

**U.S. AND JEWISH GROUPS STILL HOPE SYRIA WILL FULFILL PLEDGE ON VISAS**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- The deadline by which all Syrian Jews were to have received permission to leave the country has come and gone, but U.S. officials and Jewish groups are still hopeful that Syrian President Hafez Assad will honor his pledge to grant travel visas to all Jews who want them.

Assad had promised U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in early December that all Jews wishing to leave Syria would be permitted to do so by the end of 1993.

Since then, a reported 350 of Syria's roughly 1,350 Jews have received travel visas, issued at a rate of 20 to 30 a day.

"We have seen very good progress on that, and the progress is continuing," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said in Washington, at the department's daily briefing Monday.

"We expect that all those who wish to obtain travel documents will obtain them in the days ahead," he said.

After decades in which travel was limited for the 3,500 Jews then living in Syria, Assad announced a policy of free travel in April 1992.

While more than 2,000 Jews have left the country, most moving to Brooklyn's large Syrian community, Assad sharply reined in the issuing of travel permits beginning in October 1992. Since then, only a handful of Jews have left each week.

**Attempt To Split Families?**

Advocates for Syrian Jews have another concern about the current visa process.

"There are certain families where one or two children have not yet received" travel documents, in effect keeping the entire family in Syria, said Judy Feld Carr, chair of the National Task Force for Syrian Jews of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

"Assad is certainly stringing out the process," said Seymour Reich, who heads a similar task force of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"He's testing the patience of Clinton," he said, referring to the American president's upcoming meeting with the Syrian leader.

Reich nonetheless expressed optimism in a statement jointly issued with Alice Harary, chair of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jewry.

"We expect that the government of Syria will live up to its promise in the coming days, and we will continue to closely monitor developments," the statement said.

In the statement, the groups welcomed the reports that "several hundred Syrian Jews have received exit permits in recent days."

But they voiced regret that "the Syrian government did not adhere to its commitment to the Clinton administration that all of the approximately 1,350 Syrian Jews who wished to leave would be processed by Dec. 31, 1993."

Privately, American Jewish advocates for Syrian Jewry are giving the Syrians a few more days before loudly attacking Assad.

They are mindful of the Clinton-Assad meeting, set to take place Jan. 16 in Geneva.

**ISRAEL BOYCOTTING TALKS WITH PLO UNTIL IT ENDORSES EARLIER ACCORD**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- Israel will not return to the negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization for the time being.

The decision emerged here Monday night after a private and lengthy meeting between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

It followed a weekend of intensive consultations within the government, and between Israel and Egypt, which acted as mediator between Israel and the PLO at the talks last week in Cairo.

Peres acknowledged Monday that there was a "sort of crisis" in the autonomy talks with the PLO, but said he believed it could be overcome.

Peres made the comment to members of the national executive of the Canadian Jewish Congress, the representative body of the Canadian Jewish community.

Israel first announced on Sunday that it would not attend another round of talks on Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho unless the PLO adhered to the draft agreement reached last week in Cairo.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Mike McCurry attempted to play down the impasse in the Israeli-PLO negotiations.

"I would say that as these negotiations address tough issues, we should remember that they are, in fact, negotiating," McCurry said during his briefing to reporters Monday.

"You're watching two sides in an ongoing negotiation stake out positions and discuss things in the context of their own dialogue," he said.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa, who was visiting Jordan on Monday, refused to be discouraged by the deadlock in the negotiations.

He predicted that the talks would resume soon at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba.

**Netanyahu Retracts Past Promise**

In the Gaza Strip meanwhile, violence flared Monday evening, when three young Palestinians were shot dead in separate incidents by Israeli soldiers.

And in the West Bank, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, retracting a past promise, told Jewish settlers Monday that any future government led by Likud would not be bound by the Palestinian self-rule accord signed by Israel and the PLO in September.

"The agreements are not binding on me, nor on any government that may rise under my leadership," Netanyahu said while visiting the Jordan Valley settlement of Na'ama.

He said that the PLO had already violated the accord by backing off its earlier promises to stop terrorist attacks on Israelis and to revoke clauses in the Palestine National Covenant that call for the destruction of Israel.

"Because the PLO has not done these things, it has already canceled the agreement," Netanyahu told reporters. He added that the PLO's refusal to honor its promises nullified his own past promises to honor any agreements reached by the Rabin government.

The Israeli-PLO negotiations have ground tr

a halt, with Israel angrily accusing PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat of backing away from agreements reached during last week's Cairo talks.

The Palestinians, however, contend that there never was an agreement, only an Israeli position paper. This version was endorsed Monday by Moussa of Egypt.

The Israeli Cabinet, however, remained united behind Rabin's position that there can be no continuation of the talks as long as the PLO rejects what it accepted orally last week.

Arafat, in an angry radio interview over the weekend, reiterated his insistence that the Palestinians will not be consigned to "a ghetto," which he said would be the result of the implementation of the Israeli position.

The agreement that Israeli officials say emerged from last week's talks reportedly provided an elaborate system for a Palestinian as well as well as Israeli presence at the borders between Gaza and Egypt and between Jericho and Jordan.

Israel had previously demanded sole control over the border crossings.

The agreement reached last week reportedly also called for the Jericho area to encompass an area of some 25 square miles, more than doubling the previous Israeli offer of 10 square miles.

Control over the borders at Gaza and Jericho, along with the size of the Jericho enclave that would fall under Palestinian self-rule, were among the issues that had deadlocked the Israeli-PLO negotiations.

#### 'Let Arafat Sweat'

Most Israeli ministers still share Moussa's view that somehow, soon, the negotiators will find a way through the impasse and that the talks will draw to a successful conclusion, allowing implementation of the self-rule accord to begin.

But there is now less optimism following the collapse of last week's negotiations.

"Let Arafat sweat," Rabin was quoted as saying during one of the consultations Sunday.

But observers are saying that Rabin, too, is inevitably growing more uncomfortable as the days pass and the negotiations remain stalled.

In his remarks to the Canadian Jewish Congress delegation Monday, Peres blamed the stalemate in the talks on the Palestinians, whom he accused of attempting to grab up more than had initially been agreed upon.

The foreign minister told the group of about 40 that implementation of the agreement with the PLO is "extremely difficult because it is unprecedented," and because "the PLO would like to have more than what is written in the declaration of principles."

They "would like to bring autonomy to the level of an independent state, which we (will) never agree to, for the time being," he said.

He said Israel and the PLO had reached an agreement in Cairo but that the PLO subsequently balked at the terms, claiming that Israel had agreed to things that were not on the agenda.

Peres said that unless future negotiations were based on agreements already reached in Cairo, "there was no reason to meet."

"We cannot negotiate and then negotiate on negotiations," he said.

Peres meanwhile said he believed it was appropriate for Diaspora Jews to voice their opinions and arguments about Israeli government policy, but that he would ultimately like to see Jews unify behind the government.

The foreign minister said he was not certain whether Syrian President Hafez Assad was prepared to offer any new positions or declarations during his upcoming meeting with President Clinton, scheduled for Jan. 16.

But he disputed the notion that Syria was "the key" to power in the Middle East. Syria is important, he said, "but even if Syria doesn't change, the world is changing."

During the meeting, CJC President Irving Abella said that when the Palestinian self-rule accord was signed in September, there was among Canadian Jews "an exhilarating sense of the possible."

Now, he said, "the exhilaration is gone, but the possible remains. Hard realism has set in."

#### ISRAELI CENSOR COMPLAINS TO REUTERS ABOUT PICTURES OF UNDERCOVER IDF UNIT By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- Israel's chief military censor has filed a complaint with the Reuter news agency and its television subsidiary for broadcasting pictures of an Israel Defense Force anti-terrorist unit beating up Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Pictures of the Shimshon undercover unit, disguised in Arab garb, were transmitted by Reuters on Sunday, when the unit clashed with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The pictures were seen immediately throughout the world.

An army spokesman claimed the pictures endangered state security by exposing the identity of several members of the undercover unit and its operating procedures.

Oded Ben-Ami, spokesman for the Defense Ministry, announced Monday that "the director of the local Reuter bureau was summoned by the IDF censor to explain why photographs of IDF undercover personnel operating in Gaza were not submitted to the IDF censor for scrutiny.

"Reuters' explanations were considered 'weak and puzzling,'" he said.

Reuter officials declined comment on the charge that they had breached censorship rules, saying they had not yet officially heard the complaint.

By Monday afternoon, it was learned that the chief censor had confined its protest against Reuters to an official complaint and reprimand, but had warned that any further breaches by Reuters of Israel's censorship policies would result in "severe measures."

On Sunday night, Israel Television showed film clips of the Reuter transmissions from Gaza, which included shots of several soldiers from the Shimshon unit chasing Palestinian stone-throwers, shooting at them during the chase and threatening them with pistols.

On Monday, full-face photographs of a member of the Shimshon unit holding a pistol to the head of a Palestinian were widely published in the Israeli press.

Reporters here suggested that the censor's complaint was registered more to punish Reuters for publicizing the soldiers' brutality than for exposing the unit's undercover activities.

A member of the Foreign Press Association here remarked that if the chief censor confined his censure of Reuters to a mere "warning and complaint, the danger to Israel's security and the well-being of its soldiers," as originally charged, could not have been overly serious.

## MAN WHO CORRESPONDED WITH POLLARD DOUBTS HE LEAKED CLASSIFIED MATERIAL

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- Howard Kaplan does not believe charges that Jonathan Pollard tried to send out top secret information from his prison cell, and to make his point the writer of Middle East spy novels has gone public with a censored letter he received from Pollard six years ago.

Kaplan acted after outgoing Defense Secretary Les Aspin notified President Clinton last month that Pollard, who is serving a life sentence for passing U.S. intelligence secrets to Israel, tried to slip out additional classified and top secret data in 14 of his letters from prison.

Pollard's letter to Kaplan, one of 15 since his conviction seven years ago, contained references to a Soviet missile and a joint U.S.-Israeli missile project, with some sentences whited-out by Navy censors.

"My point (in going public) was that everything Pollard sent out was being censored, that Pollard and everybody else knew that, and therefore there was no possibility that anything would actually leak out," Kaplan said.

"It would have been insane for him to try to send out any military information," he said.

Indeed, Pollard agreed as part of his plea bargain during his trial that all his correspondence would be monitored by the government.

Kaplan also pointed out that all 15 letters he had received from Pollard were postmarked from Washington, rather than from his prison location, further indicating tight censorship by U.S. Naval intelligence.

Aspin's memo to Clinton, supposedly confidential but quickly leaked to the news media, appears to be another move in ongoing efforts to influence Clinton's decision on whether to grant presidential clemency to Pollard.

### Government Departments At Odds On Clemency

Within the government, the State and Justice departments appear to be lobbying for clemency, with the Defense Department and the intelligence community bitterly opposed.

The Washington Times reported recently that Mark Richard, a senior Justice Department official, had drafted a recommendation to commute Pollard's life sentence to 20 years in prison.

This would make Pollard eligible for parole now and send a strong signal to the parole board that he should be set free, the Times reported.

Richard is also urging that criminal cases be terminated against three unindicted Israeli co-conspirators who fled to Israel after Pollard was arrested outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

The three were identified in court records as Col. Aviem Sella, Yosef Yagur and Irit Erb, the Times reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and several American Jewish organizations have appealed to Clinton to reduce Pollard's life sentence on humanitarian grounds.

State Department officials are said to support this position to strengthen Rabin's hand against his domestic critics, who oppose his negotiations with the Palestinians.

Here in Los Angeles, Kaplan said he initiated his correspondence with Pollard shortly after the former intelligence analyst's conviction, because he was "morally outraged that after Pollard

entered a plea bargain, the government reneged on the agreement," he said.

Fourteen of the 15 letters he received from Pollard were handwritten on lined, legal-sized yellow paper. The one censored letter had been reduced and photocopied, and included a cover note from Naval intelligence stating that the letter contained classified national security information, Kaplan said.

In his letters to Pollard, Kaplan said, he wrote mainly about his personal and family life, and responded to Pollard's interest in his three novels, which deal with intrigue and espionage in the Middle East.

## MINISTRY IS ORDERED TO SET ASIDE MONEY FOR CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Israel's Supreme Court has ordered the Religious Affairs Ministry to set aside money requested by Israel's Conservative movement for its cultural programs until the ministry formally decides whether to fund the movement's programs.

The court issued a similar order last month for the funding of cultural programs run by the Reform movement, known here as the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism.

The court orders mark a small step forward for non-Orthodox Jewish movements in Israel, which have long complained of being treated with far less than parity with Orthodox Jewish institutions and even non-Jewish religious groups.

The Conservative, or Masorti, movement had filed a petition with the Supreme Court protesting the failure of the Religious Affairs Ministry to answer its request for roughly \$290,000.

The money is earmarked for Jewish education for new immigrants, Bar and Bat Mitzvah lessons, holiday workshops and women's Torah study, said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, Masorti spokesman. The ministry's failure to respond "arouses suspicions that it is deliberate," said Bandel.

In its petition, the Conservative movement charged, "The religious establishment that rules the ministry tries in any way possible to make permanent the exclusive rule of Orthodoxy in religious life in Israel and to prevent any other stream from involvement in matters of religion.

"Among other ways, (it prevents) support to (non-Orthodox) movements from budgets meant for the entire public in various religious affiliations," the petition said.

Bandel said the movement had appealed for the interim set-aside out of fear that the ministry would jeopardize the funding request even before the court ruling by "creating an established fact of empty public coffers which would make any hearing on allocations totally irrelevant."

The Conservative movement's petition, as well as the earlier one on behalf of the Reform movement, represents a "new stage for non-Orthodox movements in Israel," Bandel said. "We have decided to fight for our rights and not to take no for an answer."

"We're not asking for any favors. Everything we ask is according to legal criteria and what we rightfully deserve," he said.

Bandel said the Conservative movement has another petition pending in the Supreme Court related to \$150,000 it has sought unsuccessfully from the Religious Affairs Ministry since 1986 for additions to a synagogue in Beersheba. A court hearing on this petition is scheduled for Jan. 26.

**NEW GROUNDS FOR CROWN HEIGHTS CASE  
EMERGE AND THEN APPEAR TO FADE AWAY**  
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- For a few days it looked like a new suspect had emerged in the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, the Hasidic scholar who died of stab wounds during the Crown Heights riots of 1991.

That would give the Brooklyn district attorney grounds for new criminal charges in the case, while providing impetus for the U.S. attorney general to pursue federal civil rights charges.

But prospects for a new prosecution may have faded since the chief witness who fingered the new suspect has recanted.

Three witnesses told investigators that Ernesto Edwards had stabbed Rosenbaum during the riots in the heavily Hasidic Brooklyn neighborhood.

Two of the witnesses -- an ex-girlfriend and a prison inmate now serving time with Edwards -- said he told them what he had done.

The third, John Anderson, a member of the gang that surrounded Rosenbaum on Aug. 18, 1991, reportedly told detectives that he saw Edwards use the same knife that Lemrick Nelson Jr. had just plunged into Rosenbaum.

Nelson was acquitted of state murder charges in October 1992, which prompted calls for a federal investigation.

During Nelson's trial, Anderson testified that he did not see anyone stab Rosenbaum. He told New York Newsday that he is sticking to that testimony and denied ever having told detectives otherwise.

Edwards, 24, who has been arrested several times for petty larceny and drug possession, is now serving two to six years on drug and attempted robbery charges.

Both U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno's office and Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes' office refused to comment on their investigations, which both say they are still pursuing.

Law enforcement officials have reportedly said that each hopes the other will press charges.

**HERUT ACTIVISTS ATTEMPT TAKEOVER  
OF JEWISH NATIONAL FUND IN FRANCE**  
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- The French branch of the Jewish National Fund underwent something resembling an unfriendly takeover last month.

At the annual assembly of Keren Keyemeth LeIsrael of France, held here Dec. 12, some 200 new members showed up, hoping to elect their own slate of candidates to KKL's National Committee.

The new members, who belonged to the right-wing Herut movement, outnumbered the rest of the gathering by 2 to 1.

Daniel Marcovitch, KKL's secretary-general, soon got into a heated discussion with the leader of the new members, Joel Bettan, who sits on the executive board of Herut-France, over the right of the newcomers to vote for the National Committee.

KKL-France, which is not directly affiliated with the Jewish National Fund in the United States and does not have a say over how JNF money in Israel is spent, is led by Jacques Orfuss, 88, a veteran Jewish leader who is the group's president.

The debate between Marcovitch and Bettan

was interrupted when Orfuss managed to introduce Israel's ambassador to France, Yehuda Lancry.

Lancry, a personal friend of Israel's former Likud foreign minister, David Levy, delivered a speech in which he expressed support for the current Israeli government's efforts to implement the historic accord it signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization on Sept. 13 in Washington.

Booed by part of the audience, Lancry finished his speech and soon left the assembly.

Amid the ensuing shouting and heckling, Bettan and his supporters finally got what they wanted: They were allowed to take part in the vote.

As a result, the candidates presented on the spot by Bettan won an overwhelming victory.

The victorious slate consisted mainly of members of Herut-France and its two youth organizations, Betar and Tagar.

A fuming Marcovitch said that 30 out of the 40 newly elected candidates had become members of KKL only six days before the vote.

The Herut party, which was founded in 1948 and remained under the leadership of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin until his retirement from public life in 1983, became part of the Likud bloc in 1973.

One week after the election, Marcovitch held a meeting of the KKL's executive body, during which it was decided to nullify the earlier election, because of "numerous irregularities."

A new general assembly is scheduled to convene this month.

Bettan subsequently said that Marcovitch was "a bad loser."

**SPOUSE OF EL AL FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
FINDS NOVEL WAY OF ASSURING A SEAT**  
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 3 (JTA) -- Dissatisfied with the uncertainties associated with flying on a stand-by basis, the wife of a veteran El Al flight attendant found a novel way of ensuring guaranteed seating for herself aboard the airline's flights to and from London.

Under El Al's free ticket arrangements for its personnel, employees of the airline and their families can fly without cost -- but only as stand-by passengers. This often entails long waits at the airport to learn if a seat will be available for them.

And during peak travel periods, El Al employees often have to return to the airport every day for days on end until space becomes available.

But the flight steward's wife, who wanted to ensure that she would be able to fly round-trip to London during the busy Rosh Hashanah period last September, devised a strategy to make the system work for her.

Using a personal computer, she linked up with El Al's booking computer and reserved 50 tickets to London and another 50 from London to Israel, all under various names.

Since the 50 reservations on each flight would end up as "no shows," she reasoned, she would have no trouble flying stand-by.

But her scam came to light when El Al controllers noted a larger-than-usual number of "no shows" on flights to and from London.

Subsequent investigations were made until the responsible party was identified.

El Al has not yet announced what measures, if any, it plans to take against the woman.