



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel's main political factions agreed to hold general elections May 29. Prime Minister Shimon Peres had called for early elections, moving them up from October, but differences between the political parties had held up an agreement on the precise date. [Page 4]

■ Police in Manchester, N.H., separated Jewish protesters from supporters of presidential hopeful Pat Buchanan at a pre-primary day rally. The police said they feared an outbreak of violence as a result of the protest by members of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-AMCHA.

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel's Board of Governors grappled with reform and consolidation of the agency at its quarterly meetings in Jerusalem. The agency is seeking to cut millions of dollars as part of an austerity plan.

■ Israel announced that it would allow a Palestinian hijacker into the Gaza Strip to vote on amending the Palestine National Charter. Leila Khaled, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was on a list of members of the Palestine National Council that Israel approved for entrance into Gaza. [Page 2]

■ The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations is considering a visit to Qatar as the last lap of its annual mission to Israel next week. Israel has no formal diplomatic ties with Qatar, but the two nations recently struck a gas deal.

■ Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Israel could not prevent visiting foreign ministers from holding talks at Orient House, the PLO's de facto headquarters in eastern Jerusalem. His announcement came the same day that U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns revealed that American diplomatic officials have held — and will continue to hold — occasional meetings at Orient House. [Page 3]

■ Likud maverick David Levy announced the establishment of a political party to run in Israel's elections. Levy said his Geshet Party could win as much as 20 percent of the vote. [Page 4]

ON THE ELECTION TRAIL

Resolve of candidates tested by extremists in their midst

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Four years ago, Pat Buchanan's campaign co-chairman stood next to a white supremacist, a Ku Klux Klan leader and a head of a militia group while a speaker branded opponents of gun control as "your enemies" who are "pumping all the Talmudic filth that they can vomit and defecate into your living room."

Larry Pratt, who last week took a leave of absence from the Buchanan presidential campaign, watched as the crowd burst into applause.

In more recent years, he returned to similar sessions, standing beside some of the most bigoted supporters of the right to bear arms. Only in recent days has Pratt distanced himself from such offensive views.

As Pratt's history comes to light, Buchanan has become the latest aspirant for the nation's highest office to have a top-level supporter involved with his campaign who has ties to extremist causes.

Buchanan, whose boost in the early race for the Republican bid for president has alarmed many Jews, is not alone in attracting extremists to his campaign.

But his adamant defense of his longtime friend and adviser is raising troubling questions for many.

Republican hopeful Steve Forbes has been faced with his own questions about his informal adviser, Thomas Ellis, a former director of the Pioneer Fund, which is known for its anti-Semitism and white supremacy.

The revelations about extremists in the midst of political campaigns are neither new nor surprising, according to students of politics.

As long as there have been political campaigns, people with extremist views tend to flock to those campaigns during the election season, they say.

It was true in 1988, with revelations that President Bush had Nazi SS sympathizers in his inner circle, and it is true today, with the latest reports from this year's contest.

"Politics attracts passionate people and some of the passionate people are extremists," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"They feel they can get legitimacy by attaching themselves to mainstream candidates," he said.

Campaigns are "where the action is in American politics," said Jason Isaacson, director of the Washington office of the American Jewish Committee. "There is no very effective filter against extremist involvement in campaign personnel."

The true test of candidates is how they react when extremists are uncovered in their campaign hierarchy, Foxman and others argued.

"You can't really expect candidates to weed out in advance people who have extremist attitudes or have graced the platforms of extremists," Foxman said, adding that the only way to judge candidates is by what they do "once the person's history is brought to their attention."

When asked whether Buchanan has met that test, Foxman replied, "No, no, no."

Buchanan adamantly defends Pratt

Buchanan, who has been bolstered in his quest for the presidential bid by strong showings in last week's Iowa caucus and this week's New Hampshire primary, has adamantly defended Pratt.

As the head of the Gun Owners of America, Pratt has attended numerous rallies with the most virulent anti-Semites and racists of today.

Kenneth Stern, the AJCommittee's specialist on anti-Semitism and hate groups, said Pratt's presence in an important Republican campaign poses a graver threat than many realize, especially because of his access to members of Congress.

Pratt's involvement in the politics of gun control "bridges the gap between the far right, anti-Semites, racists and members of Congress," said Stern, whose book, "A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate," was recently published.

"It's astonishing to me that a guy who has gone to meetings with

really stone-cold Nazis and white supremacists is a welcome lobbyist on Capitol Hill."

Pratt started Gun Owners in 1975, convinced that the National Rifle Association was not active enough in opposing gun control in Washington.

Allegations about Pratt began to resurface last week after the Center for Public Integrity released a report on presidential campaigns and their advisers.

The center reported that Pratt is widely credited with "introducing the concept of militias to the right-wing underground."

In an effort to stem the tide of criticism, Pratt called a news conference, telling reporters, "I loathe the Aryan Nation and other racist groups with every fiber of my being."

As part of his defense, Pratt released a statement touting support from the Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, described by the ADL as a "right-wing, fringe group" based in Wisconsin.

Pratt told Ted Koppel on the television show "Nightline" that the head of the group, Aaron Zelman, considers him a "righteous gentile."

Despite media scrutiny and calls from other campaigns to dump Pratt outright, Buchanan has refused to oust Pratt from the campaign.

"I think it was a mistake to go to those meetings," Buchanan said Sunday on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley," referring to Pratt's participation in the right-wing rallies.

"But, look, I'm not going to cut this man loose when he's asked me to stand by him while he explains what he did right and what he did wrong."

'The dogs are on him'

Buchanan said, "The dogs are on him" because he is "a devout Christian who happens to be very strong in favor of gun ownership, and he's standing with Pat Buchanan."

Buchanan has also compared Pratt's plight to that of Christina Jeffrey, the House historian dismissed by Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) after revelations that she criticized a Holocaust education curriculum for not giving adequate time to the Nazi point of view.

She has since been exonerated by, among others, Foxman, who was one of her staunchest critics.

"She was smeared, she was destroyed and Newt cut her loose and dropped her over the side," Buchanan said on the ABC program.

Buchanan has also evoked the Million Man March to defend Pratt, saying that not everyone who attended the Louis Farrakhan-led rally shares Farrakhan's views.

As Buchanan continues to head off criticism about Pratt, revelations about other questionable advisers in his candidacy continue to surface.

The latest embarrassment for the Buchanan campaign came last week, when the Jewish Communications Network, an on-line news service, reported that the Buchanan World Wide Web Internet site included an article blaming the death of former White House deputy counsel Vincent Foster on the Mossad.

The story alleged that Foster, whose death the police have ruled a suicide, sold to Israel's spy agency U.S. nuclear codes, for which the Mossad paid \$2.73 million, deposited in a secret Swiss bank account.

The article also accuses first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton of spying for the Mossad. The campaign removed the article from the site after the disclosure.

In the Forbes campaign, meanwhile, Ellis, an informal adviser and good friend of the presidential aspirant, has raised his own set of questions.

The group that he headed, the Pioneer Fund, was

initially run by a Nazi sympathizer who once told Congress that four-fifths of all Jewish immigrants were feeble-minded.

More recently, the fund gave a grant to a white supremacist professor who wrote that Jews have an evolutionary boost from "intermittent persecution, which the more intelligent may have been able to foresee and escape," as reported by Bob Herbert in a column in The New York Times.

Forbes has apparently not made any public statements about his connection with Ellis, and has yet to reply to a letter on the matter from the ADL's Foxman. □

Israel to allow 154 members of PNC to attend Gaza meeting

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has announced that it will allow some 154 members of the Palestine National Council to attend a meeting in the Gaza Strip at which they are expected to vote on a resolution to revoke the anti-Israel clauses from the Palestine National Covenant.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres said last month that Israel would allow those members of the council who were living abroad, including staunch foes of Israel, to enter Palestinian self-rule areas to vote on the charter.

Among the 154 PNC members approved by Israel on Tuesday was Leila Khaled, a member of the Damascus-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who in 1969 hijacked a TWA Rome-Tel Aviv flight and in 1970 hijacked an El Al jet.

Khaled, who was born in Haifa in 1944, claims to have since moved away from the militantly anti-Israel Popular Front. She has reportedly been living in Amman with her husband and children and has been working as a teacher.

Others allowed into Gaza reportedly included Abu Ali Mustafa, a deputy of Popular Front leader George Habash, and Ghazi Hussein, the brother of Faisal Hussein, the Palestine Liberation Organization's top official in Jerusalem.

Foreign Minister Ehud Barak this week explained the Israeli decision to allow the members of the PLO's parliament in exile into Gaza. Barak said Israel had only two choices. One was to allow the PNC members into the territories to attend the vote. The other was to refuse entry, which would prevent the PLO from meeting its obligations under the terms of its agreements with Israel. □

Dutch Muslims protest U.S., Israel

By Ruben Vis

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — About 1,000 fundamentalist Muslims from across the Netherlands demonstrated against the United States and Israel at the Hague last week, the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

The crowd also protested Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's peace policies.

The participants in the demonstration, which occurs annually, marched from the Israeli Embassy to the American Embassy here in addition to appearing at the Hague.

The Hague houses the seat of Dutch government, the Dutch Supreme Court and the International Court of Justice.

At the demonstration, one of the few public appearances of fundamentalist Muslims here, the crowd demanded that the Dutch government take action against the Israeli police, who, according to protesters, "break bones of children" and "rape women."

Three protesters were detained by police for a few hours. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Likud presses Jerusalem issue as focus of election campaign**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Likud Party has drawn first blood.

In its opening thrust of Israel's nationwide election campaign, the main opposition party this week attacked the issue of Jerusalem — and it immediately had Shimon Peres' Labor-led government bleeding and backing away.

"If they carry on like this, we might win yet," a senior Likud figure said bemusedly in an interview.

Peres announced last week that he would seek early elections.

But while all parties agreed that the polling should be moved up from its scheduled date in October, they spent several days bickering about the actual date until they agreed Tuesday on May 29.

Likud strategists did not wait until the date was resolved. "Peres will split Jerusalem," they proclaimed over the weekend on thousands of billboards and in full-page newspaper ads.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and his top aides held a news conference in the capital Sunday morning to drive home the assault, accusing Labor of holding secret negotiations with the Palestinians — negotiations, according to Likud, that would result in the division of Jerusalem.

The attack might have been a one-day wonder — were it not for the Peres government's fluttering reaction.

The leaders of Labor "have gone completely hysterical," the leader of the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party, Aryeh Deri, said on television Monday night.

Peres himself set the tone by dispatching the Cabinet secretary, Shmuel Hollander, to assure reporters after the weekly Cabinet meeting that the prime minister was not going to split Jerusalem and, more specifically, that the government was not holding secret negotiations with the Palestinians about the future of the city.

Labor slashed at Likud

This quickly backfired, however, when the Israeli daily Ha'aretz confirmed in its main headline Monday that two Israeli academics involved in the early negotiations with the Palestinians held in 1993 in Oslo had indeed held several sessions recently with Palestinian figures on the future of Jerusalem.

One of the two professors, Ron Pundak, was quoted as saying that the meetings were "purely academic." Unlike the situation in early 1993, Pundak contended, there was currently no need for unofficial diplomacy because Peres and Palestinian Council President Yasser Arafat talk directly.

Compounding the impression of a governing party on the run — instead of, as the polls portray, a party with a commanding electoral lead — Labor slashed wildly at Likud for engaging in "negative propaganda" and "personal attacks."

Some ministers at the Cabinet session grimly recalled "the atmosphere before Yitzhak Rabin's murder" last November, when Likud engaged in hot political rhetoric that many later blamed for contributing to a climate that made the assassination possible.

But this charge fell flat when Minister of Tourism Uzi Baram commented that the Likud's tactic was, in his view, entirely within the bounds of political propriety.

Perhaps Labor's most glaringly oversensitive response — radiating vulnerability — was an announcement from Minister of Internal Security Moshe Shahal's office that he would use police force if necessary to prevent high-profile Palestinian diplomatic activity at

Orient House. In formal letters to the prime minister and to the foreign minister, Shahal solemnly made this pledge — to which no one, Israeli or Palestinian, attaches the slightest credence.

Orient House, a 19th-century building in eastern Jerusalem, serves as the center of Palestinian political and social activity in the city. It is the headquarters of Faisal Husseini, the most prominent Palestinian leader in Jerusalem, who serves as minister for Jerusalem affairs in the Palestinian Authority.

To the frequent but impotent chagrin of the Israeli government, Husseini and other leading Palestinians receive visiting foreign dignitaries at Orient House.

Israel sees such activity as eroding its own claim to sole sovereignty over the city, but in the past it has been able to do little more than issue sharply worded statements about such meetings. Indeed, on Tuesday, Peres contradicted Shahal's announcement, saying that Israel could not stop foreign ministers from visiting Orient House.

As part of his party's attack on the government, Jerusalem's Likud mayor, Ehud Olmert, demanded Sunday that this transparent fiction be ended. Olmert did not say the fiction began during Yitzhak Shamir's Likud government, in which he served as a minister. But Shahal and Labor were apparently too rattled to raise that point.

Instead, the minister for internal security blithely swam straight into the net that the Likud had cast for him, giving a commitment that international pressure will certainly prevent him from honoring — as it has prevented governments, both Labor and Likud, in the past.

Having struck pay dirt so soon, the Likud can now be expected to keep digging away at the Jerusalem issue throughout the campaign.

A highly placed Likud strategist said in an interview that his party's plan of attack lay in targeting "the Peres credibility factor." Once again, as in the series of election campaigns in the 1980s that Peres lost, Likud intends to reawaken in the public a feeling that Peres cannot be trusted, that what he says is not what he means or what he intends to do.

"I give Peres all the credence he gives himself," Netanyahu said sarcastically Monday. "He denied that he was negotiating with the PLO when he was doing so — and now he denied he's negotiating over Jerusalem."

However, there were those in Labor this week who sought some consolation in the thought that perhaps the opposition had made its best move too early.

Panic in the Labor camp

Labor strategists still maintain that Peres' "credibility problem" is a thing of the past. They believe that the prime minister, who now has a worldwide reputation for statesmanship and courage, has proved himself both credible and consistent, clinging to his peace policy in recent years in the face of widespread skepticism.

Why, then, the panic in the Labor camp?

Seasoned political observers point to the no-win quality of the Jerusalem issue from the Labor perspective.

Polls show a national consensus, certainly among Israel's Jewish citizens, in favor of keeping Jerusalem undivided and under Israel's sole sovereignty.

Nevertheless, some 65 percent of those questioned believe that a Labor government would seek and reach some sort of accommodation with the Palestinians on the city, which the Palestinians insist is their capital, too.

Given that Labor is still ahead in the polls, there is an obvious contradiction here. Many people are opposed in theory to concessions on Jerusalem. But in practice, they regard them as inevitable, even somehow desirable. It is this illogical situation through which the Likud drove a coach and horses this week with dramatic success. □

Farrakhan compares plight of Iraqi people to Holocaust*By Daniel Kurtzman*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Louis Farrakhan 1996 world tour continues to showcase the Nation of Islam leader's uncanny ability to infuriate and baffle his critics.

As Farrakhan punctuates his travels with references to the United States as the "Great Satan," federal law enforcement officials continue to investigate whether he violated any laws in his visits to Iraq, Iran and Libya, where economic sanctions apply.

Farrakhan met last week with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, and then likened the plight of the Iraqi people to the horrors Jews endured in Nazi death camps. After visiting a hospital, Farrakhan called U.S. economic sanctions against Iraq a "crime against humanity" that is leading to the "mass murder of the Iraqi people."

"Visiting the hospital," Farrakhan was quoted as saying, "would be, or could be, compared to visiting one of the [Nazi] death camps."

The black nationalist Muslim has crisscrossed Africa and the Middle East during the past month on what he described as a "world friendship" tour to show solidarity with Muslims. His meetings with various foreign leaders — a Who's Who list of international terrorism sponsors — has been sharply condemned by U.S. officials, as well as Jewish groups.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns castigated Farrakhan last week for "cavorting with dictators," denouncing his recent remarks as "shameful."

The Anti-Defamation League in a recent statement said Farrakhan's embrace of America's avowed enemies "shoots a torpedo into the notion that Louis Farrakhan is pursuing a course of moderation."

Earlier in the week, an Iranian newspaper quoted Farrakhan as saying, "You can quote me: God will destroy America at the hands of Muslims," then adding, "We do not seek the fall of the U.S. government but are looking for ways to moderate the unjust policies of the American government."

His stopovers have included Sudan as well as Libya, where leader Muammar Gadhafi pledged \$1 billion to finance political activities in the United States.

Met with Syrian president

He also held meetings in Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey and Syria, where he met for three hours with Syrian President Hafez Assad just 10 days before Israeli-Syrian peace talks were set to resume at the Wye Plantation in Maryland.

Farrakhan's exploits have been challenged on a number of legal fronts. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control sent Farrakhan a letter asking whether he illegally spent money in restricted nations or accepted money for political purposes from countries under U.S. economic sanctions.

In addition, the Justice Department sent Farrakhan a letter informing him that he must register as a foreign agent for Libya if he engages in activities to influence U.S. policies or politics on that country's behalf.

Meanwhile, his most outspoken critic in Congress, Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), has been calling for congressional hearings into his activities and has said Farrakhan would be subpoenaed if necessary. "Louis Farrakhan has been paying courtesy calls to the most murderous regimes on the face of the earth," King said in a statement. "Any American citizen who consorts with the sworn enemies of the United States and seeks their financial backing must be held fully accountable for their actions."

But Congress remains reluctant to call Farrakhan to testify, fearful of becoming entangled in what would likely be a racially divisive hearing, according to congressional sources.

Farrakhan, in his defense, reportedly told Tehran University students, "I am a free black and do not allow anyone to tell me where to go and where not to go, who to meet or not to meet."

Nation of Islam officials would not comment on Farrakhan's foreign trip. An assistant to Farrakhan, however, said the NOI leader is likely to address the issue in his annual Saviour's Day speech Feb. 25 in Chicago. □

Israeli political party heads agree to hold elections May 29*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's parliamentary leaders have reached an agreement to hold the country's national elections on May 29.

"I am happy to announce that a date has been announced which is acceptable to all the factions" in the Knesset, Raanan Cohen said Tuesday. Cohen, the Knesset leader of the Labor-led governing coalition, made the statement after holding intensive meetings throughout the day with members of the different parliamentary factions.

Last week, Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced that he would move up Israel's elections to May or early June from the scheduled date in late October.

But in subsequent days, the various political parties were unable to agree on a specific date for the voting.

Likud and the religious parties had pushed for June 4, while the Labor Party had reportedly preferred May 14 or May 20 for the elections.

The Labor Party has faced mounting pressure to pin down a date in order to allow the Knesset enough time to take all the steps required for elections to take place.

Part of the pressure came from Knesset Law Committee Chairman Dedi Zucker of the Meretz Party, who said the committee had to push through legislation that would dissolve the current Knesset prior to the elections — a step that required a new election date.

Cohen held closed-door talks Tuesday afternoon with Likud Knesset member Michael Eitan. An hour later, he convened a meeting of all the Knesset party leaders, which was soon followed by the announcement of the date.

After the announcement, Zucker said he hoped to conclude the process of dissolving the Knesset before the end of the week.

No specific date has yet been given for when the current Knesset — the 13th — would dissolve. But Labor officials said it would likely be in March.

In a related development, Likud breakaway David Levy formally declared Tuesday that he was forming a new political party that would compete in the upcoming Knesset elections. He also announced that he would run for prime minister as head of the new party.

Levy, 58, broke away from Likud last June in a dispute with Likud leader and longtime rival Benjamin Netanyahu over internal party election procedures.

He told reporters Tuesday that his new party, Geshet — Hebrew for "bridge" — could win as much as 20 percent of the vote for Knesset members.

Polls released last Friday reportedly indicated that Levy would win between 5 percent and 6 percent of the vote in the separate race against Peres and Netanyahu for the premiership. Levy, who recently rebuffed overtures to join a Likud-Tsomet list that brings two right-wing parties under one parliamentary banner, is viewed as having the potential of siphoning votes away from Netanyahu by running on his new party's centrist platform. □