



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Official results from the Palestinian elections were released, confirming Yasser Arafat's victory. Arafat won 87.1 percent of the vote for president of the Palestinian Council, and his supporters gained 55 of the legislative body's 88 seats.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced that he would call for early national elections to seek a mandate for his peace policies from the Israeli people. Peres rejected accusations made by opposition leaders that he was moving up the date for elections in order to exploit the Labor Party's gain in popularity in the wake of the Nov. 4 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. [Page 1]

■ A report that Israel's commercial banks miscalculated kibbutz debts, costing them hundreds of millions of dollars, sent shock waves through the government and banking community. The report questioned the manner in which the banks calculated kibbutz debts dating back to the 1980s. [Page 2]

■ Some 5,000 Palestinian supporters of the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas rallied over the weekend in memory of the group's chief bomb-maker, slain last month by a bomb hidden in a cellular phone. Yehiya Ayash, also known as "The Engineer," was believed to have masterminded at least seven bombing attacks against Israelis.

■ More than 100 U.S. lawmakers joined Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) in signing a letter that urges Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to amend the Palestine National Covenant. The letter attempts to hold Arafat to his commitment that the covenant, which calls for Israel's destruction, would be amended no later than 60 days after the new Palestinian Council takes office.

■ Nearly half of British Jewish men younger than 40 who are married or in steady relationships have a non-Jewish partner, according to a new survey of British Jewry. The report, conducted by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, also showed that one in three British Jews did not belong to a synagogue. [Page 3]

In calling early elections, Peres seeks mandate for peace policy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced this week that he is seeking a mandate for his peace process policies from the Israeli people.

Armed with such a mandate — in the form of a victory in the country's first direct elections for prime minister — Peres would have tacit public backing for offering an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for a peace treaty with Syria.

The mandate would also give him a stronger hand when Israel and the Palestinians begin their permanent-status negotiations.

Those talks, which will cover the thorniest issues in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, are scheduled to begin in May — about the time Israel will hold its national elections.

Peres publicly announced this week what he had already been widely reported as having decided in private: that he was issuing a call for early national elections.

"I have decided to call elections as early as is legally possible," Peres said Sunday night at a news conference at the Prime Minister's Office.

Peres did not announce a specific date for the elections, which was expected to be determined later in the week, after consultations were held between Labor Party and opposition leaders.

Last week, May 28 was widely touted as the likely date for the elections, which were originally scheduled for Oct. 29.

Earlier Sunday, Peres dispatched Labor Party officials to hold consultations with representatives from Israel's other political parties.

With broad support expected in the Knesset for holding early elections, a Labor Party initiative to be submitted later this week to dissolve the Parliament in preparation for the elections is virtually assured passage.

In making the call Sunday for early elections, Peres acknowledged that the peace negotiations with Syria were taking longer than he had thought, adding that it was time for his government to get a mandate from the people.

He said he had rejected a proposal to call early elections immediately after the Nov. 4 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin because "the country was overcome with shock, and so was I. I could not allow it to overpower us."

"I feel now that the period of instability is over," he added. "I am convinced that in order to continue and bring about new achievements, I have to renew the mandate of the government and myself."

Peres outlines Labor's achievements

Peres rejected accusations made recently by opposition leaders that he was moving up the date for elections to exploit the Labor Party's gain in popularity in the wake of the Rabin assassination. A Gallup Poll released last Friday gave Peres 52 percent of the vote for prime minister, compared to 30 percent for his rival, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

In his remarks, Peres outlined the Labor government's achievements since it took power in July 1992 — including the historic peace accords Israel reached separately with the Palestinians and the Jordanians.

Peres called for a short campaign period and urged all sides to run clean and civilized races.

The news conference came after Peres held a day of consultations with Labor officials. It also followed a meeting with President Ezer Weizman, during which Peres informed him of his decision to move up the date for elections.

Netanyahu, speaking at a news conference held immediately after Peres made his remarks, said he would accept early elections and that the opposition would not bicker over the date for the balloting.

Netanyahu also said that if he were elected, Israel would remain on the Golan and would seek to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state.

"We believe this is the only way to stabilize a situation many in Israel feel has gotten out of control," he said, adding that a Likud government would ensure regional peace and security.

Peres met Sunday with members of the Meretz Party, the junior partners in the governing coalition, before he made his announcement at the

news conference. Environment Minister Yossi Sarid and faction head Ran Cohen gave the Meretz Party's support for holding early elections — but only after receiving assurances from Peres that the campaign and voting would not interfere with the ongoing negotiations with Syria.

Spokesmen from Israel's other political parties also voiced their backing for early elections. □

Study charges kibbutz debts miscalculated by Israeli banks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A report last week that Israel's commercial banks miscalculated kibbutz debts, costing the kibbutzim hundreds of millions of dollars, has sent shock waves through the government and banking community.

The claims were made in a preliminary draft of a report commissioned by the Kibbutz Headquarters Association, a body representing some 100 collective settlements.

The Procaccia Report, named after Professor Uriel Procaccia, who prepared it, questioned the manner in which the banks calculated kibbutz debts dating back to the 1980s. According to the report, instead of the current situation in which the kibbutzim owe large amounts of money to the banks — primarily Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim — the banks miscalculated the debts and, in some cases, actually owe the kibbutzim money.

"In the 1980s, banks charged inflated interest rates," said Tsafir Ronen, director general of the Kibbutz Headquarters Association. "But it turns out that with some of these kibbutzim, it is the banks who owe them money."

Total kibbutz debts to the banking sector are estimated at some \$5 million. The repayment of the debts to the banks was arranged in two settlement agreements — the first in 1989, and a supplementary agreement approved last year by the Knesset Finance Committee.

But in the wake of last week's report, a number of kibbutzim asked to re-evaluate their debt settlement arrangements. Among them, said Giora Forman, secretary general of the Kibbutz Artzi movement, are kibbutzim that are relinquishing lucrative lands located in central Israel under the terms of the repayment settlement agreements.

"They want to re-evaluate the situation, to see if perhaps they would be able to hold on to some of the land they are currently required to give up under the contract," he said.

Meanwhile, the United Kibbutz Movement attacked the Procaccia Report, saying that it was politically motivated to get more money out the government and that it would only jeopardize the debt settlement agreements.

The commercial banks also rejected the report — particularly its statements that if the loan miscalculations proved true, the stability of the banks would be threatened.

Ze'ev Abeles, supervisor of banks, said the banks had enough reserve funds on their balance sheets to cover the doubtful debts, if necessary.

Agriculture Minister Ya'akov Tsur demanded a commission of inquiry into the matter, saying that the kibbutzim had suffered enough. "It is time to address the injustice done to the kibbutzim for years," he said. □

Amnesty International leader warns Israel on use of torture

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The leader of the human rights group Amnesty International has warned Israel about the legalization of what he described as torture used by Israeli security agents when interrogating suspected terrorists.

Pierre Sane, Amnesty's secretary general, brought his concerns before Justice Minister David Liba'i during a visit last week to Israel.

Sane's warning comes as Israel plans to establish formal guidelines for interrogation procedures carried out by the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence service.

The proposed guidelines include a clause allowing for the use of moderate physical pressure, including violent shaking, when Shin Bet agents interrogate suspected terrorists.

The Shin Bet guidelines "raise many issues, which we have just really started to address," Sane told reporters.

Sane's visit, which included a trip to Palestinian self-rule areas, was aimed at ensuring that human rights are respected by both Israel and the Palestinians as the peace process advances.

The nonpartisan organization also called on Israel to stop the practice of administrative detention and to ensure that all trials are carried out fairly.

Amnesty called on the Palestinian Authority to stop using what it said was torture during interrogations, and to stop making what it described as arbitrary political arrests in the autonomous areas. □

New anti-missile system passes tests

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The first trials of a new laser anti-missile system developed by Israel and the United States have proven successful.

The Nautilus system, which was tested twice last week at the White Sands missile range in New Mexico, succeeded at shooting down both armed and unarmed missiles. The system is designed to intercept short-range missiles, including the Katyusha rocket, which fundamentalist terror groups in Lebanon have repeatedly fired at targets in northern Israel in recent years.

The Nautilus spots a rocket in midair, then fires a laser that destroys the rocket before it hits its target.

A spokesman for the U.S. Army praised the Nautilus tests, adding that the system could also be used for long-range missiles and bombs dropped by aircraft.

Israel's Defense Ministry welcomed the tests as an impressive technological achievement, but stressed that development of the system is still in its early stages.

The successful trials are expected to result in an expanded budget for further developing the system. □

Israeli cars barred from Bethlehem

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian police officers have closed off the West Bank town of Bethlehem and the main thoroughfare that runs through it to Israeli traffic, protesting Israeli security measures at a Jewish shrine on the outskirts of the town.

Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij complained Sunday that Israeli security arrangements outside Rachel's Tomb — including Israel's blocking off traffic lanes — was having a detrimental effect on local and tourist traffic to Bethlehem.

Freij also claimed that the Israeli security measures violated the terms of agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians.

Palestinian police officials set up roadblocks Sunday in the areas of Bethlehem under their authority, barring Israeli drivers from passing through the town.

Israel has built a bypass road linking settlements near Bethlehem with Jerusalem, but many Israeli drivers opt to take the main highway, saying that the bypass road significantly lengthens travel time. □

Prosecutors file new evidence against accused WWII criminal

By Michael Gelbwasser
The Jewish Advocate

BOSTON (JTA) — After years of insisting that Aleksandras Lileikis helped kill Jews in Lithuania during World War II, federal prosecutors have filed proof that they say justifies stripping him of his U.S. citizenship.

The U.S. Attorney's Office and the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations earlier this month filed documents and asked U.S. District Judge Richard Stearns for a summary judgment.

Lileikis has until this Friday, which is two weeks after the prosecution's submission, to file his defense.

The judge will then issue a ruling.

Lileikis, 88, who for years has lived in Norwood, Mass., came to the United States in 1955 and became a citizen in 1976. He has acknowledged that he was the former head of the Lithuanian security service — known as the Saugamas — in the Vilnius province.

The accused war criminal is believed to have signed orders that sent tens of thousands of Jews to prison and to Nazi death camps. In addition, Lileikis is thought to have turned Jewish prisoners over to a killing squad.

But Lileikis has also said his duties included public opinion polling and preventing sabotage, not anything involving the killing of Jews.

However, papers from the Lithuanian Central State Archives show what federal handwriting experts said is Lileikis' signature on these orders. The papers became available after the Cold War, federal officials said.

"There is a shockingly complete paper trail," U.S. Attorney Donald Stern said.

Lileikis earlier refused to answer the federal prosecutors' questions about his wartime activities.

A U.S. district judge ruled that Lileikis could not invoke his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

Federal officials also consider the refusal grounds for denaturalization and deportation.

The United States wants to deport Lileikis to Lithuania.

"By his outright refusal to answer the charges, we contend he has, in effect, admitted them," Stern has said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney David Mackey said the recent filing included only information that prosecutors feel could not be disputed.

Israel Arbeiter, president of the American Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and a vocal proponent of Lileikis' extradition, said the request for the summary judgment "should have happened a long, long time ago."

Arbeiter said that if Lileikis returned to Lithuania, he should face trial there.

Thomas Butters, Lileikis' attorney, was not available for comment.

At least 55,000 Vilnius Jews and 220,000 Lithuanian Jews were killed during the Holocaust. □

Survey of British Jews shows growing rate of intermarriage

By Simon Rocker
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON (JTA) — Nearly half of British Jewish men younger than 40 who are married or in steady relationships have a non-Jewish partner, according to a new survey of British Jewry.

The report, conducted by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, also showed that one in three British Jews did not belong to a synagogue.

And the survey indicated that British Jewish men intermarry more than women.

The survey was based on questionnaires answered by more than 2,000 people.

Its authors maintain that because of the size of the sample and the methodology used, the survey provides the most representative picture yet obtained of Britain's Jewish community.

For British Jewish men of all ages, 38 percent who are married or in steady relationships have a non-Jewish partner, according to portions of the report that have been released.

The survey will soon be released in full.

Among British Jewish men younger than 40, the intermarriage rate is 44 percent.

For British Jewish women, the rate is estimated at between 20 percent and 25 percent.

In the United States, by comparison, the average intermarriage rate for Jewish men and women who have married during the past 10 years is 52 percent.

The gap in the intermarriage rate in Britain between the sexes has "clear implications," according to the report.

In the future, "either the rate in Jewish women will move towards that of men because of the unavailability of Jewish partners, or a higher proportion of Jewish women will remain unmarried," the survey said.

Figures on synagogue membership offer "no comfort" to the main Jewish religious bodies in Great Britain, the report also said.

Along with the finding that one in three British Jews do not belong to a synagogue, the survey found that more than 25 percent of the Jewish community had not attended synagogue during the previous year and that nearly half of the Jews younger than 35 were not members of a synagogue. □

Neo-Nazis in Russia face homicide, robbery charges

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The trial of three members of a Russian neo-Nazi group known as the Werewolf Legion began last week in Yaroslavl, a city 130 miles north of Moscow.

The group, which was formed in the spring of 1994 in Moscow, includes about a dozen youths allegedly bent on carrying out acts of terror.

Two of the group's members on trial last week are facing charges of homicide, robbery and hooliganism.

The third defendant is the group's leader, Igor Pirozhok, who is accused of inciting racial hatred.

Pirozhok was charged under Article 74 of the Russian criminal code, which makes acts of inciting ethnic and racial hatred a criminal offense.

Shortly after it was organized, the Werewolf Legion allegedly attempted to set fire to the Olympic sports hall in Moscow, which was serving as the site of a Messianic Jewish conference.

The group was also reported to have planned a series of arson attacks on movie theaters that were showing Steven Spielberg's acclaimed Holocaust film "Schindler's List."

Prior to his arrest, Pirozhok said in interviews with several Moscow newspapers that "Democrats, Yankees and kikes should be wiped out ruthlessly."

One of the legion's stated goals is the "final solution of the Jewish question by using radical methods."

The Moscow daily Izvestia said last year that the organization's ideology was based on "anti-communism, anti-Semitism, racial segregation and anti-liberalism." □

New Mexico university closes inquiry of anti-Semitic incident*By Lesley Pearl**Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — A new lock protects the visiting team's locker room at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M.

An additional security guard patrols the area. And there is a padlock on the grease board.

The changes were made after an anti-Semitic attack on Seth Greenberg, the basketball coach for California State University at Long Beach.

Prior to the Jan. 22 game between the Long Beach State 49ers and the New Mexico State Aggies at Las Cruces' Pan American Center, the 39-year-old Greenberg opened his grease board to diagram plays.

Inside, in red ink, were the words, "Seth, get ready for an ass-kicking, you Jew bastard."

According to the San Francisco Chronicle, Greenberg, who is a former coach for the Maccabiah Games in Israel, said spectators hurled racial slurs at black members of the Long Beach team at the Jan. 22 game.

At that point in the game, Greenberg had to be restrained.

Later that day, an outraged Greenberg announced on the cable network ESPN that "there are more important things than a basketball game."

It's "a sad commentary on life, and that's a sad commentary on this university that I have to go into my locker room and see a sign" that has an anti-Semitic epithet on it, he said.

"And I have to hear my [black] players called the 'n' word, and I have to hear my white guys be called 'white boys.'"

New Mexico State University began an investigation the next day.

Concentrate on basketball

Meanwhile, William Conroy, the university's executive vice president, sent a letter to Long Beach State President Robert Maxson.

Conroy did not apologize for the incident. Instead, he wrote, "Considering that your coach was under considerable emotional stress, I can understand his reaction."

Greenberg's father recently died, but Greenberg maintained that the personal loss had nothing to do with his reaction to the incidents.

According to Steve Shutt, New Mexico State University's assistant athletic director for media relations, the school's investigation is complete and the results have been turned over to the Big West Conference office.

Shutt said the locker room was "inspected from carpet to ceiling," but we "were not able to determine who was responsible for the remark on the grease board."

In addition, after speaking with security guards, referees and season ticket-holders, "we couldn't corroborate [Greenberg's] accusations of racial epithets hollered. No one else heard anything racial said."

The Big West Conference released New Mexico State University's findings last week. The university has not issued any other statement.

Scott Cathcart, sports information director for Long Beach State University, said New Mexico State and Long Beach State "agree that the two schools have taken all the steps possible [in this investigation]. The conference office's statement offered closure. Now we can put this all behind us and concentrate on basketball."

Greenberg also said, "This experience definitely affected me. I'll never take for granted who or what I am." □

Australian leaders urged to watch LaRouche activists*By Jeremy Jones*

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Two Australian federal parliamentarians have joined Jewish community groups in a call for the government to investigate the activities of the Australian followers of U.S. extremist Lyndon LaRouche.

LaRouche's ideology combines anti-Semitism and bizarre conspiracy theories, such as the claims that Queen Elizabeth heads a drug-pushing ring and that former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was in the employ of the Soviet KGB.

LaRouche has served five years in an American prison for mail fraud and tax evasion.

The two Labor Party politicians called a news conference last week at which they said the LaRouchite Citizens Electoral Councils were involved in an "unprecedented criminal conspiracy" against prominent Jewish families.

One of the parliamentarians, Clyde Holding, who holds a seat in the heartland of Melbourne's Jewish community, described LaRouche as "extreme and anti-Semitic."

A former executive member of the Citizens Electoral Councils, Don Veitch, has stated in a detailed affidavit that he gathered information on Australian Jews and disseminated material "designed to damage, discredit and falsely smear" them.

The group's primary targets in Australia have been Isi Leibler, chairman of the governing board of the World Jewish Congress, and his younger brother Mark Leibler, a past president of the Zionist Federation of Australia.

The LaRouchites have tried to link them with drug dealing and pornography.

An investigation by the Melbourne newspaper The Age recently said that LaRouchites with criminal records have visited Australia to oversee the Citizens Electoral Councils' operations and that adherents of the group have been subjected to brainwashing sessions. The newspaper also reported that the Citizens Electoral Councils were behind a defamatory campaign by a federal Liberal parliamentarian, Ken Aldred, that linked Mark Leibler and a government official to an international corruption plot.

Highly questionable reputation

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the umbrella body of Australia's Jewish community, issued a statement that said: "The Lyndon LaRouche cult has established an international reputation for fraudulent and dishonest activities.

"The cult's history has been marked by an anti-Semitic obsession with Jewish individuals and organizations, with belief in conspiracies involving Jews at the very heart of its ideology. The allegations concerning the group's targeting of prominent and respected Jewish Australians will serve as a chilling example of the lengths to which such obsessed people will go."

The ECAJ called on the Australian government "to commission a report by law enforcement agencies as to whether the anti-Australian behavior of the Australian supporters of Lyndon LaRouche involved any illegal activities, including breaches of visa regulations."

The national secretary of the Citizens Electoral Councils issued a release claiming that "the issue here causing the attacks against our organization is the political personality of Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr., now the second ranking contender behind President Clinton in the Democratic Party pre-selection process for the presidency of the United States." □