

**GLOWING TALK BUT GLARING OMISSIONS
IN THE HISTORIC CLINTON-ASSAD SUMMIT**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- Waves of warm enthusiasm, emanating from Geneva, washed over a wary and worried Jerusalem early this week, following President Clinton's historic meeting with Syrian President Hafez Assad on Sunday.

Some of the wariness here was prompted by the assessment that all the glowing optimism about what had been achieved in the talks seemed to be coming from the Americans rather than the Syrians.

"The tone was too positive to be disappointing, but it was too general to be satisfactory," Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said of the talks, capturing a feeling prevalent among many officials and observers here.

A similar assessment was made by Rafael Eitan, the leader of the staunchly nationalist Tsomet Party, who said Assad's statements at a news conference after the meeting "go no farther than his past vague generalities."

During their meeting, which lasted more than five and a half hours, Clinton and Assad pledged to support a "peace of the brave" in the Middle East.

But as Peres said, the two leaders' comments were long on generalities and short on specifics.

At a press conference after their marathon session -- the first meeting between American and Syrian leaders since 1990 -- Clinton assured Israel and the world that Syria was ready for full peace and a normalization of relations with the Jewish state.

Not merely an end of war, Clinton insisted, but normal relations -- "like between good neighbors."

He had heard this from Assad unequivocally, Clinton said, and now it would be up to the two sides, Syria and Israel, to make historic decisions for peace.

Vague And Waffling

And in his opening statement, Assad said, "Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation and enables our peoples in the region to live in peace, security and dignity."

The trouble was that when the Syrian leader was pressed to provide details about the components of the envisaged peace, Assad was vague and waffling.

Also troubling were the host of issues left unresolved after the Clinton-Assad meeting.

No announcements were made about a withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, nor about Syrian support of terrorist groups opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian accord.

On the Golan Heights on Sunday night, settlers and their sympathizers, unwilling to give up the Golan in return for vague promises of peace with Syria, mounted demonstrations and vowed a new wave of protests later in the week.

In the Knesset on Monday, Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur said the government would not make major territorial concessions on the Golan before holding a nationwide referendum.

"I want to clarify if the territorial price demanded of us on the Golan Heights is significant, the government will bring this to a public referendum," he said.

Gur provided little elaboration on the subject, but he did confirm to the Knesset that this was the government's position.

Following the Geneva meeting, Clinton dispatched the State Department's Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk of the National Security Council to brief Israeli leaders on the details of the Geneva meeting.

They met late Sunday night with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and on Monday with Peres and other Israeli officials.

Ross and his aides stressed the sunny side of Assad's public performance. In particular, they noted the Syrian president's pronouncement that his country now had a "strategic" commitment to peace with Israel.

This, they said, contrasted starkly with Assad's oft-stated "strategy" during the 1980s -- to attain military parity with the Jewish state.

Ross, in comments to Israeli reporters, spoke of Assad's having "broken new ground." He said the Geneva meeting provided a solid basis for the resumption of the bilateral peace talks in Washington later this month.

Rabin was quoted in the Israeli media Monday as saying he wanted to hear the promising declarations attributed to Assad by the Americans from Assad himself.

Peres, too, while noting the favorable tone of the Geneva press conference, said it was unclear just how that tone was to be translated, on the part of the Syrians, into the concrete practicalities of peace.

Some of the post-summit speculation here focused on the possibility of a Rabin-Assad meeting in the near future.

Rabin would then indeed be able to hear for himself, directly from Assad, the statements and signals that had so encouraged Clinton at the Geneva meeting.

It was significant that the Geneva press conference was broadcast repeatedly, and in its entirety, in the Syrian media on Sunday and Monday.

This represents an undeniable shift in Syria's tactics -- and perhaps the beginning of an effort to draw public opinion away from years of indoctrination against any notion of reaching peace with Israel.

**IN TERRORISM REPORT, U.S. LAUDS PLO,
BUT SAYS ARAFAT CAN'T CONTROL MEMBERS**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- The Clinton administration thinks the Palestine Liberation Organization is in compliance with pledges to renounce terrorism, but it also believes PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat lacks the ability to control various PLO-related factions.

In a report submitted last week to Congress, the State Department said, "We believe that the PLO is complying with the commitments embodied in the Declaration of Principles," which was signed in September, and in letters to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the late Nor-

wegian Foreign Minister Johan Holst.

The report added, however, that "rejectionist elements who claim to be under the PLO umbrella continue to commit terrorist acts."

"At the same time, both the U.S. and the Israeli government recognize that Arafat has no real ability to exert operational control over these groups," the report said.

The Israeli government is expected to study the report and comment on it in the future.

The 11-page report, dated Jan. 10, was prepared in response to a 1990 law requiring the administration to report to Congress every 120 days on PLO activities, if the administration is involved in a dialogue with the PLO.

A State Department spokesman said he thought the report was the first since the United States resumed its dialogue with the PLO shortly before the signing of the Israeli-PLO accord on Sept. 13.

Many in Congress remain wary of the PLO, which has long been connected to various terrorist groups.

On Sept. 9, Arafat said in a letter to Rabin that the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and that he renounced terrorism and violence.

The Jan. 10 report includes a list of terrorist incidents conducted by Palestinian groups -- most of whom reject the Israeli-PLO agreement -- since the agreement was signed in September.

The PLO consists of various groups, with varying relationships to Arafat and varying views of the Israeli-PLO agreement.

SYRIA RECEIVES U.S. JEWISH GROUP, MAY BE 1ST SUCH MEETING OF ITS KIND

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- After meeting with Syrian and American officials in Damascus, a leader of Americans for Peace Now believes Syrian President Hafez Assad is "very serious in terms of wanting to deal" with Israel.

"This is an important moment, where a lot of possibilities are on the table that weren't there previously," said Gary Rubin, executive director of APN.

Rubin was one of five members of the organization who was in Syria from Jan. 7 to 11.

While they traveled on individual tourist visas, the five were received as a group, in the closest thing to an official delegation of an American Jewish group that Syria has yet received.

Rubin said his sense of the Syrian position -- confirmed by the remarks following the summit Sunday between Assad and President Clinton -- was that "if Israel is willing to recognize the principle of Syrian sovereignty over every inch of the Golan Heights, then everything is open for negotiations," including the possible presence of international troops, demilitarization and the nature of the peace.

From reading the English-language Syrian press and speaking with American officials who monitor the Arabic press, Rubin came away with the impression that "while there is certainly no love fest, Israel is being mentioned. Its name is being used."

"There does seem to be a feeling by people who have covered the issue that the blatant anti-Semitism in the Syrian press has decreased somewhat," he said.

Still, Rubin said: "Syria is a closed society. There is a lot of misunderstanding and even fear

in terms of what peace will be like. There is fear of Israeli economic domination, talk of economic warfare. There is still a lack of knowledge about Israel.

"It's clear that there won't be war one day and warm peace the next day," he said.

RABBI, WHILE PRAISED BY VATICAN, IS REPORTED OBJECTIONABLE AS ENVOY

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- The newly established diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican have been clouded by reports of Vatican objections to the possible appointment of a rabbi as Israeli ambassador to the Holy See.

But Israel sources have downplayed the matter, and there was no indication that the reports would sour the new relations or throw the exchange of ambassadors off track.

Reports have surfaced in the Italian, American and Israeli media that the Vatican has, in effect, blocked the possible appointment of Rabbi David Rosen as Israeli ambassador.

The British-born Rosen, who was formerly the chief rabbi of Ireland, is the Jerusalem-based director of interfaith relations for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Rosen was a key negotiator in the talks leading up to the Israeli-Vatican agreement, which was signed Dec. 30 in Jerusalem. His name had been mentioned in the media as a possible ambassador.

Monsignor Andrea di Montezemolo, the apostolic delegate to Jerusalem, has said openly that the first Israeli ambassador to the Holy See should be a career diplomat.

The Vatican has stressed that the bilateral agreement is a state-to-state rather than a theological accord.

But Montezemolo expressed praise for Rosen, saying, "Rabbi Rosen is very experienced, and he helped a lot in relations between Jews and Catholics. He is a member of many (interfaith) organizations. It would be a pity if he should leave all this activity to be a special representative to the Holy See."

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls declined to comment on the issue, saying only that for the moment the agreement between the Vatican and Israel has been signed and ambassadors will soon be exchanged.

Harry Wall, the ADL director in Israel, was quoted by the London Jewish Chronicle as saying that the Vatican's stance would suggest "a slight touch of dual standards, since, after all, Vatican representatives abroad are clerics."

A source involved in interfaith relations said Israel had not raised that point with the Vatican.

"Even if (the Israelis) think it's chutzpah, they would never say it," the source said.

But an Israeli source downplayed the matter, saying the Vatican concerns are "not objections" and that the Vatican would probably agree to any ambassador named by Israel.

Rosen declined to comment directly on the controversy, but he stressed that state-to-state relations between the Vatican and Israel had to be viewed within the wider context of inter-religious relations.

"I understand that the (Vatican) secretary of state is eager to ensure that relations with Israel are of an exclusively bilateral diplomatic nature, but it would be a mistake to ignore the broader ramifications of the relationship," he said.

HUNGARY'S GOVERNMENT, JEWS AT ODDS OVER HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION DAY

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- The Hungarian Jewish community is seriously at odds with the government about when to hold a day of mourning to mark the Holocaust here.

A committee established by the Jewish community to oversee a yearlong series of commemorative events has protested government plans to mark not the deportations of Jews 50 years ago but the occupation of Hungary by the Germans on March 19, 1944.

The Jewish community is calling this a whitewash, depicting Hungary as a victim during World War II, whereas the wartime Hungarian Arrow Cross regime persecuted Jews on its own initiative without waiting for orders from the Nazis.

The Jewish committee has asked that a national day of mourning be held April 17, the day 50 years ago that the mass deportations of Hungary's Jews began.

Most of the 600,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz, where the majority were killed.

The Jewish community and the government have each formed committees to organize commemorative events. But the government committee includes extreme rightists, members of a new political party established by ultranationalist Istvan Csurka, who has made a series of anti-Semitic statements.

Peter Feldmayer, head of the Jewish committee, wrote a letter to a government official about two months ago saying he would not sit at the same table as the rightists, Emil Bogdan and Tibor Zimanyi. Feldmayer also made his remark to Hungarian Radio. He has not yet received an answer.

Karoly Herenyi, the spokesman for the ruling party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, said the party would definitely sponsor a commemoration for the victims of the Holocaust. But he had not answer about what the government, per se, would be doing.

IN SETTING ELECTION DATE, ITALY IGNORES JEWISH VOTERS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- Overriding Jewish objections, the Italian government announced that the country's general elections will be held on March 27, the first day of Passover, effectively excluding the country's Jewish voters from casting their ballots.

The government said Monday that the elections could be extended by one day, but since that is the second day of Passover, the announcement did little to alleviate the problem.

Jewish leaders and members of the community expressed outrage about the government's announcements.

A number of non-Jewish political and religious figures also condemned the decision. Some said they would boycott the elections to show solidarity with the Jewish community.

Rome Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff, calling the government's decision "an abuse," said he would try to fight it in the country's constitutional court.

Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro dissolved the current scandal-tainted parliament on Sunday.

For weeks, the media had been speculating that March 27 would be the most likely date for what are seen here as the most important elections in Italy's postwar history.

Jewish leaders had repeatedly pointed out that Jewish voters would be unable to cast ballots if the vote were scheduled that day.

About 40,000 Jews, 30,000 of them of voting age, live in Italy, which has a total population of 58 million.

GEORGIA BACKTRACKS ON STIFF EXIT FEES

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- The government of the former Soviet republic of Georgia has backtracked on an effort to tax Jews leaving the country.

Early this month, the Georgian government announced that passports, previously issued for a nominal charge, would cost \$300, which is equivalent to several years' salary in Georgian currency.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, which maintains an office in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, attributed the measure to a desire for foreign currency, on the assumption that the world Jewish community would pay for the passports.

Estimates of the numbers of Jews in Georgia range between 15,000 and 30,000.

President Eduard Shevardnadze said that he had not known of the measure in advance and told the Jewish Agency that he would cancel it.

Now, it is reported that there may be a \$50 passport fee.

Jewish groups have long seen exit fees as an obstacle to the right of free emigration.

"It must be made clear at the first sign of any deterioration of this right that world Jewry will not be a source of income," Baruch Gur, director of the Jewish Agency's unit for the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, said in a statement.

WAR CRIMES UNIT IS DISSOLVED; EVIDENCE REMAINS FOR MUSEUM

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- A well-worn boot, items of jewelry and reconstructed skull fragments were at the center of a unique presentation at the Sydney Jewish Museum last Friday.

With the dissolution of the war crimes investigatory unit by the Australian government due to be completed by the end of this month, the Australian Archives gave, in perpetuity, photographs of and items exhumed from the mass graves of the Jews of the villages of Gnivan and Serniki, in the Ukraine.

The exhumations and subsequent reburials in accordance with Jewish law, were part of the Australian government's investigation of allegations that people who found haven in Australia had been involved in the murders of the Jewish villagers more than 50 years ago.

It was part of a series of scientific and historical investigations conducted by the Special Investigations Unit, which provided grim physical proof of the brutality of the Nazi murder machine.

Making the presentation, Federal Justice Minister Duncan Kerr said, "It bears reflecting that the horrors of the Holocaust should never be forgotten."

JEW AND INDIANS IN AMERICA FIND COMMON GOALS AND GROUND

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17 (JTA) -- It has been two years now since India, the most populous democracy in the world, announced that it would exchange ambassadors with Israel.

Since then, the two countries have been building stronger ties after years of chilly relations.

But in the United States, some Jewish and Indian Americans were forming bonds even before Israel and India exchanged ambassadors in 1992.

For several years, B'nai B'rith has had a relationship with the Indian American Forum for Political Education, a group promoting Indian American political concerns.

"Our experience as immigrant groups is similar," said Dan Mariaschin, director of B'nai B'rith's department of international, governmental and Israel affairs.

To learn how to tackle the political process as a minority group, the Indian American Forum turned to the Jewish community in 1986.

"We have been working especially with B'nai B'rith to understand how they became involved in the political process in this country and to learn from their successes," said Krishna Srinivasa, the past president of the forum who now serves on the group's executive committee.

"B'nai B'rith has been extremely helpful to us," said Srinivasa, who lives in Atlanta.

Most Indian immigrants came to the United States within the last several decades, later than most Jews, but the two groups share values of "a strong family, veneration of education, and a desire to succeed," said Mariaschin, whose wife is from an Indian Jewish family.

Srinivasa echoed Mariaschin. "People do not realize there are a lot of common things between Indians and Jews in this country," he said.

"Indian kids are the valedictorians of their high school class and are the children of immigrants," Mariaschin said. "We've had that experience too. I think there is a great deal of potential in our working together."

The Indian American Forum, one of the biggest Indian American political groups -- with about 2,000 members in more than 20 state chapters around the country -- is seeking to educate U.S. foreign policy-makers about its views on the U.S.-Indian relationship, and the group is involving itself in a variety of political issues, including health care.

'A Great Commonality Of Interest'

Like the Jewish community, the Indian American community in this country, numbering about 1 million, is heavily represented in the health care professions.

The American Jewish Committee is also forming ties with the Indian community here, and Jason Isaacson, the group's Washington representative, said the Indian community has taken the initiative in the relationship.

"They and I see a great commonality of interest, and great potential for interethnic work," Isaacson said.

The Indian ambassador addressed an AJCommittee forum earlier this year.

While both communities are "keen to establish relations," the relationship between Jewish and Indian Americans "has not taken off as much as it should have," said Pankaj Saran, first

secretary in the political section of the Indian Embassy here.

Saran speculated that the relationship would probably grow in the wake of the improving relations between Israel and India.

Israel and India established full diplomatic relations in January 1992, and exchanged ambassadors for the first time in October 1992.

Back in 1951, India extended de facto recognition to Israel, when both countries were newly independent.

India, however, would not establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel. Israel maintained a consulate in Bombay, but India did not have a reciprocal office in Israel.

India's position was attributed to its wish not to antagonize its large Muslim minority, and its role as a leader in the non-aligned movement during the Cold War.

The non-aligned movement, which also included Egypt, Indonesia and Yugoslavia, tried to carve out its own place independent of either the United States or the Soviet Union, and supported the Arab cause against Israel in international forums.

But in the past two years, relations between Israel and India have turned around, because of changed international conditions including progress in the Middle East peace talks.

"Since January 1992 when we established relations, things are on the rise. We are witnessing a new deepening and broadening of the relationship," said Dan Arbelle, an official at the Israeli Embassy here.

When the Madrid process was established in 1991, "it essentially meant that Arab countries were prepared to sit with Israel and talk to it," said Saran of the Indian Embassy. "The international community was beginning to look at Israel in a different light."

Negotiating A Trade Agreement

Official delegations and private business-people have been traveling between the two countries in recent months, including Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who visited India this past May.

The overall trade volume between the two countries is currently \$300 million a year, said Arbelle of the Israeli Embassy. He added that the Israelis hope it will reach \$400 million by next year.

The two countries are engaged in negotiations to finalize a trade agreement, and India is considering buying Israeli equipment to upgrade its air force, Saran said.

In addition, India is hoping to play a role in the Middle East peace process.

India is participating in the water resources and arms control groups of the multilateral peace talks, and pledged \$1 million for Palestinian economic development at the donors' conference held here this past fall, Saran said.

Islamic fundamentalism has been another topic of discussion between the two countries, Arbelle said. "We find with India that we have many things in common vis-a-vis Islamic fundamentalism," he said.

Another reason for optimism in the relationships both between Israel and India and between Jewish and Indian Americans is the lack of a history of anti-Semitism in India.

"There is no history of anti-Semitism per se," said Mariaschin of B'nai B'rith, so the relationship could "start without that kind of baggage."