

WORLD BEAT

edited by Marta Garelik

WJC Leaders Pay Visit to Bulgaria

NEW YORK (JTA) — What may become the first perpetually airborne Torah is now set to circumnavigate the globe on the private jet of Edgar Bronfman.

Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, received the 100-year-old Torah scroll as a gift of the Jewish community of Bulgaria, which he visited recently.

Bronfman will have an ark built on the plane to house the Torah, according to Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director.

The Bulgarian Jewish community made the gift as an expression of gratitude to the WJC for the help it gave the Jewish community there, particularly following World War II.

The Bulgarian people and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church played a heroic role during the Holocaust, largely refusing to deport the country's 48,000 Jews. On March 19, 1943, in an event known in Bulgaria as "the miracle of the Jewish people," Bulgarian citizens actually removed Jews from transport trains.

The vast majority of those who survived the war left, in most cases for Israel. There are now about 5,000 Jews in Bulgaria, most in Sofia, some in the city of Plovdiv.

"The Jewish community suffers from no anti-Semitism at all," Steinberg reported.

The community is formally structured into two groups, a religious body and a cultural association, both recognized and supported by the state. A rabbi, trained at the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary, officiates. Because of his training, he prays in Ashkenazic style, although most of the community is Sephardic.

The WJC delegation was welcomed in the Great Synagogue, an 80-year-old Moorish building being renovated by the state in readiness for Sepharad '92, to commemorate the Jews' expulsion from Spain, the country of origin of most of the community.

Syria Easing Restriction on Jews

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Syria intends to make it easier for Jews to emigrate, specifically members of "divided families" and unmarried women, the State Department said. It praised Syria for taking a "more flexible approach" toward its Jewish population, including its stated intention of granting visas to unwed Jewish women who were having difficulty finding husbands.

The State Department estimates that there are 3,800 Jews living in Syria, including 3,000 in Damascus, 600 in Aleppo and 200 in Kamishli.

An administration source said Syria was motivated largely by a "desire to be accepted by the West and to gain certain advantages," including the lifting of U.S. economic sanctions.

France Resumes Arms Sales to Israel

PARIS (JTA) — For the first time in 21 years, France will officially supply military equipment to Israel.

The government has authorized the sale of modern jet engines for updated models of the Kfir fighter plane, the first combat aircraft designed and produced in Israel.

It is a departure from the policy set by Gen. Charles de Gaulle, then president of France, on June 3, 1967, when he imposed an arms embargo against Israel on the eve of the Six-Day War.

The embargo was made total by President George Pompidou in December 1968, after an Israeli air raid on the Beirut airport.

Now the state-owned SNECMA Co. will sell Israel five Atar 9K-50 engines that were initially developed for France's Mirage IV nuclear bomber and its Mirage F-1 jet fighter.

Israel apparently does not want to be totally dependent on American good will for its military hardware, the French say.

Moreover, there could be a

residue of resentment over the American pressure that forced Israel to abandon its second generation multi-purpose combat plane, the Lavi, in 1987. The Lavi used General Electric J-79 engines, but never got beyond the prototype stage.

If the French-made jet engines live up to expectations, Israel's entire Kfir fleet will be equipped with them.

The only condition put on the sale is a commitment by Israel not to sell the engine to a third country without France's permission.

French Mayor Protests for Yeshiva

PARIS (JTA) — The mayor of Aix-les-Bains in southwestern France has vowed to stand fast against a drive led by a right-wing town council member to cancel plans for the construction of a new synagogue and yeshiva.

Council member Jean Murguet argued that "there are, as it is, already too many Jews in our town," in an appeal made by him and six right-wing colleagues against the lease of a city-owned 6,000-square-meter plot to a Jewish foundation, just approved by Mayor Gratien Ferrari.

The foundation plans to erect a modern synagogue, a school, community center and library on the land.

The city of 25,000 on the shores of Lake Bourget is home to a well-known yeshiva and other Jewish centers of learning. Apart from seasonal students, the permanent Jewish population numbers no more than 1,000.

Aix-les-Bains is also a famous summer resort. Murguet and several other council members are spreading fear that the sight of people in traditional Jewish garb with beards and payot would discourage tourists.

West Germany to Build Subs for Israeli Navy

TEL AVIV (JTA) — West Germany is building two advanced submarines for the Israeli navy.

The diesel-powered Dolphin-class undersea craft will cost approximately \$600 million. The deal was approved by the ministerial defense committee in Bonn, headed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The subs, part of Israel's naval expansion program, will be sold by the West German shipyard to the Engels Corp. in the United States, the Israeli navy's prime procurement contractor.

Engels is building three Sa'ar V-class missile boats for the navy. Along with the U-boats, they will bring the price tag to over \$1.2 billion.

Most of the money will come from Israel's annual U.S. military assistance grant of \$1.8 billion, which may be cut by \$25 million this fiscal year because of pressures to reduce the U.S. budget deficit.

El Al Poised to Buy Share in U.S. Airline

TEL AVIV (JTA) — El Al, Israel's national air carrier, is about to acquire a 25 percent stake in a newly formed American airline, North American Airlines, whose application was approved by the U.S. government. North American will begin operating out of Kennedy Airport in New York in mid-January.

El Al is seeking to get a foothold in the U.S. and Europe, as part of its strategy to prepare itself for the world of aviation that will exist after 1992, when the Economic Community will officially exist as a unified trade and economic regime. It could not ignore the general trend of many foreign airlines to acquire stakes in each other, and especially in U.S. airlines.

El Al's aim is to provide a feed of passengers flying domestic routes inside the U.S., who would be flown abroad by the Israeli airline.

The Israeli airline has an option to buy 25 percent — the maximum allowed to foreign purchasers by U.S. law — for \$400,000. It hopes its share in the joint venture with North American will increase El Al's share of the lucrative transatlantic route.

Also in preparation for full implementation of the European Community in 1992, El Al is

looking for an opportunity to buy a stake in an airline belonging to one of the 12 E.C. member states.

Historic Flight Brought Soviet Chess Team to Israel

TEL AVIV (JTA) — A Soviet commercial airliner landed at Ben-Gurion Airport recently carrying a 46-member Soviet chess team competing in the European chess championship tournament that opened in Haifa.

The Soviet chess team was among 224 players from 26 countries participating in the match, which took place at the Dan Carmel Hotel. Also competing were teams from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria which, like the Soviet Union, have either limited or no diplomatic relations with Israel.

The absence of formal ties with Moscow may have been why the Aeroflot pilot, Capt. Oleg Agalonow, flew his Tupelov-134 jet out of Israel shortly after landing.

He told Israeli reporters that some diplomatic problems did not allow him to stay in Israel overnight. He had to fly to Athens instead.

S. African Fascists Rally

PRETORIA, South Africa (JTA) — A white supremacist mass murderer who is appealing his death sentence, got "siege heils" and Hitler-style salutes from about 25 Afrikaner neo-Nazis, who demonstrated in the heart of the South African capital in support of his clemency appeal.

The object of their adulation is Barend Strydom, who shot to death seven blacks and wounded 16 other passers-by on Nov. 15, 1988, in the square where the anniversary rally was held.

El Al and Aeroflot to Begin Direct Flights

JERUSALEM (JTA) — El Al and the Soviet airline Aeroflot will begin direct flights between Tel Aviv and Moscow this month.

Each will establish facilities in the other's country to handle commercial and technical matters.

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