

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Avraham Burg was officially elected chairman of the World Zionist Organization. The election came at the opening session of the Zionist General Council, the legislative body of the Zionist Congress. [Page 2]

■ U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher plans to send a letter to Capitol Hill detailing the Clinton administration's problems with Sen. Bob Dole's (R-Kan.) legislation to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, according to U.S. officials. The objections are expected to include a threat of a presidential veto.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin warned that Israel could only agree to a partial redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank before a July 1 target date. He said Israel's stance was well within the terms of the Palestinian self-rule accord. [Page 3]

■ The former Soviet republic of Georgia will open an embassy in Jerusalem, according to the country's president, Eduard Shevardnadze. He made the announcement in Jerusalem, where he and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed a cooperation agreement covering culture, communications and agriculture.

■ France's Jewish leaders reacted with dismay to the victories posted by the extreme-right National Front in the country's final round of municipal elections. "This is a turning point in the political history of France," said one Jewish leader.

■ A long-awaited trade pact between Israel and the European Union hit some last-minute snags. Israel has approved a draft of the accord, but has called on the E.U. to incorporate some changes into the agreement. E.U. officials are predicting that an accord will soon be finalized. [Page 2]

■ Israel's Transportation Minister Yisrael Kessar was questioned by police about the alleged misuse of funds from the Histadrut Labor Federation. Kessar was asked about his suspected use of funds for political purposes when he was secretary-general of the trade federation.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Jackson's Jewish Question: Hullabaloo flares, then flickers**

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, June 19 (JTA) — For the record, here is how the great hullabaloo surrounding "Michael Jackson and the Jewish Question" flared up, engaged diplomatic skills on both sides and flickered out as quickly as it had started.

The evening of June 14: The super pop star and his wife, Lisa Marie Presley, grant an hourlong interview to Diane Sawyer on ABC's "Prime Time Live," an encounter watched by 60 million rapt Americans as well as viewers in 115 other countries.

After dispensing with the really major questions, such as whether the couple engaged in marital relations and shared the same bed (affirmative on both counts), Sawyer hones in on the lyrics of the song "They Don't Care About Us," featured on Jackson's new album, "HIStory Past, Present and Future, Book I."

The staccato hip-hop song, in which the multimillionaire entertainer casts himself as the voice of universal victimhood, contains the lyrics "Jew me, sue me, everybody do me/Kick me, kike me, don't you black or white me." Later in the song, Jackson reprises the theme with "Kick me, kike me/Don't you wrong or right me."

Sawyer asks whether these lyrics may be considered anti-Semitic. Jackson is shocked at the suggestion, saying the song symbolized all victims of prejudice.

"It's not anti-Semitic, because I'm not a racist," pronounces the Gloved One. "I could never be a racist. I love all races from Arabs to Jewish people."

To prove this assertion beyond all doubt, Jackson notes, "My accountants and lawyers are Jewish."

"My three best friends are Jewish — David Geffen, Jeffrey Katzenberg and Steven Spielberg," he adds, naming three of Hollywood's most influential players, who recently joined forces in DreamWorks SKG.

The next day: "Prime Time Live" was aired too late for coverage in the June 15 edition of most newspapers, except for The New York Times, which finagled a copy of the album before its release date.

However, the top guns at the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Anti-Defamation League are warming up the fax machines and staffing the phones for the inevitable media onslaught. Both organizations are critical of the lyrics, but strike a moderate tone.

Groups gear up for inevitable media onslaught

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, says, "It's the ambiguity [of the words] that I'm afraid of, when they reach 20 million buyers around the world."

He points out that Jackson had been among the first visitors to the Los Angeles-based center's Museum of Tolerance and its Holocaust exhibit two years ago, and was visibly shaken by the experience.

Hier's colleague, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, refers to the lyrics' "loaded terminology, aimed at an unsophisticated audience."

David Lehrer, ADL's western regional director, comments that "the words are hateful and harmful, and hate is too serious a subject for subtleties. Why single out Jews?"

The three spokesmen say they believe that Jackson is not an anti-Semite, but wonder why no one in his entourage, which includes a fair number of Jews, had flagged the offensive words along the way.

One veteran Hollywood insider observes that Jackson writes his own lyrics and "when you reach the superstar status of a Michael Jackson or Barbra Streisand, no one around them would dare criticize them."

Later in the day, two of Jackson's "best friends" weigh in.

Music mogul Geffen testifies that "there's not one iota of anti-Semitism in Michael. He's not a hater of any kind. At worst, sometimes he's naive."

Spielberg is rather less enthusiastic and clearly unsettled that a booklet accompanying each album quotes the mega director-producer as

lauding Jackson as "a phenomenon" and "one of the world's most precious resources."

Spielberg releases a formal statement declaring that his words of praise were written in August 1993 for what he was told would be a retrospective "Best of Michael Jackson" album.

Those liner notes of almost two years ago, protests Spielberg, "are by no means an endorsement of any new songs that appear on what has now been released as Michael Jackson's 'HIStory' album."

Sony Music executives, who are investing about \$30 million to promote Jackson's album, and hope to sell 20 million copies, are reported to be nervous.

June 16: Jackson calls Cooper of the Wiesenthal Center and, in an emotional 10-minute conversation, the singer insists that "I don't have a racist bone in my body."

"My intention was to write an anti-racist song," he tells Cooper.

A short time later, Jackson faxes letters of apology to the ADL's Lehrer and to Hier and Cooper at the Wiesenthal Center. He promises that the following paragraph will accompany all his albums, except for the 2 million copies already shipped out:

"There has been a lot of controversy about my song, 'They Don't Care About Us.' My intention was for this song to say 'no' to racism, anti-Semitism and stereotyping. Unfortunately, my choice of words have unintentionally hurt the very people I want to stand in solidarity with. I just want you all to know how strongly I am committed to tolerance, peace and love, and I apologize to anyone who might have been hurt."

The ADL and Wiesenthal Center declare themselves satisfied with the apology, though Hier vows to monitor the follow-through by Sony's Epic Records, which is distributing the album.

Saturday, June 17: On the Sabbath day, they all rested from their labors. □

As official WZO chairman, Burg outlines new proposals

By Uriel Masad

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — Avraham Burg has been officially elected chairman of the World Zionist Organization.

The election came at Monday's opening session of the Zionist General Council. The council is the supreme legislative body of the Zionist Congress, which convenes every four years. The 192 delegates of the Zionist General Council voted unanimously for Burg, who has served as acting chairman of the WZO/Jewish Agency for Israel since February.

Burg is expected to be ratified as chairman of the Jewish Agency when the Agency Assembly convenes here beginning on Sunday.

Once ratified, Burg is expected to resign from his Labor Knesset seat.

In his inauguration speech, Burg called for the reorganization and restructuring of the two bodies that have been the central vehicles for Israel-Diaspora relations.

In mapping out his plans, Burg repeated his slogan, "One People — One Body" in connection with the Jewish Agency and the WZO.

Although he did not detail specifics in his opening speech, Burg left little doubt that he was referring to a much talked about merger between the organizations.

Such a plan would effectively close the WZO down as an independent organization.

Today, the WZO, which promotes aliyah and Zionist activities, acts as an equal partner in the Jewish

Agency, which spends more than \$400 million annually on bringing immigrants to Israel and resettling them and on other social services in Israel.

The Jewish Agency's money comes from the United Jewish Appeal and the Keren Hayesod. The WZO receives its budget of roughly \$30 million from an arrangement reached with the Jewish Agency.

Burg assured the delegates that any changes in the Jewish Agency and WZO would come as a result of discussions, debate, compromise and consent.

In his opening speech, Burg also outlined his vision for the future relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

His blueprint, called "Brit Am — the People's Covenant," which was also distributed in the form of a booklet, depicts in rather vague terms the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

The relationship, he said, needs rejuvenation and a strong infusion of Jewish education. □

Israel's trade pact with E.U. confronts last-minute obstacles

By Joseph Kopel

BRUSSELS, June 19 (JTA) — A long-awaited trade pact between Israel and the European Union has hit some last-minute snags.

Israel approved a draft of the trade accord on June 7, but it nonetheless called on E.U. officials to incorporate some changes into the agreement.

According to sources within the European Executive Commission, the E.U.'s principal decision-making body, the unresolved problems are linked to Israel's demand for free access to European markets for its agricultural exports, especially for its oranges.

Israel is also seeking to continue negotiations about Israeli companies tendering for European Union telecommunications contracts.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres visited Spain earlier this month to seek agreement with Spanish leaders on issues blocking the conclusion of an Israeli-E.U. accord.

Some E.U. countries — including Spain — are eager to protect their agricultural markets from Israeli imports. Peres' visit to Madrid took place less than a month before Spain takes over the rotating E.U. presidency on July 1.

Despite the last-minute difficulties, E.U. officials are predicting that an accord will soon be finalized.

A spokesman for Manuel Marin, the E.U. official in charge of relations with Mediterranean countries, said the European Commission would present a final agreement for the approval of the E.U. Council of Ministers at a summit set to take place in the French city of Cannes at the end of June.

"With efforts from both sides, a new accord could be initialed within a short time," E.U. sources said, adding that in the meantime, contacts with Israeli negotiators would continue.

The new trade pact would replace a 1975 trade and cooperation agreement between Israel and what was then known as the Common Market.

Negotiations on an updated accord between Israel and the European Union began in January 1994, after E.U. leaders decided to "reward" Israel for signing its peace agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993.

The new accord would bring Israel closer to the European Union by creating a formal framework for political dialogue between the two sides.

The European Union is Israel's main trading partner, but Israel has repeatedly complained about its \$7.5 billion trade deficit with the 15-member bloc. □

Likud's David Levy enters race for next prime minister

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — In a widely anticipated move, Likud Knesset member and former Foreign Minister David Levy has announced that he was founding a new political movement and would run for prime minister in the country's 1996 elections.

But he stopped short of declaring the formation of a new political party.

In a meeting Monday with Moshe Katsav, the leader of the Likud faction, Levy stressed that he still belonged to the party's parliamentary faction and would vote with it.

Katsav said he was glad that Levy wanted to remain in the Likud opposition, but added that he would have to check the legal implications of Levy's decision to form a new movement.

At a rally of some 4,000 supporters in Givatayim on Sunday night, Levy announced that he was setting up a "new political framework, a new movement that would organize into a party."

The 57-year-old Levy, who draws strong support at the municipal level, particularly in development towns in the Galilee and Negev, said the new movement would focus on social and economic issues.

He also lashed out at the Rabin government for what he called its "so-called peace policy." He placed himself in the political center, saying he would "not be dragged to extremes which imperil national unity."

Levy's move was expected after he sharply attacked electoral procedures that were proposed by Likud leader and Levy archrival Benjamin Netanyahu.

Levy said the proposals, which were adopted earlier this month, were biased against his supporters.

Although Levy's new movement is expected to siphon off support from Likud, it is unclear how Levy's decision would play out in the country's national elections in November 1996.

Political observers believe that a Levy candidacy could improve Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's chances in the elections by splitting the right-wing vote. □

Rabin: Only partial accord possible by July 1 target date

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — With less than two weeks to go before a July 1 target date for reaching agreement on the next phase of Palestinian self-rule, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has warned that Israel would only be able to reach a partial accord by then.

Israel is only willing to negotiate a partial redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank prior to the holding of Palestinian elections, Rabin told a joint session of the Knesset Finance Committee and the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday.

He said Israel's stance was well within the terms of the Palestinian self-rule accord, which calls for an Israeli troop redeployment in two stages.

"If we are asked to reach agreement [now] on both stages, it is very doubtful if we will be able to reach agreement at all on July 1," he said.

The Palestinians have called on Israel to complete its redeployment before elections are held.

According to recent news reports, Israel is willing to carry out an initial redeployment from four towns in the West Bank before elections: Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm and Kalkilya. A redeployment from areas that create more problematic security concerns — Ramallah, Bethlehem and

Hebron — would be worked out later, according to the reports.

Rabin also complained to the Knesset committees of the high cost of the redeployment plan.

He said the estimated cost of redeploying bases, headquarters and troops, as well as building bypass roads, has been put at \$333 million.

Rabin was quoted as telling the joint committee session that he could save millions of dollars by uprooting Jewish settlements in problematic areas of the West Bank.

But he said he would stick to his promise not to dismantle any of the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the five-year interim period of Palestinian self-rule.

"At present, we are not discussing transferring, moving or uprooting any settlement," he later told reporters.

Members of the opposition blasted the prime minister for his redeployment plan, accusing him of selling out Israel's security.

"This is not redeployment, it's withdrawal," Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters.

Redeployment would lead "to the entry of the PLO and Hamas into the towns of Judea and Samaria, and in later stages giving them the rest of the territory," he said.

In another development, Jewish settlers on Monday opened a dirt road connecting several West Bank settlements.

The move came as part of a protest campaign launched last week against the planned Israel Defense Force redeployment in the West Bank.

The five-mile dirt track linked the settlement of Almon, located near Jericho, to Kfar Adumim, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. It was built without IDF coordination.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair said Monday that settlers were acting illegally when they moved into 13 abandoned houses near the settlement of Barkan last week as part of their "Land of Israel First" campaign.

Ben-Yair passed on the ruling to Rabin in a letter, raising the possibility that the settlers may be ordered to evacuate.

But settlement leaders said the land is private property and that they are ready to defend their rights in court. □

Amman is home to 1st kosher eatery

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — Jordan's first kosher restaurant has opened in the capital city of Amman.

The Istanbul restaurant, which seats 110 people, was the brainchild of Israeli businessmen. It will be jointly run by a Jordanian, Khaled Mohammad Ali, and a three-partner Israeli firm.

A day before the June 8 opening, the restaurant unofficially opened with the slaughter of chicken and sheep, according to strict Jewish rules.

The restaurant is decorated with pictures of Jerusalem and has a menu written in English and Hebrew.

"Our restaurant will be open to Jews, Arabs who want to come in," said Ali Azza, manager of the restaurant, according to news reports.

Asked whether he was concerned about being targeted for possible attacks from people opposed to Jordan's peace treaty with Israel, Azza said, "We are not afraid, why should we be? We have not received any threats."

Thousands of Israelis have visited Jordan since the two countries signed a peace treaty in October. □

Hungarian leader assures return of religious property*By Alissa Kaplan*

NEW YORK, June 19 (JTA) — The prime minister of Hungary has assured Jewish leaders that religious property seized during World War II would be returned within a 10-year period.

The pledge was made earlier this month during Prime Minister Gyula Horn's visit to the United States.

All communal property belonging to the Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist churches and the Jews will be returned, said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

The property includes Jewish schools and synagogues, said Steinberg, who attended a meeting between Horn and WJC officials here.

Next month, the Hungarian government's working committee on restitution is scheduled to meet with Jewish representatives in Budapest, Steinberg said.

"Jewish property will be considered on an equal basis with the others," he said.

He added that by Sept. 30, a list of property to be returned would be finalized.

Compensation for religious property that cannot be returned will take place over a period of two decades.

Aspects of the Hungarian restitution issue remain murky, however.

No solution exists for the return of individual property that has no heirs as a result of the Holocaust, the WJC official said.

In addition, the return of individual property that has claimants or heirs will be handled by Hungary's existing privatization laws and legislation that has not yet been introduced, he said. □

Soldiers kill 3 Palestinians in border shootout with PLO*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — Israeli soldiers shot dead a wanted Palestinian and two members of an elite Palestine Liberation Organization unit in a shootout last week on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

Israel Radio reported June 14 that the two members of Force 17, a unit that provides bodyguards to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, were apparently trying to help Darwish Abu Khatla infiltrate the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza.

Abu Khatla, 28, a member of the PLO militia group Fatah Hawks, was wanted for his alleged involvement in past attacks on Israeli troops. He fled from Gaza to Egypt and then went on to Libya in 1990.

Israel Radio reported that Israeli troops spotted Abu Khatla attempting to cross the border and opened fire.

Under the terms of the Palestinian self-rule accord, Israel controls international border crossings into the autonomous areas of Gaza and the West Bank Jericho district.

The two Force 17 members were waiting for Abu Khatla on the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing when the shots erupted.

One of them apparently opened fire on the Israeli soldiers before fleeing. He was spotted by a different group of soldiers, who opened fire, killing him and a second member of the elite Palestinian unit.

The two members of Force 17 were later identified as Abdel Nasser Salah and Hassan Abu Thuraya.

An Arafat spokesman said the two men were not part of Arafat's presidential guard, adding that they worked at the Rafah crossing point.

The Palestinian Authority issued a mixed message about the infiltration attempt.

"It was wrong," said Arafat spokesman Marwan Kanafani. "On the other hand, we can understand the desperation of such an individual."

Other PLO officials reportedly attempted to distance themselves from the incident and promised a full investigation.

Israel security sources said the area through which Abu Khatla tried to infiltrate is a favorite crossing for smugglers and terrorists. □

Right-wing Austrians suspected in letter bombings in Germany*By Gil Sedan*

BONN, June 19 (JTA) — A letter bomb that exploded recently at the city hall in the northern German city of Lubeck may have been connected to last year's arson attempt at the local synagogue.

The bomb was addressed to the city's deputy mayor, Dieter Szameit, who had called for stern action against neo-Nazi groups in the wake of a firebombing at the Lubeck synagogue in March 1994.

Last year's incident was the first firebombing of a Jewish house of worship in Germany since the days of the Third Reich.

The Lubeck synagogue was also the target of a failed arson attempt in May.

The letter bomb arrived at the offices of the Social Democratic Party at the Lubeck city hall and was opened by party official Thomas Roter because Szameit was away on vacation. Roter suffered severe wounds to his hands.

Authorities think that the letter bomb might have been the work of an Austrian extremist group.

Roter told police that before opening the envelope, he had noticed that it had an Austrian stamp. Two Austrian extremist organizations, the Bavarian Liberation Army and the Salzburg Veterans, have claimed responsibility for a series of 18 letter-bomb attacks in the past 17 months.

One such letter reached Vienna's former mayor, Helmut Zilk, whose left hand was torn to pieces in the explosion.

All the letters have been addressed to people who were active in pro-immigrant human rights groups. □

Father of missing Israeli offers reward for information*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM, June 19 (JTA) — The father of an Israeli who disappeared last year while backpacking in Tibet has offered \$10,000 for any information regarding his whereabouts.

He also announced that a group of former members of an elite Israel Defense Force combat unit were due to leave for Tibet in two weeks to look for Nir Korech, 24, who is their comrade.

Korech was last seen near the Tibetan-Bhutanese border. He had told another backpacker that he planned to explore an area that is off-limits to foreigners.

Previous search expeditions failed to turn up any signs of Korech.

Travel fever hits many young Israelis after their release from the army. Although some stick to more commonly traveled routes, others, such as Korech, try to push the outer bounds.

The IDF has declared the army reserve officer a missing soldier.

The Foreign Ministry has been unable to gather any information on his fate. □