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Immigrant scientist project to lose its funding

By Ofri Ilani

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Some 170 immigrant scientists may lose their jobs, after Yisrael Beiteinu decided to use their funding for other purposes.

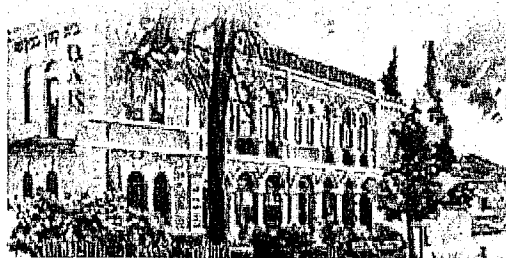
The scientists are employed at Israeli universities under a special program for absorbing immigrants in their field. Yisrael Beiteinu had demanded funding for the program as part of its coalition agreement.

Now however, "the program has run its course. Yisrael Beiteinu has supported the program, but the time has come to reexamine whether it merits the resources, since immigrants also have other needs," a party source said.

The program, run by the Immigrant Absorption Ministry, has existed since 1998, and it employs more than 400 scientists. However, the program's budget has been sliced in the new 2009-2010 state budget.

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Even though it is still unclear how much money will be cut, it appears 40% of the scientists will soon be looking for work.

The Absorption Ministry said the cuts are still under discussion. The bureau of Immigrant Absorption Minister Sofa Landver (Yisrael Beiteinu) said that the cuts were forced on them, and that Landver had asked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to find alternative funding sources.

The Ministerial Committee on Immigrant Absorption will meet next week to decide how the funds allocated to Yisrael Beiteinu in the coalition agreement, for immigrant issues, will be parceled out.

"Some scientists are valuable, but not all," said a Yisrael Beiteinu official.

"Suddenly, with no advance notice, they announced they are cutting 40% of the scientists, almost 170 senior scientists who brought in research grants," said Prof. Zvi Cohen, chairman of the faculty coordinating council. "They will be thrown out into the street to become street cleaners. We will not let it happen. If the government does not change its decision, the universities will not open," said Cohen.

Dr. Michael Danilenko, who came to Israel from Kazakhstan in 1992, researches leukemia and innovative treatments using vitamins and various plant-based agents. "This treatment damages healthy tissue less than chemotherapy," he said.

Danilenko has received 10 research grants from Israeli and foreign institutions for his work. Nevertheless, he may still find himself out of a job soon, since he



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is employed by Ben-Gurion University as part of the immigrant scientist program.

The council of university presidents has asked Netanyahu to intervene to save the program. But a Yisrael Beiteinu official responded, "If these scientists are so successful, why don't the universities give them jobs and pay them out of their own budgets?"

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