an overall agreement on the future of the territories.

With these views, Abdel-Shafi puts himself in opposition to other members of the Palestinian delegation, including chief negotiator Faisal Hussein.

But judging from reactions in Jericho this week, Husseini and Arafat are out. They are considered too moderate in local terms.

Abdel-Shafi, a retired politician of 75, is in.

To a large extent, this explains the difficulties in the negotiations with the Palestinians, and the reason why Christopher has focused his efforts on Syria. There, at least, no one says no to a "Golan First" idea.

NAVAL ACADEMY COMES UNDER FIRE FOR YOM KIPPUR HOMECOMING DATE

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 5 (JTA) -- A group of Jewish members of Congress has sent a letter to the U.S. Naval Academy, protesting its decision to schedule its fall homecoming on the weekend of Yom Kippur.

The letter, organized by Rep. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and signed by 26 other Jewish representatives, criticized the academy for not displaying "more sensitivity to Jewish midshipmen, alumni, their families and friends."

B'nai B'rith also criticized the academy for what it called "incredible bureaucratic insensitivity" for its decision to hold the homecoming festivities on Sept. 24 and 25.

"It would behoove the academy to check a religious calendar before scheduling any events in the future," B'nai B'rith President Kent Schiner said in a statement.

B'nai B'rith had yet to receive a response from the academy, a B'nai B'rith spokeswoman said Tuesday.

Cardin, in a statement, called the academy's decision an "outrage."

"We are a diverse nation and the U.S. Naval Academy has had many outstanding Jewish midshipmen and alumni. Not to recognize our diversity and be sensitive to the holiest day of the Jewish year is an outrage and something that needs to be stopped now," the congressman said.

The members of Congress called on the academy to change the date of its alumni weekend and ensure that it does not schedule such events on Yom Kippur again.

JEWS IN UKRAINE BRACE THEMSELVES IN AFTERMATH OF DEMJANJUK RULING

By Jed Sunden

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) -- Ukrainian Jews are bracing themselves for a possible anti-Semitic backlash here over the case of John Demjanjuk.

A day before Israel's Supreme Court ruled last week to overturn Demjanjuk's 1988 conviction for war crimes committed at the Treblinka death camp, a group of protesters demonstrated outside the Israeli Embassy here demanding freedom for the Ukrainian native.

The demonstrators called for the immediate release of Demjanjuk and spoke of a larger Jewish conspiracy to defame the entire Ukrainian nation.

Similar demonstrations took place in Lviv (formerly called L'vov) during the official visit in June of Shevah Weiss, speaker of the Israeli Knesset.

Formal diplomatic relations were established between Israel and Ukraine in 1991, when an independent Ukrainian government was established in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Earlier this year, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk made an official visit to the State of Israel to formally open the Ukrainian Embassy there.

"Relations between Israel and the Ukraine could survive whatever decision the court reached," said Ehud Eitan, charge d'affairs of the Israeli Embassy in Kiev.

"Some people see Demjanjuk as representing the Ukrainian people and react to the case as such, but neither government views it that way," he said.

Though the case has been a major issue in Ukrainian communities abroad, especially in the United States and Canada, attempts at forging a mass appeal on Demjanjuk's behalf have not been successful in Ukraine.

More importantly, the Ukrainian government has remained aloof from the case throughout the trial.

Levy Ziskind, chairman of the Central Synagogue in Kiev, played down the situation.

"Our only fear is that things will become as bad here as they are in Moscow," he said, referring to the recent attacks on a synagogue in the Russian capital.

"Other than that, we do not want to get involved in politics," said Ziskind. "Demjanjuk is not our problem. We have enough troubles of our own without politics."

'A Truly Undistinguished Figure'

In the quiet aftermath of the court's decision to drop the charges of mass murder against the former Cleveland autoworker, the Jewish community here has allowed itself a sigh of relief -- although Jews know the situation could take a sudden turn for the worse.

"I support the Israeli court's decision, and I can say that the Jewish community is proud that the court found a correct decision," said Froiom Yakovitch, chairman of the Jewish Historical Society of Ukraine and a professor at the newly opened International Solomon University in Kiev.

Yakovitch said, "I hope this case will not bring a new wave of anti-Semitism."

"I am afraid that some Ukrainians might use this case to stir up anti-Semitism in the country and try to use it as an example of how all Ukrainians were tortured by the Jews."

Josef Zissels, chairman of the Association of

Jewish Organizations and Communities in Ukraine, was more optimistic. "Clearly, certain right-wing groups will use Mr. Demjanjuk as their political capital, but I doubt it will last long or be very serious."

"Maybe something will happen if he arrives here, but I think he is a truly undistinguished figure," said Zissels.

WIESENTHAL CENTER JOINS SURVIVORS' BID TO STOP DEPORTATION OF JOHN DEMJANJUK

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Aug. 5 (JTA) -- The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center joined with eight survivors of the Sobibor death camp on Thursday to file a petition asking that Israel's Supreme Court stop the deportation of John Demjanjuk.

The petition follows a U.S. appeals court ruling Tuesday that Demjanjuk must be allowed to return to the United States, from which he was extradited to Israel in 1986.

The petition says Demjanjuk must now be tried in Israel for the crimes he allegedly committed at Sobibor.

It rests its claim on the Supreme Court's findings last week that although there is reasonable doubt that Demjanjuk was the savage "Ivan the Terrible" guard at the Treblinka death camp, there is substantial evidence that he was a guard at Sobibor.

Moreover, the petition cites a Nazi SS record of disciplinary action against Demjanjuk. The document comes from an SS camp in Lublin, Poland, and places Demjanjuk there on Jan. 20, 1943.

According to the document, Demjanjuk was disciplined for leaving the barracks against orders.

Efraim Zuroff, director of the Wiesenthal Center's Israel office, said the document was never investigated despite having been discovered about 18 months ago in Vilnius, Lithuania, and turned over to the Israeli court.

Zuroff said the center joined this latest petition to the court after listening to the rage of Holocaust survivors, "rage that we ourselves felt."

Attorney General Yosef Harish will announce Aug. 11 whether Israel will try Demjanjuk for crimes at Sobibor.

His decision will come as a result of another petition to try Demjanjuk on the Sobibor charges that was filed last week by both the right-wing extremist Kach movement and a group of Holocaust survivors.

The U.S. appeals court ruled that Israel had no legal right to try the retired Cleveland autoworker for any other crimes.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Justice Department has asked the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati to close the case involving the original order for Demjanjuk's extradition.

A year ago, the Cincinnati court opened an inquiry into whether the Justice Department had concealed evidence when it sought to strip Demjanjuk of his citizenship and have him deported.

In its brief filed Thursday, the U.S. Justice Department urged the court to accept a special master's finding that U.S. prosecutors had not withheld evidence that would have cleared Demjanjuk.

"It is now time to close the case," Justice Department lawyer Patty Merkamp Stemler said in the brief.

JEWISH GROUPS DECRY REINSTATEMENT OF JEFFRIES AS DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Aug. 5 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are decrying a federal judge's decision to reinstate Leonard Jeffries as chairman of the black studies department at the City College here.

While calling Jeffries' behavior "repugnant," U.S. District Court Judge Kenneth Conboy returned the chairmanship to the controversial professor on the grounds that the university's administration violated his First Amendment rights in ousting him.

At the same time, Conboy also stated that his ruling did not give Jeffries license to spout racism or teach discredited theories.

In the decision, handed down Aug. 4, Conboy blasted officials of the City University of New York, which oversees City College, for mishandling the case and for what he called their "cowardly" and "dishonest" behavior.

He proceeded to present them with a veritable blueprint for constructing a strong case against Jeffries, who was stripped of his chairmanship after making what were considered by many to be anti-Semitic and racist remarks in a July 1991 speech.

In that speech, made at the Empire State Black Arts and Cultural Festival in Albany, N.Y., Jeffries said, "Russian Jewry had a particular control over the movies, and their financial partners, the Mafia, put together a system of destruction of black people."

In his speech, Jeffries also accused Jews of financing, planning, operating and maintaining the slave trade.

After his remarks became public, Jeffries' speech ignited impassioned debate around the country about academic freedom, multiculturalism and academic responsibility.

A federal jury concluded in May that the college had violated Jeffries' rights and awarded him \$400,000 in damages, which Conboy later reduced by \$40,000.

It was left to Conboy to decide whether to reinstate him.

He did so reluctantly, expressing distaste for Jeffries' "hateful, poisonous and reprehensible statements."

But he also criticized the university's legal strategy of disciplining Jeffries for administrative incompetence, when he found that the real issue was Jeffries' off-campus speech.

By not confronting the real issue, the judge wrote, university officials had been "dishonest about their motivations."

'Morally A Travesty'

According to Conboy, the university could have disciplined a faculty member for engaging in a "systematic pattern of racist, anti-Semitic, sexist or homophobic remarks during class."

The school could also have charged that his behavior disrupted classes, faculty relations or fund-raising.

He suggested that the university should have pursued one of these avenues as far back as 1984, after Jeffries reportedly made anti-Semitic remarks to a Jewish job applicant.

The school could also have acted after Jeffries was accused of threatening to kill Eliot Morgan, a Harvard Crimson reporter who interviewed him.

Morgan, now working as an intern at The

Wall Street Journal, called Conboy's decision this week "morally a travesty."

"But legally I agree with it. There was little that could have been done given the way City College presented their case," said Morgan, who is Jewish and black.

"A legitimate case has been squandered. And it's a sad thing. Not only is he reinstated, but he's \$360,000 richer for it. It proved profitable to be a bigot in this case," he said.

The American Jewish Congress, in a statement issued by Executive Director Henry Siegman, said that the reinstatement "makes a caricature of the principle of academic freedom."

City College "properly has never attempted to deny Jeffries a classroom. It has sought only to distance itself from his bizarre views by not conferring on him the honor and administrative responsibility of department chair," said Siegman.

The Anti-Defamation League, in a statement issued by Melvin Salberg, the group's national chairman, said that "to reward Professor Jeffries' blatant bigotry by reinstating him is appalling."

The reinstatement "seems to reinforce the notion that racism and bigotry can be brought onto the college campus with impunity."

CUT IN EMERGENCY REFUGEE AID CONCERNS SOME JEWISH GROUPS

By Deborah Kalb and Lisa Mann

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- Jewish groups are voicing concern about proposed legislation that could sharply reduce funding for a government program providing emergency relief to refugees around the world.

But they are relieved that a congressional panel has voted to maintain refugee assistance for Israel at last year's funding level, despite a proposed cut by the Clinton administration.

During recent consideration of foreign aid legislation for the 1994 fiscal year, the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations voted to restore Israel's \$80 million in refugee assistance funding.

The administration had called for a cut in Israel's refugee assistance to \$55 million, but the subcommittee, in an effort led by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), decided to continue the \$80 million funding that Israel received this year.

Jewish groups were pleased by that action, but were concerned about an accompanying cut from \$49 million to \$19 million in Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance funds approved by the House.

ERMA is a fund used primarily to supply aid to displaced people in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Refugee advocates within the Jewish community expressed concern that if the House version of the foreign aid legislation eventually passed both chambers of Congress, money to assist displaced people and refugees during an emergency would be in short supply.

Some in the pro-Israel community, however, pointed out that ERMA is a fund with permanent authorization, meaning that if there is a refugee emergency and over \$19 million is needed, the supplemental money will eventually be provided.

But refugee advocates, including officials from the Council of Jewish Federations and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, argued that finding the money to replenish ERMA could take a long time, and that the \$19 billion is not adequate.