



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The latest issue of National Geographic is at the center of a controversy after it featured quotes from Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel in a profile on Toronto. The Canadian Jewish Congress condemned the piece, in which Zundel talks about Toronto's racial mix.

■ Israel's Supreme Court granted a two-month extension for the government to decide whether to accept the most recent recommendations about the Women of the Wall, a group that has sought for years to pray together at the Western Wall. [Page 4]

■ Dr. Ahmed Tibi dropped out of the race for the Knesset. Tibi urged Israeli Arabs to vote for Shimon Peres for prime minister. [Page 2]

■ Israeli security forces arrested 19 suspected Hamas activists in raids in the West Bank. The arrests come after Hassan Salameh, the Hamas terrorist captured by Israel last week in Hebron, gave information about the group's activities, security sources said.

■ Zionist Organization of America President Morton Klein and New York Rabbi Avi Weiss led a protest at the University of Pennsylvania against the granting of an honorary degree to Nabil Sha'ath. The Palestinian Authority official is an alumnus of the school.

■ Turkish police detained three Palestinians who were accused of planning attacks against Israel, where they were headed. The three were arrested after boarding a Turkish plane with false passports.

■ Secretary of State Warren Christopher criticized America's European allies' continuing relationship with Iran. In an address to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, he called for "real and strong economic pressure against Iran."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ideological gaps narrowing in the race for prime minister

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As election day in Israel draws closer, the ideological gap between Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu is growing steadily narrower.

The polls have remained remarkably consistent for the past several weeks, showing Peres, the Labor candidate in the race for prime minister, leading Likud rival Netanyahu by four to six percentage points.

But as they both reach out for the crucial undecided voters in the middle of the political spectrum, their rhetoric and policy positions are becoming increasingly blurred.

On Sunday, for example, Netanyahu declared that if elected, he would spend no more than some \$330 million a year on settlements.

The rest of the settlement budget would have to come from private investment, he said, seeking to blunt Labor's assertions that a Likud government would pour away the country's hard-won prosperity into building new settlements in the West Bank.

Despite the uncertain outcome of next week's elections, political observers here already are beginning to map out scenarios for the morning after polling day.

A victory by Netanyahu, say seasoned observers, would not be nearly so traumatic to the peace process as the Labor propaganda machine — and a large part of the media — are portraying it.

The Likud leader, who lived for long periods in the United States and later served there as a senior diplomat, would not want to risk sacrificing Israel's current honeymoon with Washington.

Whatever the ideological baggage of the Likud's own hard-liners or that of its rightist political allies, Netanyahu would probably seek to ply a relatively moderate course, knowing that the United States would not want to see the Middle East peace process grind to a halt.

As part of his campaign, Netanyahu has said a government under his leadership would accept the self-rule accords, provided the Palestinians fully honored them, too.

While this formulation is deliberately loose enough to put the entire peace process on hold if Israel's security needs are not met, Netanyahu as premier could well choose to maintain his pre-election posture of pragmatism.

Possible national unity government

With this in mind, it is widely speculated in political circles here that if Netanyahu wins, he may urge Labor to join with him in a government of national unity, offering the Ministry of Defense to Ehud Barak, the former Israel Defense Force chief of staff and current foreign minister.

The assumption in this scenario is that Peres, once beaten, would quickly bow out of public life.

Appointing Barak would enable Netanyahu to avoid ceding this vital post to any of his hard-liners: Ariel Sharon, Rafael Eitan or Ze'ev "Benny" Begin.

For Netanyahu to choose any one of them would signal to the world — especially the Arabs — that the peace process is effectively at an end.

Even discounting the national unity option, a victorious Netanyahu could well prove more independent-minded than his critics expect.

In this scenario, he could shake off pressures from the right and name Likud moderate Dan Meridor as minister of defense and former Likud Knesset Member David Levy, another relative moderate, as foreign minister.

In the same vein, there has been speculation here that Netanyahu might move for a quick deal with Syria, one involving deep withdrawals from the Golan Heights — despite his ostensible commitment to hold on to the region forever.

This scenario is based on the "Begin precedent." Menachem Begin, who became prime minister for the first time in 1977, surprised friend and foe alike by negotiating a peace agreement with Egypt that involved a total Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula.

Domestically, too, Netanyahu may prove less prone to pressures from

Because of the Memorial Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, May 27.

the religious community than has been apparent during the election campaign.

Netanyahu himself is a secular Israeli, with a solid respect for the pillars of constitutionality and liberalism that underpin Western democracies.

Although he declared this week, to the delight of the religious parties, that he would not favor the enactment of a written constitution in Israel, Netanyahu would be unlikely to make the kind of concessions to the Orthodox parties that they seek to strengthen their influence in Israeli life.

Civil and human rights groups have long sought a constitution to codify certain basic rights.

A victory by Peres, meanwhile, so earnestly desired by the dovish and secular sectors of Israeli society as a way to usher in an era of peace and pluralism, is similarly unlikely to pan out in quite the manner the idealists anticipate.

If Peres wins but his Labor Party does not gain a large enough percentage of the separate Knesset vote, he would face a difficult task in assembling a coalition that could win the support of a Knesset majority.

A small margin of victory would also mean that Peres won thanks to the support of Israel's Arab community.

His inability to secure a majority among Israeli Jews inevitably would weaken him politically as he and the Knesset embark on the next four years.

To shore up his political standing and head off the prospect of an abrupt end to his premiership, Peres, in this scenario, would actively seek to bring at least some of the Orthodox parties into his coalition.

His predecessor, the slain Yitzhak Rabin, did this in 1992, linking the fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party with the secularist Meretz Party in an uncomfortable alliance with Labor.

That alliance held together long enough to make possible the historic breakthrough in the Palestinian peace process.

In order to complete that process and negotiate the permanent-status accord with the Palestinians, Peres would need the widest possible backing.

His recent pledge to submit such a final-status pact to the nation in a plebiscite before signing it would certainly help him to woo Orthodox and middle-of-the-road parties into his coalition.

Peres may revive 'Beilin Plan'

But if Peres, like Rabin before him, finds himself needing the support of the Orthodox parties, this would mean that the dreams of a wholesale reform of state-synagogue relations to advance a pluralistic agenda would have to be shelved once again.

In the foreign policy sphere, a Peres victory might well revive the "Beilin Plan" that Peres quickly shelved as politically awkward when it first surfaced in the media earlier this year.

Under this plan, reportedly worked out in a series of meetings between Minister without Portfolio Yossi Beilin and senior Palestinian Authority official Mahmoud Abbas, Israel would countenance the creation of a Palestinian state in much of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But the large Jewish settlements built close to the 1967 border would be annexed to Israel.

This would mean that most of the approximately 135,000 settlers would remain in their homes and remain citizens of Israel.

Beilin has long argued that the three years earmarked in the 1993 Declaration of Principles for the permanent-status negotiations are too long and could prove counterproductive.

Peres, while he was up for election, always rejected that view.

But a Peres who wins the election, and does not plan to stand again, may think otherwise. □

Likud poll: Netanyahu squeaks ahead of Peres

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — With Israel's May 29 national elections fast approaching, the Likud Party said this week that an internal poll it conducted showed that Benjamin Netanyahu had pulled ahead of Shimon Peres by 1 or 2 percentage points in the race for prime minister.

Likud officials said Tuesday that the gap is so narrow that a few hundred votes could make the difference in the race's outcome.

Labor Party polls have also indicated a narrowing gap in the prime ministerial race, but in all its surveys, Peres remains in the lead.

Both parties have been directing much of their campaign efforts to a large bloc of centrists in the electorate who have not decided which way to vote.

Likud officials hope that next week's televised debate between the candidates will be enough to win over undecided voters.

Officials from the two parties were still negotiating the format of the debate, as well as who will be the moderator.

The debate, tentatively scheduled for Sunday night and expected to be prerecorded, will consist of the moderator presenting questions to each candidate.

Likud officials were pushing for the candidates to be allowed to offer rebuttals to each other's statements in order to have some interaction between Netanyahu and Peres. □

Arafat adviser bows out of race

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Dr. Ahmed Tibi, the Israeli Arab adviser to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, has announced his withdrawal from the Knesset race.

Tibi told a news conference Tuesday that he did not have enough time to organize his campaign, adding that recent polls indicated that his party, the Arab Movement for Change, would not receive the minimum 1.5 percent of the total vote needed to win representation in the Knesset.

Tibi added that he did not want to split the vote of the Israeli Arab electorate and urged his followers to support parties that back the peace process. Tibi voiced the hope that his decision to withdraw would strengthen the Arab parties' representation in the Knesset.

He also called on Israeli Arab voters to support Shimon Peres in the race for prime minister.

One of the Arab parties remaining in the Knesset race, the Arab Democratic Party-United Arab List, also announced Tuesday that it was supporting Peres for prime minister. □

Israeli enters world via Amman

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For the first time since Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in October 1994, an Israeli has been born in the Jordanian capital.

Daniel Harel was born last Friday at a leading maternity hospital in Amman.

He is the son of Ze'ev Harel, an administration officer at the Israeli Embassy in Amman. □

Many, but not all, Jews hail high court's vote on gay rights

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When Colorado citizens voted in 1992 to single out homosexuals and deny them civil rights protections as a group, alarm bells went off for many American Jews.

Throughout history, they remembered, Jews have been the ones singled out for different treatment.

When the Supreme Court on Monday overturned the voter-initiated amendment to the Colorado Constitution, cheers went out from these same American Jews.

"Heavy handed unequal restraint of access to the political process by targeting a specific group of people resonates in a particularly sensitive way for Jews," said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department.

The court, in a 6-3 decision, overturned the Colorado amendment, saying that it violated the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection.

Colorado voters passed the measure by a narrow margin in 1992, barring anti-discrimination laws designed to protect homosexuals.

"A state cannot so deem a class of persons a stranger to its laws," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the majority opinion.

Many Jewish groups, including the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the Anti-Defamation League, had signed friend-of-the-court briefs on behalf of the lawsuit challenging the measure.

Samuel Rabinove, legal director of the AJCommittee, hailed the decision for upholding that "fundamental rights cannot be abrogated by majority vote."

Not all Jews, however, were pleased. "We wish the case would have come down the other way," said David Zwiebel, general counsel and director of government affairs for Agudath Israel of America.

He expressed concern that the decision could be interpreted as a governmental endorsement of homosexuality, which Orthodox Judaism prohibits.

Other Orthodox Jewish groups remained on the sidelines during the debate.

"We are opposed to all forms of discrimination, but cannot endorse anything that could be interpreted as endorsing homosexuality as a legitimate alternative life-style," said Betty Ehrenberg, executive director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs. □

Jewish roots of Navy admiral comes as a surprise to many

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As Washington mourned the loss of Adm. Jeremy M. "Mike" Boorda, many expressed surprise that the Navy's top officer was born Jewish.

Boorda, 56, died May 16 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound amid allegations that he improperly wore two citations for combat on medals he received for his service during the Vietnam War.

Although Boorda was not a practicing Jew and in fact raised his children as Protestants, he was born to two Jewish parents and had a Bar Mitzvah at the traditional age of 13.

"He did not in any way emphasize his Jewish roots or his Jewishness," said Rabbi Aaron Landes, a retired U.S. Navy rear admiral.

Landes, who knew Boorda, is the spiritual leader

of Beth Sholom Congregation in Elkins Park, Pa., a suburb of Philadelphia.

But elsewhere, from the White House to Jewish organizations to the Pentagon, virtually no one knew that Boorda, who became the first enlisted man to rise to the Navy's highest post of chief of naval operations, had been born Jewish.

"Certainly he did not identify actively in the Jewish community in the Navy," said Landes, who for 34 years has served as a member of the Chaplain Corps.

The Navy officially lists Boorda's religion as Jewish, giving him the highest rank ever achieved by a Jew in the Navy.

His memorial service was held Tuesday at the Washington National Cathedral.

Boorda and his wife, Bettie, who is not Jewish, raised their four children as Protestants, Landes said.

Among Boorda's ancestors were a cantor and a Chasidic family, Landes said.

Landes last saw Boorda last year when he traveled to Philadelphia to address the local Navy League.

After Boorda's death, Landes visited with the sister of the deceased in Philadelphia.

"Whatever his religious identity, it is secondary to his really being an outstanding officer in the United States Navy," Landes said.

Jewish War Veterans officials, who were surprised to learn of Boorda's Jewish roots, praised him as a "true American hero" who "defended this nation with honor and loyalty." □

JNF drops plan to plant forest sponsored by missionary group

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — As part of its ongoing quest to blend into the mainstream of the Jewish community, an umbrella organization of so-called "Messianic Jewish" groups wanted to plant a forest in Israel through the Jewish National Fund.

The JNF initially agreed to plant the forest of about 100,000 trees, which would have brought the organization \$50,000, and to put up a plaque with only the initials of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America-Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations of America.

But then the JNF changed its mind.

In its initial agreement, the JNF had required that the Philadelphia-based group not use the words "Messianic" or "Messiah" in any of its promotional materials related to the forest, said JNF spokesman Mark Cohen.

But even that restriction, he said, would not have mitigated the fact that the organization is devoted to converting Jews to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Jewish experts on missionaries say it is the imprimatur of the mainstream Jewish community that the evangelical Messianic Jews desperately seek so that they can claim legitimacy in the eyes of the Jewish community.

When the Forward, a Jewish weekly, reported the proposed JNF forest in a May 3 article, an outcry arose that led the Jewish group to rescind its agreement to plant the forest.

A May 13 statement from the JNF said that "in response to a strong outpouring of protest from longtime friends and supporters, including its lay and National Rabbinic Council leadership, [we] acknowledge that [we] made a mistake."

This was not the first time the JNF had accepted donations from Messianic groups, who many say are nothing more than Christians dressed up in Jewish clothing.

In August 1995, Baltimore's Messianic congregation, Rosh Pina, donated \$5,000 to the JNF. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Women of the Wall angered by latest delay in its quest***By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Women of the Wall are angry.

Nearly seven years after first petitioning Israel's Supreme Court for an order that would allow women to pray aloud as a group at the Western Wall with a Torah and ritual garments, the group is still waiting for its dream to be realized.

Two years ago, the Supreme Court vowed to resolve this politically explosive issue, which is opposed by the Orthodox religious establishment, but has yet to do so.

The court Sunday granted a government ministerial commission charged with resolving the issue an extension until July 29.

On that date, the court will hear from both the commission and representatives of the women's group.

The government's position relies on the halachic prohibition against "kol isha" — the sound of a woman's voice — because it can sexually arouse male worshippers.

In the first order it issued after the Women of the Wall filed a petition in 1989, the Supreme Court wrote in a temporary order that the group may not pray out loud at the Wall because "the voice of the woman is lewd."

Phyllis Chesler, a director of the International Committee for Women of the Wall, said, "In their opposing brief, the government has compared us to prostitutes and said that we're doing the devil's work, that we have been painted by feminism and should instead be at home taking care of our husbands and children."

The group now meets at the Wall once a month, on Rosh Chodesh, as well as on holidays, and prays together silently, without donning prayer shawls.

Then the group, which includes Orthodox and non-Orthodox women and ranges in size from 10 to 30 women, walks to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, where it reads from the Torah.

The Little Wall

In January 1992, the Supreme Court asked that a Knesset commission be formed to resolve the issue.

That commission sought, and was granted, extensions until last month.

In a discussion paper the Knesset commission issued in February, it suggested alternative sites for the Women of the Wall, including a site known as Kotel HaKatan, or the Little Wall.

This site is a continuation of the Western Wall surrounding the Temple Mount in the Old City's Muslim Quarter.

Another suggestion was that the women pray at a site used by Christians, where Jesus presumably overthrew the money-lenders' tables.

"Those recommendations were filled with contempt," said Chesler, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Then, in April, the commission recommended that the Women of the Wall pray at a location outside the Old City of Jerusalem, in an area of Arab eastern Jerusalem.

The area is "unfit for prayer and probably unfit for Jews," Chesler said.

She added, "They're not offering us any bullet-proof tallises, either."

Orit Sulitzeanu, spokeswoman for the Israel Women's Network, called the commission's recommendations "no solution at all."

"The commission was supposed to come up with a solution that would enable the women to pray at the Wall but it has failed to fulfill its mandate," she said.

Shortly after the Knesset commission dissolved, the government appointed a ministerial commission made up of current Cabinet ministers, to decide how, or whether, to implement the earlier group's recommendations.

Women of the Wall has proposed a time-sharing arrangement that would allow the women to pray together aloud in the women's section each morning when the Torah is read from 6 a.m. to 7 a.m.

Few men are present at the Western Wall at this time.

In order to accommodate Orthodox women, the group would not constitute a minyan and would omit certain prayers that can only be said by the ritual quorum of 10 adults, Chesler said.

According to Anat Hoffman, who is a leader of Women of the Wall in Jerusalem, "Women are welcome to pray as long as their mouths are shut. Shut in holy places; shut in ritual.

"The daughters of Abraham want to have a voice, but we are told that Abraham had no daughters."

Women of the Wall representatives charge that entrusting the task of resolving the dispute to a ministerial commission will accomplish nothing.

They reason that the very ministers who have been named to the commission will almost certainly be replaced once a new government is formed after the May 29 elections.

And it is likely — whether Labor or Likud wins the election — that the support of Orthodox political parties will be needed to form a coalition government.

"The issue is that the state has continually given into terror from ultraright-wing religious parties and individuals," Chesler said.

The Israeli government is defending the time it has taken to resolve the issue.

"We are talking about an issue that is 2,000 years old," said Nili Arad, deputy to the attorney general and the government's representative in the case.

"This is a serious issue and can't be decided like a regular case," she said. "Time is not being wasted. We need to deal with this issue as long as it needs to be dealt with."

Angered but not defeated by this latest bureaucratic hurdle, Hoffman and Chesler said a solution to the Women of the Wall's problem would not be reached any time soon.

"Until and unless everyone demands in every way possible politically that women be counted as Jews, the state will continue to delay, and try and grind us into dust," Chesler said.

Brides read from Torah

Hoffman believes that her 9-year-old daughter will not "be able to have a Bat Mitzvah at the Wall when she is 12."

"I just hope that her daughter will have the opportunity," she said.

Chesler said a number of Bat Mitzvah girls had recently come to pray with Women of the Wall.

Brides have begun to come and read from the Torah for their pre-wedding "aufruf" at a site away from the Wall itself, Chesler said.

Despite her frustration, Hoffman believes that the group's tenacity has paid off.

"People seeing us at the Wall don't go crazy anymore, perhaps because we are regulars," she said. "People do admire our skills and tenacity, the fact that we keep coming."

"Perhaps our biggest achievement is what we have accomplished on the ground." □

(Staff writer Debra Nussbaum Cohen in New York contributed to this report.)