



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Israel and Syria's ambassadors to the United States concluded two days of talks in Washington.** The face-to-face meetings were the first since Syria suspended the talks without explanation in December. Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich was scheduled to return to Israel to brief his government's leaders. [Page 2]

■ **Vice President Al Gore promised Jordanian officials that the United States will write off all of Jordan's debt to the U.S. government.** During a swing through the Middle East, Gore hinted that civilian aid to Egypt could end after 1996. [Page 2]

■ **The Marriott Corp. is set to begin construction on a sprawling business center in the Gaza Strip.** A brainchild of Builders for Peace, the project is expected to produce hundreds of jobs in the economically depressed area. [Page 3]

■ **The Israeli government barred the entry of Palestinian vehicles from the Gaza Strip.** The move came one day after Israeli police apparently averted a suicide bombing by discovering an explosive-laden truck with Gazan license plates near Beer-sheba.

■ **Israel failed to convince Russia not to sell nuclear reactors to Iran.** A delegation from the Israeli Foreign Ministry held talks about the issue in Moscow with a number of senior Russian officials. [Page 4]

■ **Mahmoud Abbas was named to head a committee that will supervise the ongoing Palestinian negotiations with Israel.** Palestinian leader Nabil Sha'ath denied that he was being ousted from his responsibilities as chief negotiator at the talks. [Page 4]

■ **Israel's Environment Minister Yossi Sarid created a stir, saying that Jewish settlers will eventually have to leave the West Bank town of Hebron — and the sooner the better.** His comments came two days after terrorists opened fire on a crowded bus near Hebron, killing two Israelis. Members of the Likud opposition called for Sarid's expulsion from his Cabinet post, as well as from his role as a negotiator with the Palestinians.

## Senators urge administration to move embassy after talks

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) — A record 93 senators have joined in urging the Clinton administration to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In a letter delivered to Secretary of State Warren Christopher on Monday, the senators declared that the "U.S. Embassy belongs in Jerusalem."

But the senators are not calling for an immediate transfer.

Instead they have called on the U.S. government to move its embassy "no later than" May 1999, when Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization are scheduled to complete their final-status talks.

Discussions about moving the embassy to Jerusalem are not new. Both houses of Congress have passed resolutions during the past decade recognizing a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and urging a transfer of the embassy.

In the wake of the Israeli-PLO self-rule accord signed in September 1993, however, the issue has sparked concern that an immediate transfer would threaten the peace process.

PLO officials have threatened to withdraw from their ongoing negotiations with Israel if the United States moves its embassy.

Circulated by Sens. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), this week's letter seeks to head off other members of Congress who are advocating an immediate move.

Moynihan and D'Amato hope to avoid a political confrontation with the PLO, which would endanger the peace process, aides have said.

But in a move that could negate their efforts, Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) is considering introducing legislation that would force the State Department to move the embassy to eastern Jerusalem before Oct. 1 of this year.

## Senators acknowledge explosive Jerusalem issue

In their letter this week, the senators acknowledged the explosive nature of the future of Jerusalem, but said:

"The search for peace can only be hindered by raising utterly unrealistically hopes about the future status of Jerusalem among the Palestinians and understandable fears among the Israeli population that their capital city may once again be divided by cinder block and barbed wire."

As for the record number of senators supporting the initiative, Moynihan said, "U.S. senators do not often agree, but 93 agree that an undivided Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel."

"The world must recognize that an undivided Jerusalem is and shall remain Israel's capital and nothing will change that," D'Amato said.

A similar letter in the House of Representatives, which was circulated by Reps. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Benjamin Gilman, (R-N.Y.) has 84 signatures.

Based on an earlier action it undertook, the Clinton administration may already be in sync with the sentiments expressed in the congressional letters.

In October, the United States bought a plot of land in western Jerusalem for future "diplomatic use," where a "very senior diplomat" would live, according to the State Department.

Several Jewish groups have expressed support for the Senate initiative.

"For decades, Congress has supported Jerusalem as Israel's capital and I'm gratified to see a bipartisan and record number of senators once again signal their intention to see the U.S. Embassy moved to its rightful place," said Neal Sher, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"Nothing would give us more pleasure in the Jewish community than seeing the American flag flying over an American Embassy in Jerusalem with Israel at peace with its neighbors," said Martin Raffel, director of the Israel Task Force and associate executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"The Moynihan-D'Amato approach did a good job of balancing our

principled position that the American Embassy belongs in Jerusalem with the needs for the peace process," Raffel said.

But other Jewish groups are endorsing the bill being considered by Kyl, which would require an immediate transfer of the embassy.

According to a draft of the Kyl legislation, "Funds available to the Department of State may be used to maintain and operate the United States Embassy in Israel only if the embassy is designated to be within the city of Jerusalem."

The Christians' Israel Public Action Campaign is spearheading the effort to gain support for the Kyl bill, though it is not yet clear whether it actually will be introduced.

Americans for a Safe Israel, the Jewish War Veterans and the Zionist Organization of America are among the organizations endorsing the draft bill.

"We should seize on this opportunity and move the embassy as quickly as possible," said Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, referring to the letter sent by the 93 senators.

However, Capitol Hill aides said the support for the letter was so widespread because the language in the letter defers a move until after the PLO and Israel reach a final agreement.

The seven senators who did not sign this week's letter were Sens. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.), Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.), Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), John Chafee (R-R.I.), Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), James Jeffords (R-Vt.) and David Pryor (D-Ark.).

An aide to Abraham said the senator supported the essence of the letter, but was afraid it would derail peace talks with the Palestinians. □

## Far from public's probing eye, Israelis and Syrians resume talks

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) — Far from the public eye, Israel and Syria resumed their peace talks this week.

In meetings Monday and Tuesday, Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States, and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Muallem, conferred with Dennis Ross, the State Department's special Middle East coordinator.

The face-to-face meetings are the first since Syria abruptly suspended the talks without explanation in December.

At the time, talks were progressing with the ambassadors and with Israeli and Syrian military chiefs-of-staff, who were meeting to discuss security arrangements for the Golan Heights in the event of an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher secured the resumption of the dialogue during his shuttle visits between Jerusalem and Damascus last week.

Although conducted in an atmosphere of secrecy, the sessions this week reportedly focused on laying the groundwork for the resumption of talks between the military representatives.

Negotiations have stalled as Syria continues to demand Israeli withdrawal from the entire Golan.

Israel has said it will not specify the extent of a pullout until Syria is willing to spell out its vision of peace.

Rabinovich was scheduled to return to Israel after the meetings concluded Tuesday to brief Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

The Israeli Embassy here sent a confidential report

to Rabin and Peres detailing Syrian positions, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

According to a Syrian source cited in the report, Syria opposes stationing U.S. troops on the Golan to monitor a presumed peace accord, insists on public negotiations and will not accept a Camp David-type demilitarization agreement, Ha'aretz reported. □

## In Gore's Middle East swing, aid discussed in Jordan, Egypt

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) — Vice President Al Gore traveled to the Middle East this week for a series of talks with regional leaders about the peace process.

Gore arrived in the Jordanian capital of Amman on Tuesday in what was the second stop of a tour that was to include visits to Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian self-rule areas, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

In Amman, Gore promised Jordanian officials that the United States will write off all of Jordan's debt to the U.S. government, a pledge President Clinton made on the eve of the historic Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed in October.

Last week, the House of Representatives undercut Clinton's pledge by approving debt relief for only \$50 million of Jordan's total outstanding debt of \$275 million.

The Senate subsequently agreed to write off all of Jordan's debt, and the Senate proposal is expected to prevail in negotiations between the House and Senate lawmakers.

"We are committed to full debt forgiveness in 1995, and we will meet our commitment," Gore told Jordanian officials.

Gore's visit to Amman, which included discussions about Israeli-Jordanian relations, came a week before King Hussein and President Clinton were scheduled to meet in Washington.

On Monday, Gore arrived in Cairo for the first leg of his Middle East tour.

After Gore met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, the two officials publicly stated that U.S. annual civilian aid to Egypt of about \$800 million would be cut.

Since 1979, when Egypt signed its peace treaty with Israel, Cairo has been receiving a total annual aid package of \$2.1 billion, of which \$1.3 billion is military assistance.

"We don't expect that the aid will last forever," Mubarak said at a joint news conference. "We know very well that there will come a time when it will be reduced."

Gore said the Clinton administration was committed to maintaining the current level of civilian aid at least through 1996.

Gore was in Cairo to promote the "Partnership for Growth," a new program aimed at replacing American government assistance to Egypt in the civilian sphere with private-sector cooperative ventures involving the two countries.

While in Cairo, Gore endorsed the idea of banning nuclear weapons from the Middle East. But he refused to pressure Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

U.S.-Egyptian relations are at a sensitive stage because of disagreements over the treaty. Egypt has demanded that Israel become a signatory to the treaty, which is up for renewal next month.

The United States has stood behind Israel's position that it will not sign the treaty until peace is reached throughout the entire Middle East.

Gore was due to arrive in Israel on Thursday. □

# FOCUS ON ISSUES

## Weizman, Burg disagree over centrality of aliyah

By Uriel Masad

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) — An ideological rift over the centrality of aliyah surfaced this week between President Ezer Weizman and Avraham Burg, acting chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

During a daylong visit to several Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization projects in Jerusalem, Weizman said the sole message to Diaspora Jewry must be persistent, unequivocal and clear: aliyah, immigration to Israel.

Burg, on the other hand, believes that the emphasis must lie with Jewish education, in Israel and abroad, with aliyah becoming the voluntary outcome of such educational efforts in the Diaspora.

Weizman, as guest of the Zionist Executive, toured several projects Sunday in order to become more closely acquainted with the activities of the various departments in the fields of immigration, absorption, development, and Jewish-Zionist education.

Weizman emphasized his viewpoint at the first scheduled stop of the tour, the Kiryat Moriah campus, where hundreds of Diaspora high school and university students study year-round.

Located in the Talpiot neighborhood of Jerusalem, Kiryat Moriah is the campus of the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education.

While speaking with the young people, Weizman asked over and over when they intended to come and live in Israel.

In response to his persistent questions, Weizman received non-committal and vague responses, which clearly did not please him.

Robert Kay, 19, of England said he was not certain whether he could live in Israel.

"It depends on whether I can integrate into Israeli society, and in my profession as a lawyer," he said to the president.

### Particularly impressed with the Kotel

Kay, who intends to study law in England, also told the president that he has seen historical sites in Israel and was particularly impressed with the Kotel — the Western Wall.

To which Weizman replied: "It's natural that you would be impressed by the Kotel. But you should also see the new Israel — its successful industry, art and culture."

When Lena Fishman from the United States spoke of going back home to become a Jewish leader in her community, the president asked her which was more important, building the land of the Jews, or continuing the "galut," the Hebrew word for "exile."

Fishman was hesitant at first, but finally answered: "Both?"

To Anna Shtranizis, a student of Yiddish from Russia who intends to research the archives of Yiddish culture there, the president said: "Yiddish is the past, Hebrew is the future. The Jewish world is diminishing, and its only hope is to live here in Israel."

Weizman also visited a factory, established with the assistance of the Jerusalem Business Development Center in cooperation with the Jewish Agency, which employs 30 people, half of them new immigrants.

At another stop, the Israel Goldstein Village of the Youth Aliyah Department, the president spoke at length with a group of youths from Israel, Ethiopia, Morocco, France, Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union.

The tour also included a visit to Ulpan Etzion, a

Jewish Agency Hebrew study and absorption center with 200 students, mainly from Western countries and the former Soviet Union.

It was during lunch with the Zionist Executive that the ideological rift between Weizman and Burg came to the fore.

While discussing the day's events, the conversation turned to the president's encounter with the students at Kiryat Moriah. Weizman stressed the need to encourage aliyah based on Israel's attractiveness, and on its advanced position in such fields as technology and industry.

Burg, on the other hand, argued that the message of Israel's strong army or its developed industry are not sufficiently attractive for Jews living in prosperous countries. Without the spiritual element, and without a strong Jewish-Zionist identity that is unique to the Jewish people, the State of Israel will lose its uniqueness and become "a state of Hebrew-speaking gentiles," Burg said.

"We are approaching today the end of the catastrophic Zionist era, in which Jews escaped for their lives, and found refuge in Israel," Burg said, adding, "The central question of our lives must be how to combat assimilation that destroys half of our people. There are no simple answers to this question, and therefore, it is impossible to save a nation with slogans." □

## In boost for Gaza economy, Marriott plans business center

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) — Palestinians in the Gaza Strip will see the economic benefits to peace — in the form of a sprawling business center.

In less than two months, the Marriott Corp., in conjunction with the General Resources Design Group, plans to begin building a 275-room hotel complete with 10,000 square feet of leasable office space, three restaurants, a swimming pool and mega-business center, according to Marriott officials.

"This will be a landing pad for business to come to Gaza," said Ziad Karram, president and CEO of the design group, which is based in Fairfax, Va.

Located less than one mile north of Gaza City, the \$80 million beachfront Gaza Marriott Business Center will bring 1,000 jobs to Gaza during two years of construction, said Karram, a Palestinian American.

The project, a brainchild of Builders for Peace, is scheduled to be completed by early 1997. Builders for Peace was founded after Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Declaration of Principles in September 1993 to encourage Arab and Jewish Americans to invest in Gaza and Jericho. Those areas fell under Palestinian self-rule in May.

Culligan International Corp., owned by Astrum International, will build the infrastructure. Steven Green, the chief executive of Astrum, is one of the founding Jewish members of Builders.

Once operational, planners expect to hire 350 permanent workers for the facility and another 1,750 for support jobs in the area, Karram said.

He and Marriott representatives were scheduled to announce the project after meeting with Vice President Al Gore in Jericho on Friday.

The Overseas Private Investment Corp., a federal agency that provides investment incentives abroad, is on the verge of announcing \$50 million in loan guarantees for the project, U.S. officials said.

In meetings with Builders for Peace during his visit to Washington last week, King Hassan II of Morocco pledged financial support for the project, according to Karram. □

## PLO reshuffles bargaining team in effort to speed up negotiations

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) — The Palestine Liberation Organization this week reshuffled its bargaining team in an effort to speed up ongoing negotiations with Israel.

In the Gaza Strip, sources with the Palestinian Authority confirmed Sunday that Mahmoud Abbas, one of the architects of the Palestinian self-rule accord, has been named to head a committee that would supervise negotiations with Israel.

Palestinian leader Nabil Sha'ath denied that he was being ousted from his responsibilities as chief negotiator at the talks. He said Abbas was only becoming part of a review committee to oversee the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The decision to name Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, to the supervision committee came at the end of a stormy meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee in Tunis over the weekend. At that meeting, committee members strongly criticized PLO leader Yasser Arafat's handling of the negotiations with Israel.

After considering whether to suspend the talks, the committee instead decided to reshuffle the negotiating team in an effort to bring some momentum to the talks.

Abbas signed the Declaration of Principles for the Palestinians in Washington in September 1993 along with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Soon after the signing, Abbas had a falling out with Arafat and refused to take part in the ensuing negotiations with Israel.

Abbas has been critical of Arafat's leadership style, saying his strategies have weakened the Palestinian's bargaining position.

In Jerusalem, Israeli political sources said they did not think that the reshuffle would have a detrimental effect on the negotiations.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, who is also involved in the negotiations, said he welcomed Abbas' return to the talks. □

## Israel fails in talks to halt Russian sale of reactors to Iran

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) — Israel failed this week to convince Russia not to sell nuclear reactors to Iran.

A delegation from the Israeli Foreign Ministry held talks about the issue over the weekend in Moscow with a number of senior Russian officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Posolyvek.

The Israeli delegation, led by Foreign Ministry Deputy Director Eitan Ben Tsur, expressed concern over Iran's growing strength, its support of terror and its efforts to obtain nuclear weapons.

The Russians responded that they intended to follow through with the deal, but stressed that the Iranians could not exploit the purchase to build nuclear weapons.

Russian officials, maintaining that the reactors cannot be used for military purposes, said it would place its trust in the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which will monitor activities at the reactor sites.

In addition to the observers from the IAEA, Russia plans to send its own experts to monitor the use of the reactors, Russian officials said.

Iran is relatively weak and feels threatened both by the United States and by its neighboring countries, the officials said.

They also said Russia did not share Israel's

assessment that Iran is a major supporter of Islamic fundamentalist terror groups.

The Israeli-Russian talks came in advance of a visit to the Middle East by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

The Russian foreign minister was scheduled to meet this week with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher before heading to the Middle East, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. □

## Torah ceremony in Prague includes Havel, Israeli scribes

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, March 21 (JTA) — Czech President Vaclav Havel recently took part in the ceremonial return of a repaired Torah scroll to this city's historic Altneuschul synagogue.

In a ceremony that began at the Jewish town hall here, the chairman of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, Jiri Danicek, said because of the stormy history of the country during the 20th century, the scroll had not been repaired since 1907.

During the ceremony, two scribes from Israel who had carried out the repair inscribed the last words of the Torah in the open scroll.

The Torah was then rolled up, dressed and festooned with a golden crown that had been donated to the Prague community in the 18th century by one of its rabbis, Ezechiel Landau, who died in 1793.

The Torah was carried out of the town hall by Henry Greenfield, an Australian Jew of Prague origin who sponsored the repair and who will finance the repair of 10 additional Prague Torahs in the coming years. Accompanying the Torah in a procession to the Altneuschul were klezmer musicians, singers and dancers.

In his remarks, Havel said the ceremony reflected the revival of the Jewish community in his country. □

## Two groups vie for creation of national Holocaust center

By Simon Rucker

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, March 21 (JTA) — The race is on to establish a national Holocaust center in London.

A private Jewish group last week unveiled plans for a multimillion dollar museum that would be a smaller-scale version of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

The group's announcement came as officials at Britain's Imperial War Museum were contemplating the construction of a wing that would, in part, be devoted to the Holocaust.

The private group said a report it had commissioned projected a building with 50,000 square feet of exhibition space. The building would cost about \$16 million to build and about another \$8 million to \$16 million to endow, according to the report.

The group wants its museum to concentrate exclusively on the history of the Holocaust.

Planners at the Imperial War Museum are meanwhile thinking of creating a wing that would be devoted more generally to the history of genocide.

The director of the Imperial War Museum director, Alan Borg, said a "major new section" of at least 1,000 square feet was being contemplated that would be largely, though not solely, focused on the Holocaust.

"We are not in opposition. We can complement each other," Israel Weinstock, a member of the private group, said of the two sets of plans. □