

SOVIET LAW WILL ALLOW FREE TRAVEL

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Body

MOSCOW - The Soviet legislature destroyed one of the pillars of the authoritarian state Monday as it passed a liberalized emigration bill that would give citizens the right to travel or live abroad. The move could lead to the easing of U.S. trade restrictions. The law would allow travel abroad for virtually anyone who has permission from another nation to enter and who has no outstanding alimony obligations, criminal charges or recent knowledge of state secrets. The bill was approved by the Supreme Soviet, the legislature, on a vote of 320-37 with 32 abstentions. The bill also sets up appeal procedures for people who are denied permission to leave. But the new law may not go fully into effect until the start of 1993, and emigration activists said it contained loopholes that could still bar the departure of some people. Whether to accept large numbers of Soviet emigres would also be up to foreign governments. Western European nations are already worried about the cost of resettling increasing numbers of immigrants. The measure enacts into law many of the emigration reforms that President Mikhail S. Gorbachev has already ordered the bureaucracy to carry out, reversing the harsh travel restrictions that were a hallmark of authoritarian Communist rule. In Washington, President George Bush's administration expressed pleasure Monday that the legislation had been passed but indicated that it was too soon to say whether this could lead to favorable trade breaks. Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman, said the administration would wait to see whether a final version of the law satisfied U.S. conditions for extending most-favored-nation trading status to the Soviet Union.

Bush already has granted the Soviet Union a temporary waiver of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which curtails trade with the Soviets because of the restrictive emigration policy. The waiver, which expires at the end of next month, allowed the U.S. government to extend \$1 billion in credit guarantees so that the Soviets could buy U.S. grain. The law's backers acclaimed its passage as a major step in the Soviet Union's transformation from a totalitarian state to an open society. "We always feared strangers," Fyodor Burlatsky, one of the bill's architects, said. "Therefore passage of this law is a historic act, an act of Russian history, not only an act in the fight against totalitarianism." Top Soviet officials with an eye on a European human rights conference scheduled for Moscow later this year were jubilant. "With the adoption of this bill, our legislation has been brought i nto line with international law," Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky said. The fear of "cosmopolitanism" reached such a peak during Josef Stalin's bloody rule from the 1920s through the 1940s that thousands of Soviets who had contact with foreigners - or were presumed to have had - were branded spies, imprisoned, exiled or executed. In ensuing years, the government strictly limited foreign travel, requiring special passports, visas and invitations from abroad. Emigration was an impossible dream for all but a few, and thousands turned to defection. Introduced as part of Gorbachev's reforms in November 1989, the emigration bill was delayed by the KGB secret police and the armed forces, which feared that Soviets traveling abroad or emigrating would take state secrets with them and would spy. The anticipated boom in foreign travel will force the cash-strapped Soviet government to print more passports and visa documents, upgrade rail, highway and air transportation and hire more bureaucrats to process travel applications. The law was originally scheduled to take effect July 1, 1992. In a compromise, lawmakers agreed Monday to give the government six more months to prepare for implementation. "We cannot just remove the collar from emigres, kick them out with our feet and say, 'Go wherever you want,'" said Viktor Kucherenko, chairman of the budget committee. "We must create conditions not like those we have now - an intolerable half-year wait for

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tickets and a wait of months to exchange money - but normal conditions, for which a year of preparation is needed." Under the measure, Gorbachev's Cabinet is to report within two weeks on whether some parts of the law can take effect before January 1993. Burlatsky said that he supports quicker implementation of a provision allowing citizens to emigrate without invitations from relatives abroad. Human rights activists remained skeptical about the measure. "Freedom of migration appears to be there on paper, but what will be in reality, we'll see," said Victoria Shakhmet, co-chairwoman of the private Bureau on Exit and Emigration in Moscow. She said activists were unhappy with the law's ban on emigration for men who have not fulfilled their military draft obligations. They object also to an article that allows the government to extend indefinitely a five-year ban on travel for citizens with access to classified information. Under the measure, the government estimates that up to 2 million people will go abroad to look for jobs.

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