

**U.S. HOUSE PANEL PONDERES BAN
ON HAMAS MEMBERS' ENTRY TO U.S.**

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- A congressional subcommittee is considering legislation that would ban members of the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas from entering the United States.

Hamas is part of "a sophisticated and highly organized terrorist network in the United States," Rep. Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.) said in a statement Wednesday before the House Judiciary subcommittee on international law, immigration and refugees.

Hamas has been waging a war in the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the Middle East peace process. It has recently come out vehemently, and violently, against the peace accord signed here in September.

The bill, which was introduced by Deutsch last March, would consider all Hamas members to be terrorists. Federal immigration law prohibits terrorists from entering the United States.

Mary Ryan, assistant secretary for consular affairs at the State Department, testified against that provision of the bill that declares all Hamas members terrorists and thus bars any Hamas member from entering the United States.

Not all Hamas members are considered terrorists because Hamas engages in social welfare activities, including providing economic, educational and medical assistance to Palestinians, Ryan said at the hearing.

The spokesperson said the State Department stands by its longstanding position, supported by existing immigration law, that only persons directly involved in terrorist activity are prohibited from U.S. soil.

Israel deported more than 400 Islamic fundamentalists in late 1992 for suspected terrorist activities, many of whom had ties to Hamas.

"Hamas has found a friendly U.S. community in which to operate and fund-raise promoting its acts of violence," Deutsch said.

The State Department announced in February 1993 that for the first time, its annual terrorism report would include a section on Hamas. The following month, the United States government announced that it had severed all contacts with the organization.

Two other bills that would exclude members of terrorist organizations from the United States, each sponsored by Rep. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), also were discussed at the hearings.

**ARAB BOYCOTT IS ON THE AGENDA
AS MOROCCAN OFFICIAL VISITS U.S.**

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Against a backdrop of growing ties between Israel and Morocco, Moroccan Foreign Minister Abdellatif Filali met here this week with Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Subjects under discussion at Tuesday's meeting included cooperation on the thorny issue of the Arab economic boycott of Israel.

"I'm told the secretary and the minister discussed ways to cooperate on the boycott in advance of the Arab League's March meeting," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said.

Morocco has been among the most forthcoming Arab countries regarding contacts with Israel.

Prior to the meeting, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Morocco's "King Hassan and the minister have taken a leading role in trying to promote good relations between Israel and the Arab states."

Morocco has "been one of the leaders in the easing of the boycott," Christopher said.

"Morocco will probably be one of the first Arab countries to establish diplomatic relations" with Israel, an Israeli official said Tuesday.

Late last year, the Moroccan government reportedly told Christopher that Morocco and Israel would be expanding their economic ties.

The Israeli official said Israel and Morocco had had "a lot of communication" over the past few years and especially in the last year.

Despite the lack of full diplomatic relations between the two countries, their tourism and economic ties are "quite remarkable," the Israeli official said.

Israelis have been able to visit Morocco openly as tourists, and Israeli ministers have traveled to Morocco on working trips, the Israeli official said.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Morocco last fall, after the historic Israeli-Palestinian signing ceremony on the White House lawn.

The State Department said there have been a number of exchanges of business delegations between the two countries.

Ending the Arab League's boycott of Israel and of companies doing business with Israel has risen to the top of the U.S. government's Middle East priority list in recent months.

In January, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown announced that a top Arab League official had pledged that the group would discuss rescinding the boycott at its upcoming meeting. But in early February, another Arab League official reportedly said Brown's announcement was premature.

McCurry said Christopher and Filali discussed "broad Middle East issues and bilateral relations."

NEW CHARGE FILED AGAINST DERI

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair has told indicted former Interior Minister Aryeh Deri that a new indictment is to be submitted against him, Israel Radio reported.

The new charge reportedly involves fraud and breach of trust.

The indictment is said to deal with the illegal transfer of money from the Interior Ministry through local religious councils to institutions sponsored by Deri's fervently Orthodox Shas Party.

Deri is already scheduled to stand trial in two months on charges of fraud and bribery.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
EGYPT TRADES 'COLD PEACE'
FOR WARMER TIES WITH ISRAEL**
By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK -- Israel's "cold peace" with Egypt has seen a dramatic thaw in recent weeks.

After more than a decade in which there was little of the normalization promised in the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has reportedly told his senior military staff, "We are now moving toward full peace and normal relations with Israel."

The changed attitude has been manifest in the signing of cultural and scientific agreements between the two countries; in a decision to lay a phone link between the two countries; and in the arrival in Israel of hundreds of Egyptian tourists.

Cairo's new warmth is significant, because the limits of the Israeli-Egypt peace have been cited by opponents of Israel's present peace negotiations as evidence that true peace with Israel's Arab neighbors is only a mirage.

According to one Israeli who has participated in the thaw, the Egyptians are not unaware of this argument.

"I think they realize the peace treaty with Israel has been too formal for too long, and if they are to gain the confidence of the Israeli public in the peace treaty with Egypt and whole peace process, they better warm it up," said Uri Bar-Ner, Israel's deputy foreign minister in charge of scientific and cultural affairs.

Bar-Ner also suggested that Mubarak wanted to send a message to the Syrians and Palestinians that peace agreements with Israel involve more than just formal ties.

In January, Bar-Ner signed an agreement with his Egyptian counterpart providing for cultural exchanges. Thirty-two specific projects were listed in an addendum to the agreement, which was ratified this month during a state visit to Cairo by Shulamit Aloni, Israel's minister of communications, arts, science and technology.

Palestinian Issue Blocked Progress

"It's very significant because Egypt has had a major problem developing cultural agreements with Israel, because Egyptian artists and societies were very reluctant to have any contact with Israel, because they would be boycotted by the rest of the Arab world," said Bar-Ner.

It was issues of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict that froze the Egyptian-Israeli peace almost from its beginning, at least from the perspective of Cairo.

Egypt withdrew its ambassador from Tel Aviv during the Lebanon War in 1982, which began only two months after Israel completed its withdrawal from the Sinai. The ambassador returned following a summit between Mubarak and then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres in 1986, but the Egyptians cited the Palestinian issue as a bar to fuller relations.

"It vindicates what some of us have been saying all along, that there is an inherent connection between Israel's peace-process policy and the bilateral relations between Israel and Egypt," said another Foreign Ministry official.

"For a long time the Egyptians did not want to improve their bilateral relations with Israel, since they felt Israel was not adhering to its

commitments to the peace process," said the official.

According to a report from Egypt by the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot, Mubarak told his military staff that "the era of cold peace is over" and that he was encouraging full business cooperation with Israelis, including a possible sale of natural gas.

"There is no reason that Arab states without formal relations with Israel should sell her natural gas, while we have a surplus and nobody to sell to," Mubarak was quoted as saying, referring to reports that the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar is embarking on such a sale.

According to the newspaper account, Mubarak also met with the editors of the Egyptian press to inform them of the new line. Editorials concerning "the new honeymoon" with Israel soon followed.

How fully the Egyptian media adopts a changed attitude toward Israel may be the most significant question in evaluating Israeli-Egyptian ties.

"The real poison in the relationship is the way the Egyptian media has described us," said the Israeli official.

But while it is too soon to say whether the desired media shift has come about, it is clear that, in many small but significant ways, the Egyptian government is implementing its announced policy of normalization.

Drops Registration Requirement

Egypt has dropped a requirement that would be visitors to Israel register with the military officials, a regulation that kept tourism effectively nil. Since that change in regulations, dozens of tourists are passing daily through the Taba border crossing, many on group pilgrimages to Muslim or Coptic Christian holy places.

Two Egyptian translators of Hebrew literature into Arabic appeared at an international translation conference held in Israel in January -- the first time, according to Bar-Ner, that an Egyptian writer or translator dared appear in an Israeli forum that would receive world-wide publicity.

One of the translators made a side trip to present writer Amos Oz with the first Arabic translation of one of his novels.

Among the agreements formalized during Aloni's visit to Cairo is one to lay a direct phone link between the two countries, whose phone connections now pass through Rome. This would also bring Israel's phone network closer to the other Arab countries and Egypt's to the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Egyptian education minister agreed to allow Israeli archaeologists to participate in digs in the Sinai.

In addition, Egyptian educators and computer experts will come to Israel to study a program to teach reading that was developed by the Center for Educational Technology in Ramat Aviv.

And before leaving Cairo, Aloni announced that her visit will be reciprocated by her three Egyptian counterparts, the ministers of communications, of science, and of education.

These would be the first such visits in a decade.

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv.)

DE KLERK, COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY, CITES 'OPPORTUNITY' FOR ETHNIC GROUPS

By Suzanne Belling

PRETORIA, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- With only two months before South Africa's first non-racial general election, South African President and Nobel Peace Laureate F.W. de Klerk has given a message of encouragement to the Jewish community.

"Room and opportunity should be ensured for the various language, cultural and religious groups to remain true to what is important to them," de Klerk said in an interview.

He added that the various groups that comprise South Africa must be able "to cherish that which is dear to them and to practice in the religious field and in other fields -- freely and without intervention -- their customs, rituals and habits."

He said he remains absolutely committed to the concept that the diversity of South Africa's multicultural population enriches the country.

"I believe the transitional constitution and bill of rights already creates that framework. It is clear that no minority group, no church and no religion need feel endangered.

"They will have the right of redress to the Constitutional Court and their fundamental rights in that regard have already been amply protected and will be in the final constitution," he said.

De Klerk said South Africans must stop thinking in terms of black and white. He said he believes that millions of South Africans basically share the same value system: "They are supportive of free enterprise, they are anti-communist, they are anti-socialist."

Given the possibility of power sharing between de Klerk's National Party and the African National Congress, the president said a national unity government could operate relatively successfully, "notwithstanding the vast differences between us and the ANC."

"We are the two main parties," he said, and "there is no doubt that to deliver on promises the ANC will have to basically accept our economic policy framework."

Country 'Poised For A Golden Era'

"That is the only economic policy framework which will attract investors to South Africa -- from within and from without," de Klerk said. "Only if we get investments will we be able to create jobs. And we won't get investments unless we create an investor-friendly climate."

Asked to respond to the nervousness some members of the Jewish community feel about the future of South Africa, de Klerk said:

"This country is poised for a golden era. We are solving, with all the pains that go with it -- and the risks -- our problem of 300 years." South Africa, he said, is "really entering a new phase."

"According to my firm belief," he said, South Africa will "become a much more prosperous country than it is at the moment. This country is destined to play a tremendously important role in Africa."

He said that white South Africans who emigrated because of the country's former apartheid policies are welcome to return. "I think many of them are coming back," he said.

Because the elections are so close, many

expatriates are adopting a "wait-and-see" attitude, he said.

With regard to the threat of violence from the right wing, de Klerk said he does not foresee any massive political violence.

"In all probability, we will have to deal with some underground activities," he acknowledged, just as German Chancellor Helmut "Kohl has to deal with underground activities of the neo-Nazis, and as the British and Irish governments have to deal with underground activities."

The country's burgeoning criminal violence will be better contained after the election, he said, when police will be free to do their real job of fighting and preventing crime, rather than maintaining order in the political sense, he said.

On the future relationship between South Africa and Israel, which did not break ties with Johannesburg, the president said: "As far as I'm concerned, and as long as I'm in public life, I will remember old friends and will stand up for them, because they helped all South Africans."

PROTESTS GREET TALK SHOW PLANNING TO HOST FARRAKHAN

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 24 -- In an unusual alliance, Catholics, gay activists and Republican college students have joined the Anti-Defamation League in protesting Friday's appearance of Louis Farrakhan on the late-night talk and entertainment show hosted by Arsenio Hall.

In a full-page advertisement in Thursday's Variety, the show business trade publication, the ADL and its allies cited 14 vitriolic quotations by the Nation of Islam leader attacking whites, Jews, Christians, Pope John Paul II and gays and lesbians.

The Variety ad uses the same approach as an earlier ADL ad in The New York Times, which quoted, without comment, excerpts from a November speech by Khalid Abdul Muhammad, then the national spokesman for the Nation of Islam.

The Variety ad, addressed to Hall, was co-signed by the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation/LA.

The show is known for its guest-friendly, "schmoozy" format and is not given to hard interrogations, noted the Simon Wiesenthal Center in protesting Farrakhan's appearance. The center has urged general managers of the 160 stations carrying the syndicated show to replace it with reruns of earlier Arsenio Hall shows.

Hall has not responded directly to the various protests. Paula Askanas, the show's marketing director, cited a statement by Hall in a press release announcing Farrakhan's appearance.

"As always, I feel a strong responsibility to not only use my late-night arena for entertainment, but also as a vehicle to open dialogue as we strive for peace and harmony in America," Hall said in the statement.

The ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, said the ad was taken out to give viewers insight into Farrakhan's anti-Semitic and racist views. "This is not a question of entertainment," he said. "This is a serious issue of hate."

(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Pamela Druckerman in New York.)

**RABBINIC FORMULA YIELDS
3 DAYS OF PURIM SHPIELING****By Michele Chabin**

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- People who love Purim have an extra reason to celebrate the holiday this year: For the first time in a decade, Purim in Jerusalem is a three-day affair.

Throughout Israel, a carnival mood reigns as small children and their older siblings parade down the streets in brightly colored costumes, inspired by everything from the Scroll of Esther to the Simpsons.

As much a national holiday as a religious one, the celebratory mood extends from the beaches of Tel Aviv to the alleyways of Mea She'arim, Jerusalem's most devout neighborhood.

The holiday commemorates the bravery of Mordechai and his cousin, Queen Esther, who helped save the Jewish people from a massacre plotted by the evil Haman, the Persian King Ahashveros' henchman.

Purim gets its name from the lots cast by Haman to determine when the slaughter of the Jews was to take place.

The Jews of Shushan celebrated their deliverance from the decree of death on the 15th of Adar, one day after the rest of Persian Jewry was saved.

Since Shushan was a walled city, it was decreed that Jews in walled cities, such as Jerusalem, should forever celebrate Purim a day after everyone else.

According to the Georgian calendar, which is used throughout most of the world, "regular" Purim begins on the eve of Feb. 24 and Shushan Purim starts on the eve of Feb. 25, which this year is Friday night.

Megillah Not Read On Shabbat

When Purim falls on Shabbat, the Scroll of Esther is not read. Nor can the mitzvah of giving money to the poor be performed, since handling money on Shabbat is prohibited.

To solve the problem, the rabbis devised a formula: Those living in walled cities should hear the Megillah reading on Thursday night and Friday morning, just like all other Jews.

They must recite the special holiday prayer "Al Hanisim" on Shabbat, and attend a festive Purim se'uda (meal) on Sunday.

Sunday is also the day to distribute mish-loach manot, the baskets of fruits and sweets that Jews traditionally distribute on Purim.

"It's a bit complicated," conceded Rabbi Shlomo Gestetner of the Tzemech Tzedek Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem. "But what could be better than three days of Purim?"

For Gestetner, whose congregation reaches out to unaffiliated Jews, "Purim is a holiday that brings Jews together. We are a dispersed people, but the reading of the Megillah unites us."

Like many Israelis, Gestetner has come to view Purim in a wider, more political context, as well. "For me, Shushan Purim reminds me of the special place of Jerusalem in Jewish life. The city is at the heart of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

"This is especially important to remember now, as people discuss possible Palestinian sovereignty over east Jerusalem, including the Old City," he said.

**ISRAEL BUILDING OLYMPIC-SIZE ICE RINK,
WITH EYE TO HOSTING WORLD COMPETITIONS****By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- In a move that may one day enable Israel to host a winter sports competition, construction will soon begin on the country's first Olympic-sized ice-skating rink.

The proposed rink, which will be built in strict compliance with Olympic standards, will be part of the Canada Center sports complex in Metulla, in northern Israel.

The project will be partly funded by the United Israel Appeal in Canada and the Jewish Agency.

Additional funding is expected from government sources, such as the Tourism Ministry.

Israel's entry into the world of winter sports comes largely as a result of the immigration of athletes from the former Soviet Union.

One of these athletes, figure skater Misha Shmerkin, provided Israel with its first-ever presence at a Winter Olympics, skating at the games in Lillehammer, Norway.

As a result of Shmerkin's presence there, Israel has obtained membership in the Winter Olympics Committee.

The committee membership, coupled with the new Olympic-sized skating rink, will enable Israel to host international skating competitions and ice hockey matches.

According to Yossi Goldberg, the chairman of the local council in Metulla, the rink will provide seating for up to 1,000 spectators.

Goldberg, who is also chairman of the Israeli Figure Skating Association, said he has invited the International Figure Skating Committee to hold its 1996 World Congress in Jerusalem.

That would coincide with celebrations marking the 3,000th anniversary of the city.

Israel has in recent years built a number of smaller ice rinks throughout the country where recent immigrants can train.

The new rink, which will enable athletes to train under conditions similar to those available in more northern reaches, was planned for the Metulla region because that is the only area in Israel where winter temperatures are low enough for both skiing and ice skating.

ITALIAN RADIO GETS YIDDISH PROGRAM**By Ruth E. Gruber**

ROME (JTA) -- State-run Italian radio will broadcast a daily weekday program on Yiddish culture.

The host of the program will be Moni Ovadia, a Jewish actor and singer living in Milan who has achieved success with a series of plays and musicals based on Yiddish tales.

One of his productions, a musical based on the legend of the Golem, was presented in New York two years ago.

According to media announcements about the new program, each broadcast will be dedicated to a separate theme.

Ovadia intends to explore various aspects of each theme by combining song, stories, jokes, memories and other sources.

About 40,000 Jews currently live in Italy. Rome, with 15,000 Jews, has the country's largest Jewish community.