



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The final results from the Palestinian elections affirmed that in the race for the executive head of the Palestinian Council, Yasser Arafat crushed his sole opponent with 88 percent of the vote. Arafat loyalists also will control the newly elected council.

■ Tunisia and Israel announced plans to exchange freestanding interest sections in April. The development came as Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak made an official visit to Washington. [Page 3]

■ Israel's Labor Party Central Committee overwhelmingly voted for Prime Minister Shimon Peres as its candidate in the next national elections. Peres ran unopposed after Religious Affairs Minister Shimon Shetreet withdrew his bid.

■ The trial of Yigal Amir, the confessed assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, was set to begin Tuesday. [Page 3]

■ The Israeli delegation conducting peace talks with Syria left for the United States for another round of discussions, set to begin Wednesday in eastern Maryland. Political sources in Israel said Syrian pragmatism in the area of security arrangements would be the test for any progress.

■ The most powerful group of Muslim militants in Egypt, the Islamic Group, reportedly vowed to strike at American "interests and people" in revenge for the life sentence of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman.

■ Israel Eldad, an underground leader of prestate Israel and for 50 years one of the most influential figures of the Israeli right wing died. Eldad immigrated to British-run Palestine in 1941 and, along with Yitzhak Shamir, led Lehi, the most militant of the underground groups.

■ The president of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors made an impassioned plea in Jerusalem for the international Jewish community to press Germany to provide compensation to Holocaust survivors who have so far been excluded from the reparations process.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Israel anxiously awaiting next Palestinian peace move

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Now that the votes are counted in the first Palestinian elections, the government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres has quickly shifted the focus to the next step in the peace process.

The Israeli prime minister is looking beyond the newly elected Palestinian Council — headed by Yasser Arafat and largely controlled by Arafat loyalists — and is urging the revocation of clauses in the Palestinian charter that call for Israel's destruction.

By calling for this next step, which is laden with political and emotional significance for both Palestinians and Israelis, the Peres government is seeking to place the onus of responsibility for the further success of the peace process squarely on the shoulders of the Palestinians.

It is now up to Arafat and his elected colleagues to demonstrate that they can rein in terrorism and that they can take the symbolic step that will enshrine the reconciliation between the two nations.

The abrogation of the anti-Israel clauses in the Palestine Liberation Organization covenant must take place no later than two months after the inauguration of the new government, according to the Israeli-Palestinian agreements that paved the way to Saturday's elections.

Israel has said that a failure to so do would be a cause for a freeze in the negotiations.

Peres is not the only voice in the government exhorting Arafat to look ahead.

Minister of Health Ephraim Sneh said Monday that the process of Palestinian self-determination would depend upon the proper and satisfactory implementation of the accords between Israel and the Palestinian leadership. In particular, Sneh focused on the abrogation requirement, calling it the next vital test on the path to the eventual permanent-status settlement between the two groups.

Yossi Beilin, minister without portfolio and a close Peres confidant, warned Sunday in uncharacteristically blunt terms that there would be no permanent-status negotiations, no further redeployment and, in fact, no movement forward if the Palestinians did not eliminate the clauses.

The abrogation, it is felt in government circles, would finally lay to rest most peoples' fears about the course and ultimate goals of the peace process with the Palestinians — provided, of course, that the state of security is satisfactory.

Israeli and Palestinian forces have still been on full alert, fearing a major reprisal by Islamic hardliners for the killing earlier this month in Gaza of Hamas terrorist Yehiya Ayash, also known as "The Engineer." Israel is widely believed to be behind the killing of Ayash, who was the reputed mastermind of several terrorist attacks against Israelis.

### Even those with Jewish blood on their hands

Many also believe that the abrogation or amending of the PLO covenant would seriously weaken the Likud-led opposition's ongoing efforts to find fault with the agreements already signed with the Palestinians and to persuade the public, during this election year, that the whole peace process will lead to disaster.

What Arafat needs to do now is convene the Palestinian National Council, the PLO parliament in exile, to eliminate the wording. The 88 members of the Palestinian Council elected Saturday, many of whom appear to be willing to amend the covenant, are to become members of the PNC and will participate in its deliberations when Arafat convenes the body.

There has even been talk by some Palestinian officials of the possibility of a new covenant altogether.

To aid the effort, Peres disclosed just as the polling stations closed Saturday that he would permit all members of the PNC, even those opposed to the peace accords and those with Jewish blood on their hands, to return to the West Bank and Gaza in order to attend its sessions.

Arafat was to draw up a list of some 100 PNC members for whom he wants Israel to grant entry.

While the structure to revoke the clauses appears to be in place, the new executive leader of the Palestinian government still faces a challenge, because the manner in which the clauses in question are abrogated or amended will be a direct reflection on him.

Some of the PNC members have consistently opposed Arafat's peace moves with Israel.

The PNC includes, at least nominally, such rejectionist leaders as George Habash of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Nayef Hawatmeh of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The two quickly declared Sunday in Syria that they would not be availing themselves of Peres' invitation.

And at least one former leader of the Hamas fundamentalist group won a seat on the new Palestinian political body, even though the Islamic group officially boycotted the elections.

It also remains to be seen how well Arafat handles the not-so-quiet voices that oppose his vision of peace.

Radical Palestinian groups based in Damascus condemned the results of the historic elections, saying that Arafat's success was false.

They called for new elections that would include Palestinians living abroad.

Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghoshe said that if Palestinians around the world could have cast ballots, no more than "20 percent" would have selected the 66-year-old Arafat.

Although the Arab League congratulated Arafat, it expressed sympathy for the Palestinians scattered across the Middle East who did not participate in the elections.

Some observers remain skeptical about whether Arafat, despite his new and enormously enhanced status as the elected leader of his people, has the political clout to produce the required two-thirds majority of the PNC to amend the covenant.

Arafat must be able to dismiss these naysayers, and rely on the more optimistic heavy hitters — both Israeli and Palestinian — in his corner.

Peres himself told Arafat, in a telephone conversation that was repeated to media, that he had no doubt that the Palestinian side would live up to its commitment. Peres stressed the Palestinians' profound interest in the continuation of all aspects of the peace process, including the political and the economic.

### **'What are they talking about?'**

The Palestinians' No. 2 man, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, who headed the election committee and is thus bolstered by the election's success, duly assured Israeli reporters that the commitment would indeed be honored.

Abu Mazen regarded the PNC's upcoming move on abrogation such a fait accompli that he rushed to announce Monday that the newly elected council would declare Palestinian independence before the end of the three-year term of the newly elected interim government.

The declaration sent a wave of discomfort within the Israeli political community.

Opposition forces in Israel have hardly been quiet about the possibility that former terrorists would receive Israeli visas.

But word of a Palestinian state, especially at this early point in the process, is considered blasphemous in many Israeli homes.

A strong Likud reaction to Abu Mazen would seem natural.

But even the pro-peace process Minister of Health Sneh tried to play down Abu Mazen's statement. "What kind of a Palestinian state are they talking about?" he said. "A state where we control 70 percent of the West Bank?"

Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu made an observation one would not necessarily expect from him: He said that if the Palestinians changed their covenant, he might accept Palestinian autonomy.

Netanyahu, however, added that the Palestinians must also change their "attitude toward Israel as a Jewish state." □

*(JTA correspondent Gil Sedan in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)*

### **10 years after Achille Lauro, PLO reaches pact with victims**

*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer, no sum of money, no act of contrition can erase the pain resulting from the murder of their father.

But there is perhaps a sense of closure in the tentative settlement they have reached in their lawsuit against the Palestine Liberation Organization.

More than 10 years ago, terrorists belonging to an extremist PLO faction shot Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American Jew who was aboard the hijacked Achille Lauro cruise ship, and threw him overboard.

The PLO has now reached an agreement in principle with the Klinghoffer daughters "to create an institution designed for peace studies, including the prevention of terrorism," according to a Jan. 9 letter signed by lawyers for both sides.

It said the institute would "memorialize the tragic death of Leon Klinghoffer as well as other victims of violence."

The agreement, reached just days before PLO leader Yasser Arafat was elected to head the newly created Palestinian Council, calls on the PLO to provide initial funding for a peace institute dedicated to promoting programs to resolve conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere.

If the agreement is finalized, further litigation against the PLO by the Klinghoffers and the travel agency that booked the cruise "will not be necessary," the letter to U.S. District Judge Louis Stanton stated.

The judge has set a mid-February deadline for reaching a final agreement, a spokeswoman for the Klinghoffers said.

The Klinghoffers and their spokeswoman declined to comment on the preliminary agreement until it is finalized.

Since their father's death, Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer have dedicated themselves to fighting the scourge of terrorism.

Together with their late mother, Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer established the Klinghoffer Memorial Foundation of the Anti-Defamation League in 1985 — a foundation dedicated to combating the threat of terrorism through educational, legal and legislative means.

"Through their selfless and courageous efforts, Lisa and Ilsa Klinghoffer transformed terrorism and its victims from the abstract and became — and remain — the personification of the threat of terrorism," Abraham Foxman, national director of Anti-Defamation League, said at the Washington ceremony commemorating the 10th anniversary of Leon Klinghoffer's death.

"We cannot allow terrorists to gain a stronger foothold in this country," Ilsa Klinghoffer said at the ceremony, invoking the recent bombings of the federal building in Oklahoma City and the World Trade Center in New York.

"We do not want other Americans to feel the pain of watching their parents being held hostage, tortured and murdered." □

## Israel's peace dividend extends to Tunisian ties

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After several fits and starts, Tunisia has joined the circle of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The North African country and Israel agreed Monday to establish low-level diplomatic relations by trading interest sections.

Tel Aviv and Tunis will exchange interest sections by April 15, which is a step toward full diplomatic relations but which, on the diplomatic scale, falls a couple of steps short of an embassy.

Despite initial plans to open the offices using Belgium as a third party, Tunisian officials said Monday that they were ready to establish an independent interest section in Israel not linked to another country.

The officials said they were making the distinction as a gesture of goodwill toward the Jewish state.

In addition, Tunisia will open a liaison office in Gaza.

The diplomatic move comes more than a year after the two countries originally agreed to exchange interest sections.

Tunisia, once the base of the Palestine Liberation Organization, had first announced its diplomatic intentions in October 1994.

However, several disputes delayed the move.

The latest announcement came after a meeting here between U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Ehud Barak, Israel's foreign minister; and his Tunisian counterpart, Habib Ben Yahia.

"I am pleased to announce that for the first time Israel and Tunisia will establish official facilities, called interest groups, in each other's countries," the secretary of state said Monday after hosting the first ever trilateral meeting between the State of Israel, the United States and Tunisia.

The interest sections will "facilitate their political consultations and travel and trade between their two countries," Christopher said.

### 'Tried not to dictate terms'

Ben Yahia said the move to full relations would come if Israel reached accords with Syria as well as Lebanon.

Israel maintains full diplomatic relations with Jordan and Egypt.

Morocco and Israel established independent interest sections last year.

Israel is now negotiating with Oman and Mauritania to open similar posts.

The development with Tunisia came just as the third round of peace talks between Israel and Syria were to resume.

Barak, on his first official visit here as foreign minister, met with President Clinton to discuss the peace negotiations scheduled to resume Wednesday in eastern Maryland.

Barak also was to discuss last weekend's Palestinian elections with the president.

Clinton renewed his pledge to work toward an Israeli-Syrian accord and stressed that the United States would assist, but not pressure Israel to reach an accord.

"The timetable is entirely up to the progress of the substance of the negotiations, and that is entirely up to the parties," Clinton told reporters before his first White House meeting with Barak.

The United States has "had some success in the last three years because we have not tried to dictate terms

or anything of that kind," Clinton said.

"And if you look at the results of the last three years, that is the appropriate posture for the United States."

As for a possible meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Syrian President Hafez Assad, the U.S. president said, "If it is helpful in getting them to the point where they can make a peace, obviously, that would be a good thing but like every other part of this process, ultimately that is up to them."

Barak also met Monday with Secretary of Defense William Perry.

He was scheduled to meet Tuesday with National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and senior members of Congress before heading to New York. □

## Trial for Rabin's murder set to resume in Tel Aviv

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The murder trial of Yitzhak Rabin's confessed assassin was set to resume this week, after the High Court of Justice in Israel rejected a petition from Yigal Amir's lawyers to postpone the deliberations.

Amir's lawyers had sought to have the trial, which was set to begin Tuesday, postponed until after the state commission of inquiry into the assassination submitted its findings.

The Tel Aviv District Court, where the Amir trial is taking place, had rejected the lawyers' request, saying that the results of the Shamgar inquiry would not affect the trial.

Jonathan Ray Goldberg, one of the attorneys representing Amir, said his client would not submit a plea Tuesday because not enough information from the prosecution's side of the case had been submitted.

Amir's trial was to resume after a recess of one month, which was granted to give the defense time to review prosecution evidence.

Amir, a religious nationalist, confessed to police that he shot the prime minister when he left a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv.

The assassination was also filmed by an amateur photographer who was at the event.

Earlier this month, Amir told two investigators from the Shamgar inquiry that he had not intended to kill Rabin.

The confessed assassin said he only wanted to paralyze him in order to force him out of the political arena. □

## Naval leader: Discover Dakar fate

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The new commander of the Israeli navy said this week that the Jewish state had a moral obligation to uncover the fate of the Dakar submarine.

The craft disappeared 28 years ago with its crew of 69.

Rear Adm. Alex Alone made the comment at the annual state ceremony — held at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl Cemetery — for the Dakar crew.

In January 1968, the submarine disappeared in rough weather after leaving England.

Efforts to determine what happened to the submarine were unsuccessful.

In February 1968, the sailors were declared missing. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Is an independent state of Palestine a foregone conclusion?***By Gil Sedan and Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Shortly after the polls closed, the Palestinian leadership's second in command rushed to announce the next national objective — Palestinian independence.

Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, chairman of the central election committee, said the newly elected Palestinian Council would declare independence "within three years."

A day later, he did not rule out the establishment of a Palestinian state even before the end of the three-year term of the new interim government.

The declaration set off a wave of discomfort among Israelis, some of whom view the prospect as an anathema.

Israel's right wing was still reeling from the announcement that Israel would issue visas to former terrorists who belong to the Palestinian National Council so it can convene to abrogate its covenant calling for Israel's destruction.

Israeli officials such as Health Minister Ephraim Sneh played down the statement.

"What kind of a Palestinian state are they talking about?" he asked. "A state where we control 70 percent of the West Bank?"

Ridicule it as he may, the Palestinian state seemed to draw nearer as Israeli government spokesmen did not reject Abu Mazen's statement out of hand.

They merely restated the official line, saying that the matter would be resolved in the negotiations on the final status of the territories, which are slated to begin in May.

Although the Labor Party sticks formally to its rejection of a Palestinian state, no one doubts that the "final status of the territories" most likely will mean an independent Palestinian state.

On the streets where voting took place, Palestinians were of a mixed mind whether the elections would lead to a Palestinian state.

Whatever their view, Palestinians took to the streets the day after their first election gave Yasser Arafat a resounding victory as president of the Palestinian Council.

Some 75 percent of roughly 1 million registered voters went to the polls for the first time in their history to choose the president of the Palestinian Council and members of the 88-seat body.

**Start of Muslim holy month**

Arafat, 66, who has led the Palestinians for the past 30 years, won 88 percent of the votes. His only challenger, Samiha Khalil, an opponent of the Oslo agreement, received 12 percent of the vote.

Perhaps it was nationalistic pride or perhaps it was the start of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, that made West Bank towns and villages so crowded Monday.

Whatever the reasons, larger than usual numbers of Palestinians were out and about, shopping in the markets and lining up at the mosques.

Many seemed excited by the elections and the prospect of self-rule. But few expressed full-fledged optimism about the future.

Even those who wholeheartedly support Arafat doubted whether he would be able to realize their dreams of an independent Palestinian state.

"I didn't vote for Arafat," said Nafez Abu Sharifeh, a 28-year-old computer engineer in the town of El Bireh, near Ramallah.

"I did vote for two council candidates because they are relatives. I don't believe in the elections because the time is not right. We are still under Israeli occupation and in truth, the Palestinian Authority has no authority."

This was echoed by Ayei Castro, a restaurant owner in eastern Jerusalem.

"For me, the elections aren't important, because I don't care what [the Palestinian Authority] plans to do. This is Islamic land, but whatever Israel wants, the authority does. Arafat can't say no."

Castro, a 39-year-old native of Jaffa, admitted that he has a personal ax to grind with Israel.

"In 1948 my family was forced to flee Jaffa so we moved to Jerusalem. They took all our houses and land. Of 114 dunams, I have only 1 1/2 left. I have papers from the [British Mandate] period proving my ownership, not that it does any good."

Others, like Alif Sabbagh, a 37-year-old Israeli Arab from the Galilee, say they would have voted, given the opportunity. Under the terms of the Oslo Agreement, Arab citizens of Israel were ineligible to vote in this week's election. East Jerusalem Palestinians who voted are not Israeli citizens.

Obviously frustrated by his inability to go to the ballot box, Sabbagh, who now lives in East Jerusalem, said, "The Palestinian people are my people. I'm an Israeli citizen but I feel Palestinian. I have suffered like the rest of my people have suffered. My land has been confiscated and my brothers and I don't know my uncle, a refugee living in Lebanon."

Sabbagh expressed the hope that sometime in the near future Israeli Arabs "will be able to have dual citizenship, as some American Jews do. I hope we can participate in the negotiations over our future as Israeli citizens and Palestinians."

While Mohammed Shuker, a 41-year-old restaurateur in Ramallah, would have liked to see more opposition candidates running against Arafat, he expressed satisfaction that elections took place at all.

In fluent Hebrew, he said, "Of course I'm happy that we had elections, since most people here support peace. Unfortunately, the road to democracy will be long and difficult."

"We need to learn and emulate other democratic countries — the United States, nations in Europe, even Israel. We have much to learn from Israel."

**A young hairdresser**

The most upbeat note of the day was sounded by a young hairdresser named Taham.

"I'm not old enough to vote myself, but the rest of my family went to the polls," she said. "It was so exciting and everyone is so happy. I can't wait till the next elections, when it will be my turn."

Although Arafat's Fatah organization and its supporters were the clear winners in the vote for the council, some measure of opposition to Arafat was evident: the election of independent candidates who did not receive Arafat's blessing in the elections.

Most prominent among them were Haidar Abdul Shafi, who served as the head of the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid Conference, and later criticized Arafat for his authoritarian leadership, and Abdul Jawad Saleh, a former mayor of the West Bank town of El Bireh and critic of the current peace process.

The first Palestinian elections will not be remembered as the cleanest elections ever.

By midweek, dozens of candidates who were not elected to the autonomy council complained of fraud, while candidates who could have sworn that their whole villages were behind them were not elected. □