

**RABIN SAYS TOUGH STANCE ON SECURITY IS PAYING OFF IN TALKS WITH THE PLO**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is maintaining that Israel's tough stand on security issues is beginning to show positive results in the negotiations with the Palestinians.

Rabin made the assessment Sunday when he met with reporters to discuss the meeting in Oslo the day before between Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Peres and Arafat were in Oslo to attend the funeral of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst, who had been instrumental in lining up a series of secret talks last year in the Norwegian capital that led to the historic self-rule agreement between Israel and the PLO.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, also in Oslo for the funeral, met separately with Peres and Arafat in an effort to get the Israeli-PLO negotiations back on track.

The negotiations for implementing the self-rule accord have been stalled on several security issues, particularly the question of who will control the border crossings between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, and between the West Bank town of Jericho and Jordan.

At the Oslo meeting with Arafat, Peres reportedly demanded that Israel maintain exclusive control at the Jordan River crossings, and that travelers would encounter Palestinian border personnel only after an initial screening by the Israeli army. Arafat reportedly did not contest this position.

The two are scheduled to meet again next weekend in Switzerland.

Talks To Resume Monday

Israeli and Palestinian negotiations on security and the transfer of civilian responsibilities were scheduled for Monday at the Sinai border town of Taba.

On Monday as well, bilateral negotiations will resume in Washington. Israeli and Syrian negotiators will meet for the first time in four months to discuss the normalization of relations between Jerusalem and Damascus.

On the eve of the resumption of Middle East peace talks in Washington, President Clinton and Jordan's King Hussein held a private meeting last Friday at the White House.

A spokeswoman at the Jordanian Embassy in Washington said that Clinton and Hussein also discussed other elements in the U.S.-Jordanian relationship, including aid to Jordan.

"Jordan seeks assistance in terms of its debt problem," she said.

Later in the week, Arafat was scheduled to fly to Saudi Arabia for what would be his first visit there since the rupture of relations between the Saudis and the PLO during the 1991 Gulf War.

Arafat's support of Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein in the war had angered the Saudis, who subsequently stopped providing financial support to the PLO.

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Deborah Kalb in Washington.)

ARAB LEAGUE VOWS TO U.S. TO REVIEW BOYCOTT ISSUES

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- The Arab League is reconsidering elements of the economic boycott of Israel, U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown has announced.

The Arab League's secretary general, Esmat Abdel Meguid, told Brown that, at its next ministerial meeting in March, the league would consider rescinding its so-called secondary and tertiary boycotts, the secretary said last Friday in Cairo.

The secondary boycott imposes trading sanctions against companies doing business with Israel. The tertiary boycott, in turn, imposes sanctions on companies that trade with firms that have broken the terms of the secondary boycott.

"I am hopeful that this commitment will result in a decision eliminating the secondary and tertiary boycotts, and I look forward to a day when the boycott, in its entirety, will be ended," Brown said in a statement.

The secretary and Meguid met late Thursday in the Egyptian capital.

Brown was quick to telephone Jewish leaders Friday with news of Meguid's commitment.

Among those contacted were officials of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

'The Result Of His Tireless Efforts'

During his Middle East trip last week, Brown urged Arab leaders to end the boycott, which has been in effect since before the founding of Israel in 1948 and affects both Israel and companies doing business with Israel.

"We are grateful that in every capital he visited during his recent mission to the Middle East, the secretary raised the issue of this unfair and anachronistic trade practice," AIPAC President Steve Grossman said in a statement Friday.

"This important development is in large measure the result of his tireless efforts," Grossman said of Brown's announcement on Friday.

The boycott, which also includes a primary boycott directed at Israel itself, has come under sharp fire from President Clinton.

"We are gratified the Arab League will finally place the economic boycott of Israel on its agenda," Lester Pollack, chairman of the President's Conference, said in a statement Friday.

"It's certainly a constructive step," said Walter Stern, chairman of the International Steering Committee on Freedom of Trade with Israel, an umbrella group concerned with the boycott.

"I look forward to hearing what the result of the discussions are, if it gets that far," Stern added.

Brown's weeklong trip to the Middle East included stops in Israel, the territories, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

On Saturday, Brown became the first high-level American official to visit the Gaza Strip.

Meeting there with 25 Palestinian businessmen, Brown promised U.S. assistance to help rebuild the local economy once the self-rule accord goes into effect.

**REFORM RABBIS, FRESH FROM JORDAN,
EXPRESS HOPE ABOUT PEACE PROCESS**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- Arriving in Israel following a historic trip to Jordan last week, a group of American Reform rabbis voiced optimism about the prospect of an Israeli-Jordanian peace.

"Our mere presence (in Jordan) was a statement," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. "Our visit would not have been feasible or proper two to three years ago."

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin met with the group of rabbis here on Sunday.

During his remarks, which included a positive assessment of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Beilin appeared to backtrack from comments he made last week disparaging the contributions made by Diaspora organizations as "charity."

The Reform group, including 80 American rabbis, was the first official rabbinical delegation ever to visit Jordan, which is technically in a state of war with Israel.

The group had been scheduled to meet last week with Crown Prince Hassan, but the meeting was canceled because of what Jordanian officials called a mix-up in the arrangements between the palace and the Jordanian representatives in Washington.

Hirsch conceded delegates had been disappointed by the cancellation, but said they did not feel slighted.

Hassan did find time last week for a first-ever official interview with a journalist from an Israeli daily paper.

As headlined on the front page of Friday's Yediot Achronot, Hassan expressed his wish for a "warm peace" with Israel.

During the rabbinical group's meetings with academicians, economists and other prominent Jordanians, the group managed to convey the message "that many more American Jews support the peace process than criticize or object to it," said Hirsch.

Couldn't Have Israeli-Stamped Passports

Noting that while his group "did not do a scientific survey," Hirsch expressed the view that "in the course of our discussions, people conveyed the impression to us that it's no longer a question of whether there will be peace between Jordan and Israel, but when."

The fact that American rabbis "were being protected by members of Jordan's security forces" during the visit was a powerful and hopeful sign, said Rabbi Daniel Polish, from Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

But the group's inability to enter Jordan with Israeli-stamped passports and the lack of a direct travel corridor between Eilat and Aqaba on the Israeli-Jordanian border were signs that the transition is still under way, Polish said.

He added that the meetings in Amman were encouraging because they reflected "a desire for the peace process to succeed."

The Jordanians "understand the country has much to gain from a closer relationship with Israel," he said.

During his address to the rabbis on Sunday, Beilin warmly thanked the group for its support of the peace process.

He said their efforts in Jordan had acted as a "kind of counterbalance" to the activities of Diaspora groups opposed to the Israeli government's peace initiatives.

But Beilin nonetheless stressed that the actions of these opposition groups were "totally legitimate."

The debate between Israeli and American Jews "is something which should be encouraged," said Beilin, even if "sometimes it's not very pleasant."

"You are more than welcome to be involved," he said.

Beilin's remarks appeared intended to soften the impression given in a highly publicized speech he made last week to the Women's International Zionist Organization.

In that speech, Beilin said Israel no longer needs the "charity" of Diaspora fund-raising organizations.

"If our economic situation is better than in many of your countries, how can we go on asking for your charity?" Beilin reportedly said last week.

His remarks prompted a harsh attack against him by Rabin, and unleashed a storm of protest from within the Jewish Agency.

In an apparent effort to mend some fences, Beilin told the group of Reform rabbis he is not interested in disparaging the efforts of any organizations.

He said the Israel-Diaspora relationship has to be changed to meet changing needs, and that Jewish organizations must respond by changing their priorities.

Beilin took care to note the role of Diaspora organizations in supporting aliyah, saying that "without the support of the Diaspora," the recent wave of immigration "would have been very difficult for us to handle."

At the same time, he emphasized he is "quite worried" about Jewish continuity in the Diaspora and believes that Israel needs to help ensure that continuity, primarily through education in the Diaspora and youth programs in Israel.

"We urge you to be involved" in these questions, said Beilin, "but being involved means a dialogue," and that will be challenging, given the "revolutionary" transformations in Israel in light of the peace process.

"People are so used to wars and terrorism" defining the dialogue, he said, adding that they will no longer be the only issues on the agenda.

"It was easy for the Diaspora to accept us as a people (with) very deep problems, who fought against the whole world and needed help," Beilin said.

But now, he said, "We won't need so much help and we will have a dialogue between equals."

DINITZ FACES PRELIMINARY HEARING

JERUSALEM, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- The head of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization will appear before Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair on Monday for a preliminary hearing before a final decision is made on whether to press charges against him.

Dinitz has been under investigation for possible fraud, including using agency credit cards for personal expenses.

His case is presently before the attorney general, who must decide whether there is a basis to press charges, and also whether there is a public interest in so doing.

ROMANIA'S LEADER VOWS TO QUASH SURGE OF ANTI-SEMITIC ACTIVITIES

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- The leader of Romania has pledged to "put an end" to the recent surge of anti-Semitic activity in his country.

In letters sent recently to the Anti-Defamation League and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), President Ion Iliescu gave his personal assurance that he would thwart the actions of anti-Semitic forces in Romania.

"I am as determined as ever to use all my constitutional powers to prevent and, if the case, to put an end to any action (designed to) revive anti-Semitism in Romania," Iliescu wrote.

"The Romanian people and the government of Romania have nothing in common with extremist attitudes," he wrote.

The letters were written in reaction to concern here over recent dedications of statues and roads to a former Romanian dictator who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

The dictator, Ion Antonescu, was executed as a war criminal in 1946. During Antonescu's rule from 1940 to 1944, more than 250,000 Jews died in territories controlled by Romania.

"I welcome President Iliescu's letter and his clear and forthright statements repudiating the ceremony honoring Gen. Antonescu," Maloney said in a statement Jan. 19.

"I also commend him for his unambiguous promise to fight anti-Semitism in his country," she said.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, praised Iliescu's intentions.

But "the government must act to translate the commitment into deeds," Foxman said in a statement.

Jewish groups strongly denounced the October dedication of a statue to Antonescu near Bucharest, a ceremony financed by members of the local Romanian police and attended by a member of the Romanian Cabinet.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher and B'nai B'rith leaders met separately with Romanian officials in December, urging the government of Romania to take a more active role in combating extreme nationalism.

UNDER U.S. DEPORTATION ORDER, EX-SS GUARD BOUND FOR BRITAIN

NEW YORK, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- An admitted SS guard at the Mauthausen death camp has left the United States and gone to Britain, the Justice Department announced.

Alexander Schweidler, 71, a resident of Inverness, Fla., left the United States on Jan. 20. A deportation order had been issued by a United States immigration judge in Miami last month.

The deportation order was the result of a settlement reached between the Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations and Schweidler, a citizen of the United Kingdom born in Slovakia.

OSI is a special unit of the Justice Department charged with investigating and prosecuting suspected war criminals residing in the United States.

OSI had maintained that Schweidler fatally shot two Soviet prisoners of war at the Mauthausen camp in Austria in April 1942.

In December, Schweidler signed an agreement

with the OSI admitting he had been an armed SS guard at Mauthausen.

He also admitted that he assisted in the persecution of civilians on the basis of race, religion, national origin or political opinion, grounds for deportation.

But Schweidler did not admit killing the Soviet prisoners.

In ordering the deportation, Judge J. Daniel Dowell stated that a "persecutor, regardless of the passage of time since his vile acts, should not be allowed to remain in the United States once he is discovered."

"There should be no protective umbrella of law to erase the harm and suffering he has caused," said Dowell.

Neal Sher, director of OSI, said 48 Nazi persecutors have been stripped of their U.S. citizenship and 39 have been deported from the United States since OSI began operations in 1979.

Sher said more than 350 people currently are under investigation by OSI.

ROME JEWS JOIN INTERFAITH PEACE MARCH

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- Jews joined Christians and Muslims Saturday night in a candle-lit procession through downtown Rome calling for peace in the former Yugoslavia.

More than 3,000 people, including the mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli, took part in the procession, which wound its way from the Capitoline Hill past the main synagogue to the nearby Church of St. Bartholomew on an island in the Tiber River.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, spoke about the three stars Jews wait to see to ascertain the end of Shabbat.

"I would call these stars justice, freedom and love," she said.

"It is on these pillars that peace is constructed.

Religions can do much because there is no peace without religious peace," she said, adding that peace "is also unfortunately killed in the name of God."

Rabbi Abramo Piattelli offered a prayer for peace when the procession stopped in front of the synagogue, and a Catholic priest led similar prayers in St. Bartholomew's Church.

70 FRENCH LEGISLATORS TO VISIT ISRAEL

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Jan. 23 (JTA) -- A group of 70 members of the French Parliament will visit Israel at the end of January.

The French legislators will be taken to Israel by Siona, a French Zionist organization of Sephardic Jews.

The group is scheduled to meet with Israeli President Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and leaders of the opposition.

This will be the third field trip for parliamentarians organized by Siona and the French Parliament's France-Israel Friendship Group.

"The aim is to strengthen the links of friendship between France and Israel, through a better knowledge of Israel's realities," said Roger Pinto, the French Sephardic leader who arranged the trip.

He said this would be the most important delegation from Parliament to visit Israel.

**ON ROOF OF THE WORLD, NEW SIGN:
ISRAELIS ARE NOT WELCOMED HERE**

By Alexandra J. Wall

KATHMANDU, Nepal (JTA) -- Israeli music plays in the background. The waiters greet the customers, "Erev tov, Shabbat Shalom." Homestyle dishes on the menu include falafel, schnitzel and humus and menus are frequently in Hebrew.

But locales like the Abu Rami restaurant here, where Israelis had long felt welcome, are becoming more and more scarce in Nepal, one of the most popular destinations among young Israeli travelers.

Drawn by the challenge of trekking in the spectacular serenity of the Himalayas, thousands of Israelis just beyond their army service flock to Nepal each year. But many, excited by the prospects of traveling abroad and seeing the world, are finding that a bad reputation has preceded them.

After a host of bad experiences in which Israelis have been accused of at best disrespect and rudeness and worse violence and theft, Israelis are finding it impossible to change their image here and are no longer wanted in this friendly country.

Iris Alfoar and Vered Lichter, both 22, were refused accommodations several times on the Annapurna Circuit trek, which has been most popular with Israelis.

Two incidents allegedly initiated by Israelis resulted in melees and have clouded the reception for Israelis.

"We had been walking all day," recalled Alfoar, who lives in Tel Aviv. "We finally reached a village and asked at a guest house for a room. The owner asked us where we were from. We said 'Israel,' and he told us there was no room available."

The two women, who ultimately found accommodations at another lodge, later learned that a Dutch couple who had arrived after them were given a room in the first guest house.

"I would like to say that this is anti-Semitism, but I know that it isn't," said Alfoar.

'A Few Bad Incidents' Ruin It For All

"The Nepalese, especially those in the villages, don't know anything about Judaism, or even the political situation in Israel. They only know about Israelis from the ones that come through here, and unfortunately a few bad incidents have ruined it for all of us."

Alfoar thinks that this treatment is unfair.

"The Nepalese are generalizing about all of us, based on the actions of just a few. From every country there are bad tourists and good tourists. I don't understand why they single out Israelis for this kind of treatment," she said.

"Guest house owners did not believe me when I said that I was Israeli," said Oren Golan, who came to Nepal with his American cousin.

"They would tell me, 'You're too nice to be Israeli,' or 'You order too much food to be Israeli.'" But the 25-year-old Givatayim resident is not the typical Israeli traveler in Nepal.

Golan waited until after finishing his bachelor's degree before heading to the Far East. He also chose to trek with a group of people from different countries, rather than the usual Israeli trend of keeping to only Hebrew-speakers.

"The average Israeli in Nepal is very young," said Ilan Maor, second secretary to the Israeli ambassador to Nepal.

"Most Israelis are released from the army, work a few months and then come straight to the Far East. This is the first time in their lives that they are free to do whatever they want."

Both Israelis and Nepalese acknowledge that cultural differences account for some of the problems. Both also concur that a clash is inevitable because the brash, loud nature of Israelis is seen as obtrusive by the meek, polite Nepalese.

Another explanation of Israeli behavior in Nepal is that the young men recently released from the army are still caught up in the macho military culture in which they have been immersed for the past three to four years.

But it goes beyond cultural differences, according to Subash Rai, who has worked predominantly with Israelis in his two years in the tourist business.

"I have been trekking when Israelis stop and urinate on our stupas (religious monuments), knowing that they are of religious significance for us," said Rai. "They simply don't respect our customs or our culture."

Amar K.C., a student who works as a trekking guide during vacations from university, agreed.

'They Lack Dignity And Character'

"One hundred percent of Israeli people, I don't like," he said. "They complain about everything. They are never satisfied. They come here and act as if this is their country. They are stingy with their money. They lack dignity and character."

When asked if he would ever work with Israelis again, the guide said, "I promise you no."

This sentiment was echoed by a guide who leads rafting groups, most of which are Israeli.

"I've been working for this company for four years," said Bim Gurung, 21. During that time he has learned a fair amount of Hebrew and can sing Israeli songs. But despite his ability to yell rafting commands in Hebrew, he thinks he will seek employment elsewhere next year.

"Four years is enough," he said. "I always have problems with them. They never listen to instructions and they refuse to wear life jackets. I'm tired of working with them."

But unruly behavior is a minor charge, compared to the charges of stealing or not paying.

"I went trekking as a porter, with one Israeli for nine days," said Suk Bahadur B.K. "He paid me three days in advance and said he'd pay me the rest after the trek. After I carried all of his things for nine days, he told me that he had no more money and could not pay me for the six days that he owed me."

Mistrust of Israelis is most pervasive in the guest houses along the Annapurna Circuit trek, a three-week trek that is most popular among Israelis.

Lale Baha, a trekking guide for seven years, said there is good reason why some guest houses bear signs saying, "No Israelis allowed."

He said he has seen many "tricks" Israelis are famous for while trekking, from leaving without paying to stealing bedsheets. But Maor said most Israelis coming to Nepal each year cause no trouble. Of course, he said, among 5,000 or 6,000 people, "there are going to be 50 or 60 who might cause problems."

"Luckily these incidents have not affected our dealings with the Nepalese government," the envoy said. "But it is no less important to have good relations with the people of Nepal," he said.