



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Likud Knesset member Ariel Sharon came to Washington to lay out his case against the Israeli-Palestinian accord and in favor of continuing settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.** "Oslo failed," the former defense minister told reporters before meeting with members of Congress. Unless PLO chief Yasser Arafat ends terrorism and amends the PLO covenant, he should "get nothing more" in U.S. aid, Sharon said.

■ **In a move protested by the Israeli government, South Africa announced it is establishing full diplomatic relations with the "State of Palestine."** Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin said the move "doesn't help the peace process." The Israeli government lodged an official protest with the government of Nelson Mandela. [Page 2]

■ **A leading member of the Movement for Progressive Judaism was elected to the Tel Aviv Religious Council.** Her election marks the first time a representative of the Reform movement was elected to a municipal religious council in Israel. It comes in the wake of last year's ruling by the High Court that religious councils could not bar Reform and Conservative candidates from serving on the grounds of their religious affiliation. [Page 4]

■ **The leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization condemned Israel for delaying the implementation of the Palestinian self-rule accord.** But the PLO Executive Committee decided not to suspend talks. At the same time, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators concluded another round of talks without any reported progress. Among the topics discussed was a suggestion to bring international observers to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to monitor the elections. [Page 4]

■ **The Tel Aviv District Court sentenced Rabbi Uzi Meshulam, the radical Yemenite sect leader who held police at bay, to 10 years in prison, two of which were suspended.** Meshulam had been convicted of charges that included endangering lives, conspiracy and aggravated assault. Eleven followers also were sentenced to terms ranging from 15 months to four years on the same charges.

Election of Burg marks 'visionary' shift, say leaders

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 22 (JTA) — Hailing the election of Avraham Burg as chairman of the Jewish Agency, American Jewish leaders predict the move will invigorate Israel-Diaspora relations.

This assessment comes despite the intense anti-American feeling generated in the Israeli media last week after Burg's selection by Diaspora leaders of the Jewish Agency.

The "advise and consent" committee of the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors endorsed Burg and rejected Yehiel Leket, the acting chairman of the Agency. That decision effectively killed Leket's chances to be nominated for the post.

Burg's supporters say the 40-year-old Labor member of Knesset has the vision and commitment necessary to connect a generation of native-born Israelis with their American peers, all born after the founding of the State of Israel. The Jewish Agency is the primary recipient of funds raised for Israel by the United Jewish Appeal in the United States.

"There are certain decisions made in the Jewish world that have consequences beyond one's lifetime, and this represents that kind of shift," said Debra Pell, the co-chair of the UJA Young Leadership Cabinet who is a strong Burg supporter.

"It's generational. It's visionary. He understands that Israel needs to be a Jewish nation, and I think he can help the Jewish people define what that means," Pell said. "He is someone who absolutely understands that the Diaspora is a partner with a critical voice in the future of the Jewish nation and the Jewish people."

For Burg, the Jewish Agency post comes after making a mark in the field of Diaspora-Israel relations. More than a decade ago, he first toured the United States speaking on behalf of the New Israel Fund, which raises funds for grass-roots projects in Israel.

He subsequently served as adviser on Diaspora affairs to then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Charisma played a role in Burg's selection

In his meetings with Diaspora leaders, Burg reportedly came across as far more charismatic than Leket, the longtime Jewish Agency administrator who assumed the acting chairmanship a year ago.

In his year at the helm, Leket drew high marks for his management abilities. He is said to have succeeded in boosting morale among Agency workers even while paring down staff. Despite Leket's accomplishments, "the Diaspora leaders decided they needed a charismatic figure at the head of the Agency if they were to change the image of the Agency in the eyes of Diaspora donors," said Samuel Norich, author of "What Will Bind Us Now? A Report on the Institutional Ties between Israel and American Jewry."

"It was a question rather of whether they [in the UJA] would be effective fund-raisers with Leket at the head of the Agency," said Norich.

But while the question of fund-raising ability is said to have proved decisive in the deliberations of the "advise and consent" committee, Burg's fans in the UJA-federation system say his appointment transcends bottom-line considerations.

"It's not just raising money, it's raising ideas," said Barry Shrage, the chief executive officer of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

"It is essentially developing the ideas that will shape the Jewish future," said Shrage. "He understands that one of the most important issues facing us today is what does it mean to be a Jew in the modern world."

At a time when federations and synagogues are joining together in the struggle for "Jewish continuity" in the face of assimilation and intermarriage, some see it as symbolic that Burg is the first chairman of the Agency who is religiously observant.

The son of the longtime Orthodox political leader and former Cabinet Minister Yosef Burg, the new agency chairman has been a fervent supporter of religious pluralism in Israel.

His advocacy of American-style separation of "synagogue and state"

catapulted him to the No. 3 spot on the Labor Party's list for the 1992 elections.

"He offers a role model of a bright and enlightened man who still is searching for the numinous, and this is something powerful and transcendent," said Jerry Benjamin, a past chairman of UJA Young Leadership.

"Every time I hear him speak he is very challenging to all of us about our own Jewish learning. He's a unique character," Benjamin said.

Benjamin said Burg promises renewed "horsepower" for supporters of the Israel-Diaspora relationship.

"Those of us who care took such a beating the way [Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister] Yossi Beilin raised the points he raised," said Benjamin, referring to Beilin's controversial call for Diaspora Jews to stop sending "charity" to Israel.

Beilin also called for the dismantling of the Jewish Agency and the establishment of an alternative structure.

Beilin has since toned down his criticisms. Observers predict that Beilin will be less confrontational about the Agency, now that Burg, his political ally, is at its helm.

At the same time, Burg does share many of Beilin's views. He is said to have similar concerns about democratizing the Agency's base. And he has said he rejects the idea of Israel as simply a recipient of charitable funds from the Diaspora.

The key difference is that Burg is now poised to change the system from within.

"He's going to be positioning the people of Israel to be partners, rather than recipients of charity," said Shrage. □

South Africa's ties to 'Palestine' elicits official protest from Israel

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG, Feb. 22 (JTA) — South Africa has announced that it is establishing full diplomatic relations with the "State of Palestine," a move that elicited protest from the Israeli government.

South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo made the announcement in Cape Town at a joint news conference earlier this month with Farouk Kaddoumi, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Tunis-based political department.

The Israeli government, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles signed with the PLO in Washington in September 1993, considers the issue of a Palestinian state a matter to be determined in the context of future negotiations with the PLO.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin criticized the move, saying, "It's a decision that doesn't help the peace process, and we're very sorry about that."

The Israeli government has already lodged an official protest during a meeting between Nzo and Elazar Granot, Israel's ambassador to South Africa, according to a spokesman for the Israeli Mission to the United Nations in New York.

"This is an unacceptable situation from our point of view," the spokesman said.

"I don't know of any country in the world that has established diplomatic relations with the State of Palestine. That's because it doesn't exist," he added.

During the Cape Town news conference, Nzo said that his government was taking the step in the context of the country's effort to become "a full member of the international community" in the wake of the victory of President Nelson Mandela in the country's first all-race elections in April.

Nzo also said his country was acting "in concert" with other African nations and the countries of the Non-

Aligned Movement, adding that "the vast majority of these states and organizations recognize the State of Palestine."

He said South Africa "as a matter of principle, recognizes states and maintains normal diplomatic relations with them, regardless of their ideologies."

Establishing relations with the Palestinians, he added, "brings us on the same level as our relations with Israel, Jordan, Syria, Egypt" and other countries.

Nzo said the step was taken as part of his government's commitment to the ongoing Middle East peace process. "I would like to emphasize that the formalization of our relationship with Palestine does not in any way affect our relationship with Israel or our support for their right to live within secure borders," he said.

When introducing Kaddoumi at the news conference, Nzo described him as "not only the Palestinian foreign minister, but in fact the No. 2 in the PLO after Chairman [Yasser] Arafat."

Kaddoumi, a member of the PLO's 18-member executive committee, handles foreign relations for the PLO from Tunis because, under the terms of the accord with Israel, the PLO cannot maintain relations with foreign countries from either the Gaza Strip or West Bank enclave of Jericho, both of which fell under Palestinian autonomy in May.

Kaddoumi has been critical of some of Arafat's policies in the self-rule areas and has boycotted PLO executive committee meetings, including the most recent one this week in Cairo.

During his remarks at the news conference, Kaddoumi said he had conveyed to Mandela the Palestinians' determination to pursue regional peace and stability.

In the wake of the signing of the Declaration of Principles, a number of countries, including Germany, have established low-level economic interest sections in the Palestinian self-rule zones. The Vatican established full diplomatic relations with the PLO in October.

It remains unclear what steps will be taken by the South African government as a result of its decision to normalize relations with the Palestinians.

"It is unlikely that there will be a full exchange of ambassadors," said Stephen Grundlingh, the South African consul in New York.

Instead, he said, a South African ambassador already holding a Middle East portfolio "will probably be accredited" to deal with Palestinian officials. □

(JTA staff writer Mitchell Danow in New York contributed to this report.)

Labor imposes party discipline to block a bill on Golan majority

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) — The Labor Party caucus has voted to impose party discipline on its members in order to prevent the submission of a bill that would increase the Knesset majority needed to approve any territorial concessions on the Golan Heights as part of an Israeli peace deal with Syria.

The caucus vote of 28-5 on Tuesday was aimed specifically at a proposal supported by Labor Knesset member Avigdor Kahalani that would require a majority of 70 Knesset members — or a 65 percent majority in a national referendum — to approve an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said that Kahalani's proposal would make it impossible to get backing for a land-for-peace deal with Syria unless support came from members of the opposition.

Kahalani denied speculation that he plans to leave the party in order to put forward his proposed law. □

U.S. investigating Nazi ties of former L'Oreal executive

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK, Feb. 22 (JTA) — A prominent French businessman with strong ties to cosmetics giant L'Oreal has been placed under investigation by the United States over charges that he collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

Andre Bettencourt, 75, wrote numerous articles for two pro-Nazi publications during the war, one of which was financed by the Nazi government in Germany.

The accusations against Bettencourt first surfaced in the French media about 10 days ago. Bettencourt, a French senator and former Cabinet minister, resigned late last year as deputy chairman of L'Oreal.

French Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld echoed the charges in a news conference here Tuesday, calling Bettencourt's wartime writings "an appeal to genocide."

Klarsfeld urged the United States to place Bettencourt on its "Watch List," which would bar the industrialist from entering the country. He emphasized that he was pressing for the U.S. ban because it was one of the few tools available to use against Bettencourt, who has traveled to the United States many times for political and business purposes.

Bettencourt cannot be prosecuted in France for writing propaganda.

"Always I try to fight against not only the Nazis but their accomplices in France," Klarsfeld said.

Eli Rosenbaum, director of the Office of Special Investigations, the U.S. Nazi-hunting arm of the Justice Department, confirmed Tuesday that an inquiry into Bettencourt's wartime activities was under way.

The results of Klarsfeld's own investigation "are being reviewed as a part of an inquiry by the Office of Special Investigations into whether Bettencourt is eligible to enter the United States," Rosenbaum said in a Feb. 14 facsimile to Klarsfeld.

Klarsfeld said at the news conference that during World War II, Bettencourt was a journalist for a publication that was connected to the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda and the Gestapo.

In an Easter 1941 issue of *La Terre Francaise*, Bettencourt wrote: "Jews, hypocritical Pharisees . . . do not carry in themselves the possibility of redemption. Forever, their race has been forever sullied by the blood of the righteous. They will be cursed by all."

He wrote in the 1941 Christmas issue of that publication, "The Jews of today . . . will be and are already loathed. Jews thought they had won the game. They succeeded to lay hands on Jesus and to crucify him. Rubbing their hands, they cried out, 'Let his blood fall upon us and upon our children.'"

Bettencourt has apologized in the past for his writings. He also served in the Resistance during World War II and received military honors. But Klarsfeld said Bettencourt's service began 10 days before the liberation of Paris and consisted of raising U.S. funds for French prisoners-of-war.

"What he wrote against Jews is more important than being in the resistance," Klarsfeld said.

Bettencourt's articles were first discovered last fall by Jean Frydman, a French-Israeli businessman who has a lawsuit pending against the L'Oreal American subsidiary in New York.

Frydman attended this week's news conference with Klarsfeld. In his \$100 million lawsuit, Frydman and his brother, David, charge that they were ousted from a joint venture with a L'Oreal executive in order to appease Arab officials. The company was trying to win business

with Arab countries by complying with the Arab economic boycott of Israel. The Frydmans brought a similar case against the company in France, which they lost.

The Frydmans have stirred up publicity against L'Oreal as part of their ongoing suit. Last year, Jean Frydman took out a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* detailing L'Oreal's compliance with the boycott. The case has been the subject of major news articles in *Business Week*, the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*.

In the midst of this controversy, L'Oreal took actions last year that were seen as efforts to remedy relations with Israel and the Jewish community. The company pledged \$1 million to help finance a campaign in Israel to lower the high rate of traffic accidents.

Last year, L'Oreal announced a wide range of investments in Israel, including opening a manufacturing plant there.

'I have repeatedly expressed my regrets'

In December, Bettencourt resigned as L'Oreal vice chairman following protests about his World War II activities. Earlier, the head of L'Oreal's Helena Rubenstein unit, Jacques Correze, resigned after French media publicized his own 1948 conviction for war crimes.

However, Bettencourt remains chairman of Gesparal, the holding company that controls 53.7 percent of L'Oreal.

Bettencourt issued another apology Tuesday. "My activities in the French Resistance, together with my political career, are a clear demonstration that I was aware of the errors that are the subject of criticism today," he said in a statement.

"I have repeatedly expressed my regrets concerning them in public and will always beg the Jewish community to forgive me for them," he said.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Tuesday after the news conference that even though he had a great amount of respect for Klarsfeld, he was left with some questions surrounding the location and timing of the press conference.

"I am very skeptical as to the whole purpose of this undertaking," Foxman said, adding that Jewish credibility was at stake. Foxman said he did not understand why a news conference was not held first in Paris or Washington. ADL had praised L'Oreal after an initial \$7 million investment in Israel last year.

U.S. Reps. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.); U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.); and N.Y. Gov. George Pataki issued statements at the news conference supporting Klarsfeld. □

Swiss court fines journalist for labeling officer as 'Nazi'

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 22 (JTA) — A Swiss court has ordered a journalist to pay a fine of \$230 for writing that he thought an officer was a "sympathizer of Nazism" and that she should not be promoted to the rank of major.

The officer, Mariette Paschoud, had filed a complaint in response to the 1991 article, published in the daily newspaper *Blick*, which is based in Zurich.

The court recently ruled that even though Paschoud supports Nazi arguments that question the existence of gas chambers, she does not question the existence of concentration camps or the murder of millions in those camps.

In part, because Paschoud did question aspects of the Holocaust, the court did not order the journalist to pay the \$3,600 fine she requested.

Paschoud has not been promoted to major. □

First non-Orthodox member elected to Tel Aviv Religious Council*By Uriel Masad*

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA) — Bruria Barish, a leading member of the Movement for Progressive Judaism — the Israeli arm of Reform Judaism — was elected to the Tel Aviv Religious Council this week.

This is the first time a representative of the Reform movement has been elected to a municipal religious council in Israel.

Barish's election was made possible by last year's High Court decision that said religious councils could not bar Reform and Conservative candidates from serving on the grounds of their religious affiliation.

Since the decision was made, however, no municipal council had approved any such candidate.

Barish was elected after lengthy negotiations between Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo and representatives of the religious front on the city's municipal council, and is seen as a compromise.

Initially, Reform Rabbi Meir Ezri, executive director of Beit Daniel, Tel Aviv's Reform synagogue, was to be elected to the post. But Ezri drew strong objection from the religious front because he is a Reform rabbi. Barish was then put up as a compromise candidate.

Barish served as chairwoman of the Reform movement in Israel for several years, and is currently president of Beit Daniel. She is very active in the movement, but is not a rabbi, which made her more acceptable to some of the religious members on the city council. Three other women were elected to the religious council together with Barish.

In reaction to Barish's election, Milo said, "The more-or-less general consensus that has been achieved is an indication of the excellent relations between the secular and the Orthodox in Tel Aviv."

But several fervently Orthodox leaders vehemently opposed the election. Knesset member Moshe Gafni of Degel HaTorah called for the religious factions in the Tel Aviv municipality to form a separate religious council.

"The position of all the religious parties, as we told Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a meeting, is that if a Reform representative joins a religious council, we shall leave it," Gafni said.

Knesset member Rabbi Avraham Schapira of Agudat Yisrael called Barish's election "a great shame and a disgrace."

Responding to a statement by Rabbi Chaim David Halevi, Tel Aviv's Sephardi chief rabbi, saying that he would not approve her nomination, Barish said: "There is the High Court of Justice and the courts. My election was legal, the whole council voted on it."

"Whoever will try to oppose it will bring about an unpleasant fight, which isn't what we really want in Tel Aviv," she said. □

PLO leaders condemn Israel as Cairo negotiations conclude*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA) — The leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization this week condemned Israel for delaying the implementation of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

"The trouble that is facing the negotiations is the result of a deliberate and planned policy by the Israeli government to use different excuses since the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian accord to stall carrying it out," the PLO's Executive Committee said in a statement issued in Cairo on Wednesday.

"The peace process is starting to go 'round in an empty circle and is losing its credibility and ability to continue," the statement continued.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat convened the Executive Committee for a two-day session in Cairo to address what he termed the "impasse" in negotiations with Israel.

The meeting followed talks in Paris between Arafat and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and coincided with ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Cairo.

In the statement issued at the conclusion of the PLO session, the committee condemned Israel for failing to withdraw troops from Arab population centers in the West Bank.

The step was called for under the terms of the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington in September 1993, but Israel has delayed the move, citing security concerns in the wake of repeated terrorist attacks against Israelis by Palestinian rejectionists.

The PLO leadership also called the expansion of Israeli settlements in the territories a violation of the self-rule accord. It also called upon Israel to release all Palestinians still held in Israeli jails.

The meeting in Cairo took place following an earlier decision by the committee not to suspend talks with Israel.

But the committee said it would seek international help to pressure Israel to fulfill its part of the agreement.

Arafat fails to gather quorum

Only nine of the committee's 18 members attended the meeting. Some members refused to take part because of their opposition to the direction taken in the Israeli-PLO negotiations.

Their absence leaves open the possibility that those members of the committee opposing the peace process can declare the committee's decisions null and void, since Arafat failed to gather the two-thirds quorum required under PLO rules.

During its session this week, the committee also called upon leaders of the Arab world to convene to discuss the state of the peace process.

Israel Radio reported Wednesday that several Arab member states of the United Nations are planning to request that the U.N. Security Council hold a discussion on continued Israeli settlement expansion in areas around Jerusalem.

On Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet denied an appeal by the left-wing Meretz bloc of the coalition to stop the expansion of communities around Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators concluded another round of talks in Cairo on Wednesday.

The two sides were unable to bridge their differences on issues relating to the withdrawal of Israeli forces in the West Bank and the holding of Palestinian elections.

Among the topics discussed was a Palestinian suggestion to bring international observers to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to monitor the elections.

Yoel Singer, the Foreign Ministry's legal adviser who is head of the Israeli negotiating team, said the two sides were still far from reaching an overall agreement on elections.

"I can't say we are agreed on all the elements of the agreement, but we are moving forward as fast as we can," he said.

In an effort to keep the momentum of the talks going, the two sides agreed to reconvene in Cairo in two weeks.

Singer said he would meet with Saeb Erekat, the head of the Palestinian delegation, next week in Israel or in the West Bank Jericho enclave. □