

**RABIN FOCUSES ON DOMESTIC CRISIS
TO SHORE UP SUPPORT FOR LABOR PARTY**
By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin took time off from the diplomatic front early this week to deal with a domestic battle that threatens to undermine the strength of the Labor Party.

On Sunday, he met with the ruling council of Mapam, a member of the Meretz bloc and a former longtime component of Labor, to plead with them to support Labor in the upcoming elections for the leadership of the powerful Histadrut trade federation.

The meeting came at a time when Labor needs to avoid any signs of weakness as it attempts to negotiate and implement the self-rule accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Labor is under intense pressure from the right-wing opposition to pull out of the peace talks in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in the Israeli towns of Afula, Ashdod and Hadera.

"What is really at stake," said Rabin, "is preserving the strength of the peace camp."

Last week, former Health Minister Haim Ramon threw the Labor Party into turmoil with his decision to run against his party's incumbent candidate for the post of Histadrut secretary-general. Members of the Meretz bloc, Rabin's left-wing coalition ally, have already voiced their support for Ramon.

In the late 1960s, Mapam joined with the more centrist Mapai party to form the Labor Party. But it left Labor in the last Knesset elections to join with the Ratz (Citizens' Rights) and Shinui parties to form the Meretz bloc.

With last week's decision, Ramon appears to have put himself beyond the party pale by setting up a non-party list that is specifically intended to stop Haim Haberfeld, the incumbent Histadrut boss and the Labor Party's choice for another term, when elections are held in mid-May.

A poll conducted last week showed Ramon beating Haberfeld in the countrywide Histadrut elections.

Ramon said he would be joined by two other young, popular Labor politicians, Amir Peretz and Samuel Avital. Ramon said that he, Peretz and Avital intend to remain Labor Party members.

But Labor Party officials have said they will soon seek to expel Ramon and his two allies from the party.

**ISRAEL WILL SHOW PLAN FOR SYRIAN PEACE
TO CHRISTOPHER BEFORE HIS MIDEAST TRIP**
By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- Israel Defense Force officials have completed preparations of a working paper that will be used as the basis for upcoming peace negotiations with Syria.

The proposals, after being approved by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, will be forwarded to U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who is scheduled to begin a visit to the Middle East on April 24.

Christopher is expected to show Syrian President Hafez Assad the proposals when he arrives in Damascus next week.

The secretary of state is likewise expected to convey Assad's response to the proposals when he arrives in Israel on April 28.

The proposals reportedly include an Israeli willingness to withdraw from the Golan Heights, but without any mention of full withdrawal.

A recent report in the highly respected Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz indicated that the Israeli Foreign Ministry was drafting a detailed blueprint for peace with Syria that would be based on a total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The IDF working paper calls for a withdrawal to be implemented over a period of years, while normalization of relations between the two countries would start after the first stage of withdrawal, when the IDF would still be in control of substantial parts of the Golan.

Security arrangements covered in the proposals include the demilitarization of certain areas in the Golan, the scaling down of military forces there, the establishment of early warning stations and the stationing on the Golan of an international force to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

The on-again, off-again negotiations between Israel and Syria have so far been conducted in Washington under the terms of the 1991 Madrid conference on Middle East peace.

But Rabin has already stated his belief that only a secret round of negotiations between the two countries will bring positive results.

When he met with U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry last month, Rabin said that "without secret talks between Israel and Syria, there will be no agreement reached. Recent history has shown that since 1977 it has been impossible to achieve any accommodation without prior secret contacts."

**HAMAS WARNS ISRAELI ARABS
NOT TO TRAVEL ON ISRAELI BUSES**
By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement last week urged Israeli Arabs to take the safety precaution of not traveling on Israeli buses.

Hamas, which is bitterly opposed to the ongoing Israeli-Palestine Liberation Organization peace initiatives, has already claimed responsibility for the suicide bombings of buses in the Israeli towns of Afula and Hadera.

The attacks occurred on April 7 and 13, respectively, and together claimed the lives of 12 Israelis and wounded at least 70 others.

Hamas has announced plans for three additional terrorist attacks in reprisal for the Feb. 25 Hebron massacre, when an Israeli settler killed at least 29 Palestinians praying at the town's Tomb of the Patriarchs.

A spokesman for the Council of Arab Municipality Heads has denounced the Hamas call to Israeli Arabs not to use the country's buses.

The Israeli Arab spokesman said the council members viewed the Hamas appeal as an attempt to drive a wedge between Jews and Arabs in Israel, a move that Israeli Arabs rejected with indignation.

The Israeli government has meanwhile decided that the closure of the territories -- which was announced after the Afula attack -- will continue until further notice.

But government officials have stated that 20,000 permits to enter and work in Israel will nonetheless be allocated to Palestinians in the territories.

About 16,000 of the permits will be issued on "humanitarian grounds" to merchants, medical personnel, lawyers and journalists. The remaining permits will be issued to agricultural workers who are more than 35 years old.

In an effort to alleviate some of the economic hardships caused by the closure, the Cabinet allocated approximately \$10 million for public works programs and humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip.

The PLO has meanwhile denied a report that there was an agreement between its mainstream Fatah arm and the Hamas organization to cooperate after implementation of the self-rule accord in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho goes into effect.

Previous reports that such an agreement had been reached were greeted in Israel with puzzlement and dismay.

On the basis of the earlier reports, the Israeli government warned the PLO against entering into any cooperative agreement that would enable Hamas to continue its terror attacks against Israel.

ISRAELI DELEGATION ARRIVES IN OMAN FOR MULTILATERAL TALKS ON WATER USAGE By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- In the first such official visit to a state in the Persian Gulf region, the Israeli delegation to the multilateral talks on water resources in the Middle East arrived in Oman on Friday.

The delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin and included 26 experts as well as 19 representatives from the Israeli media.

The delegation arrived after Oman reversed an earlier decision and agreed to allow Israeli journalists to attend the multilateral Middle East talks on water resources.

Under the ground rules for the regional peace talks, Oman was supposed to accept Israeli diplomats and journalists as part and parcel of the conference.

But earlier this month, Oman tried to backtrack from this commitment, prompting protests from Israel and diplomatic intervention from the United States.

In a television interview from Oman on Sunday evening, Beilin spoke of the warm reception the delegation had received. Oman, he said, strongly supported the peace process.

Asked whether he thought there was a possibility for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Oman, Beilin said he thought that would come only after the negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization were completed.

The Omani foreign minister, however, said that diplomatic relations between his country and Israel would be accomplished as part of a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab states of the region.

Oman has so far kept its contacts with the Israeli delegation away from the public eye. The official Omani media have as yet to make mention of the Israeli contingent to the talks.

UJA SPONSORING SOLIDARITY MISSION TO ISRAEL IN WAKE OF TERRORIST ATTACKS By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, April 17 (JTA) -- In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks in the Israeli towns of Afula and Hadera, the United Jewish Appeal is chartering a 747 for a solidarity mission April 24-27.

The plane is scheduled to land at an army base outside Afula, where seven Israelis were killed by a car bomb on April 6. Five Israelis were killed by another suicide bomber in Hadera a week later. Both bombers were affiliated with the Hamas Islamic fundamentalist movement.

"This is our attempt to say to the people of Israel, in a small way, that we're with you, we feel your concern, we feel your pain," said Rabbi Brian Lurie, executive vice president of UJA.

"People wonder what they can do when things like this happen. One thing they can do is to go to Israel," said Lurie.

UJA hopes to include representatives from at least 100 communities on the trip.

Also on the mission will be representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"At a time when, as a result of these recent attacks, the people of Israel may feel particularly isolated, the comfort we can bring by our presence and unity will be meaningful," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

"These attacks are on all Jews, not just Israel, and we will stand with them. Our fate is one," said Hoenlein.

ISRAEL WILL NOT ACT AGAINST GOREN By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- Israel's attorney general has told the High Court that he will take no action against former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who has called on Israeli soldiers to refuse to obey any orders that call for the evacuation of Jews from settlements in the territories.

Private citizens had petitioned the High Court to order the government to act against Goren, who had said that his call to the soldiers was based on halachah, or Jewish law.

Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair told the court that the government's policy was one of restraint, and in pursuit of this it did not want to prevent the free expression of opinion.

Ben-Yair admitted that Goren's statements represented an infringement of the law.

But the attorney general added that because of the sensitive nature of the rabbi's ruling there seemed no point in pursuing it through the courts when the Israeli government had not yet called for the settlers' evacuation.

UKRAINE CHALLENGES JEWISH AGENCY, WHILE ALIYAH DROPS FROM SOVIET STATES

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, April 17 (JTA) -- A recent dispute between the Ukrainian government and the Jewish Agency for Israel over the agency's efforts to encourage aliyah has been resolved, according to officials here.

A statement by the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice last month had charged that the Jewish Agency, or Sochnut, went "far beyond its legal mandate" by "stimulating mass departures to Israel," especially among Ukrainian youth.

The ministry warned that "if such illegal activity continues, the Justice Ministry will raise the issue of more serious measures against the Sochnut, including its dissolution."

The matter was largely resolved in a meeting here this week between Ukrainian Ambassador to Israel Yuri Sherbeck and Jewish Agency leaders, including Acting Chairman Yehiel Leket and Baruch Gur, head of the agency's Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Eastern Europe.

Sherbeck told the agency officials essentially to disregard a letter sent to the Ukrainian Embassy in Israel by the former Soviet republic's deputy justice minister echoing the previous statement, said Gur.

"The ambassador came to the Jewish Agency and met with Mr. Leket and me," said Gur. "He expressed officially that all the difficulties raised by the letter sent by the deputy minister of justice were on his own private initiative. They did not represent the policy of the Ukrainian government or the president of the republic.

"We have programs that bring youth to Israel without their parents all over the world," said Gur, referring to a program in Ukraine that had originally caused the stir. "Probably some nationalist had reservations" about the idea, he said, noting that the Jewish Agency had never stopped its activities as a result.

Aliyah On The Rise From Ukraine

"We think the matter is closed," Gur said.

The challenge from the Ukrainian government came at a time when immigration to Israel from the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union was down for the first quarter of the year, compared with the same three-month period last year.

According to statistics released by the Jewish Agency, 12,531 immigrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union during January through March, as compared to 16,460 during the first quarter of last year.

But ironically, while aliyah from the former Soviet Union is down overall so far this year, it has been on the rise in Ukraine. There were 3,500 olim from Ukraine this year, up from 2,696 in last year's first quarter, according to Jewish Agency Director-General Arnon Mantver's office.

Both Gur and Mantver said this pattern would continue as a result of the economic and political state of crisis in the country.

"The numbers (from Ukraine) could double what they were last year," said Gur.

Regarding aliyah from the former Soviet Union in general, Jewish Agency officials said they are expecting roughly the same number of

immigrants this year as last, despite the slight downturn so far in 1994.

They are anticipating approximately 60,000 new arrivals from the former Soviet Union by the end of this year, as compared to 66,000 in 1993.

Emigration from Russia dropped from 4,766 in the first quarter of last year to 2,230 in the same period this year.

Prospective emigrants are "not in a rush," but are trying to gauge the unstable political situation and the economic reforms, said Gur.

Gur noted there has also been a temporary slowdown from Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, because there was a severe winter and because there was a shortage of local currency and people could not sell their homes.

They had also heard that a new regulation would allow them to take out unlimited amounts of money and wanted to wait and see whether it would be put into effect, said Gur.

In fact, he said, the new rule is in place, and the numbers arriving in Israel have started to increase as of this month.

Gur noted there was also a "certain slow-down" in emigration from the republic of Georgia because of a new regulation that would have forced emigrants to pay \$300 for a passport, previously \$1. He said the agency successfully fought the increase, and aliyah is projected to rise.

Immigration to the United States from the former Soviet Union dropped during the first quarter, as compared to the same period last year.

So far this year, 7,946 Jews arrived in the United States, according to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. In last year's first quarter, the total stood at 9,283.

JEWES IN CITY OF NUREMBERG SHAKEN BY FORGED DEPORTATION INSTRUCTIONS

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, April 17 (JTA) -- The Jewish community in the Bavarian city of Nuremberg has reacted furiously to forged letters informing Jews of their forthcoming deportation, a chilling harkening back to the Holocaust.

The official-looking letter appeared on the stationery of the Federal Office for the Recognition of Asylum Seekers.

The letter stated that according to a certain "deportation law," the recipient had to appear at a train station within a week if the person could not prove by then his or her "Aryan origin."

So far, 13 citizens of Nuremberg, the German city where the postwar trials of Nazis were held, have reported receiving the malicious letters, according to German police.

All the letters were mailed in Nuremberg on April 10, and Israelis were among the recipients.

Both the letterhead and the name signed at the end of the letter were apparently forged.

German police are investigating the matter, but no arrests have been made. They are offering a \$3,000 reward for information leading to arrests.

The chairman of the Nuremberg Jewish community, Arno Hamburger, said the community's 400 members have nothing to fear.

But Hamburger, who is 71, described the letters as a particularly heinous form of anti-Semitic material, "because in their style" they are "reminiscent of the Nazi era."

NEWS ANALYSIS:
**OBEY'S RISE TO APPROPRIATIONS CHAIR
SITS FINE WITH PRO-ISRAEL COMMUNITY**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, April 17 (JTA) -- As the longtime chairman of the House subcommittee responsible for appropriating aid to Israel, the outspoken Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) has had his share of run-ins with members of the organized Jewish community.

But now that Obey, 55, has been elevated to the chairmanship of the full House Appropriations Committee, most pro-Israel activists here are saying he is someone with whom they can work as they push for continued high levels of U.S. aid to the Jewish state.

Obey, viewed overall as energetic, highly intelligent and at times confrontational, is perceived by most in the pro-Israel community to be supportive of Israel, especially of the current Labor government of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

But over the years, the well-respected congressman, who does not mince his words, has had run-ins with some of Israel's supporters, disagreeing with them over the issue of U.S. loan guarantees to Israel, for example.

In 1992, Obey was one of those in Congress arguing that Israel should end political settlements in the territories and bear the entire U.S. cost of loan guarantees before they were issued.

Most supporters of Israel here, including some on Capitol Hill, do not expect Obey's promotion to the chairmanship of the committee to have much effect -- either positive or negative -- on the annual debate over Israel's \$3 billion in U.S. foreign aid.

"He will want to be supportive of the Labor government and the Clinton administration policies in the region, and he will try to be supportive of the peace process," said Jess Hordes, Washington representative of the Anti-Defamation League.

"On the other hand," Hordes continued, "he does not have a constituency back home that is very supportive of foreign aid.

Pulled In Different Directions

"He's pulled in different directions," Hordes said.

Some in the pro-Israel community are hoping his focus on foreign aid will not be eclipsed by his new responsibilities on the domestic side.

As chairman of the full committee, Obey now has responsibility for appropriations for both domestic and foreign causes.

The organized Jewish community kept a low profile during the discussion over Obey's elevation.

But some pro-Israel members of Congress actively supported his bid.

"People are definitely O.K. about it," one pro-Israel Hill staffer said of Obey's new position.

The relatively youthful Obey was recently voted into the chairmanship by his colleagues, following the illness and subsequent death at age 84 of former chairman Rep. William Natcher (D-Ky.) late last month.

Among Obey's chief backers was Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), a pro-Israel stalwart on the committee's foreign operations subcommittee.

Obey will continue to chair that subcommit-

tee, a crucial waystation through which Israel's annual \$3 billion aid package must pass.

Obey beat out Rep. Neal Smith (D-Iowa), 74, who was senior to Obey on the committee, for the chairmanship in a vote taken after it became apparent that Natcher's illness was serious.

Sources in the pro-Israel community said they supported Obey over Smith, at least in part because of Obey's active interest in foreign affairs.

Obey also received high marks for his intelligence.

"He is very impressive," said Jason Isaacson, Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee.

"Intellectually, he is one of the most insightful, provocative and knowledgeable members of Congress," Isaacson said.

Obey, who represents Wisconsin's 7th district, has served in Congress since 1969.

He has chaired the Appropriations foreign operations subcommittee since 1985.

Last year, he worked with Lowey to preserve \$80 million in aid to Israel to resettle refugees from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

"Aid to Israel is key to her," a Lowey staffer said of his boss. "She would not have been supporting him (for the chairmanship) if she thought it meant a possible reduction or putting the funds in jeopardy," the staff member said.

Obey, a liberal, has been a strong proponent of economic reform in Israel and Egypt. At hearings of his subcommittee, he has asked administration officials to explain why high levels of aid to the two countries should continue if Israel and Egypt do not resolve their economic problems.

Advocates Foreign Aid Reform

Egypt is another top recipient of U.S. foreign aid, getting \$2.1 billion a year.

Over the years, Obey, an advocate of foreign aid reform, has clashed with some in the pro-Israel community on issues including protective "earmarks" for Israel's foreign aid package.

Maintaining Israel's earmarks has long been a key objective for the pro-Israel community.

And in 1992, Obey planned to offer an amendment cutting 1 percent of foreign aid across the board to demonstrate that nothing should be exempt from cuts in a period of fiscal crisis.

But to the relief of Israel's supporters, he then dropped the idea, stating that the subcommittee's budget was "the tightest ever."

Some supporters of Israel also cited Obey's domestic record -- which includes a pro-choice position on abortion -- as a reason to support him.

Most Jewish groups support a woman's right to choose abortion.

"From his perspective, foreign aid cannot be politically supported if the government does not have a clear commitment to address the deficit, and the 'social needs deficit,'" said Isaacson of AJCommittee.

Obey has demonstrated his commitment to both domestic and foreign objectives, Isaacson said.

Overall, the sense among some pro-Israel activists is that while Obey can be unpredictable, he is well-respected.

And his support on pro-Israel issues has been, and will continue to be, very important.