



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to have won the race for prime minister.** The official vote count may not be issued until as late as Sunday, after the approximately 154,000 ballots cast by soldiers, prisoners, hospital patients and diplomats are tallied. [Page 1]

■ **Four Israeli soldiers were killed when Hezbollah gunmen detonated two roadside bombs in the southern Lebanon security zone.** At least seven other Israeli soldiers were wounded in the blasts. The dead soldiers were identified as: Lt. Col. Yoram Dahan, 32, from Acre; Capt. Moshe Harosh, 23, Ashdod; Capt. Yitzhak Mizrahi, 21, Jerusalem; and Staff Sgt. Yitzhak Shapira, 21, from Netanya.

■ **Israel's smaller parties made significant gains in the Knesset elections.** The latest results show the following breakdown of seats: Labor, 33; Likud, 31; Shas, 11; National Religious Party, 10; Meretz, 9; Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, 7; Hadash, 5; United Torah Judaism, 4; Third Way, 4; United Arab List, 4; Moledet, 2. [Page 1]

■ **Shimon Peres convened senior Labor Party officials to discuss the results of Israel's cliffhanger elections.** Although one senior official was quoted as having raised the possibility of a national unity government, the idea was rejected by other officials. [Page 1]

■ **President Clinton pledged to support Israel regardless of who wins the race for prime minister.** Clinton stayed awake until the early morning hours to watch election returns.

■ **Securities fell in trading on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.** But traders were waiting to gauge the reaction of foreign investors to the Israeli elections.

■ **A French Roman Catholic priest who helped smuggle Jews out of Nazi-occupied France left the country after an uproar over his support for the author of a book that minimized the extent of the Holocaust.** Abbe Pierre, 83, defended his friend Roger Garaudy, whose book "The Founding Myths of Israeli Policy" casts doubt on whether 6 million Jews were killed in Nazi death camps.

## After a night of turbulence, Netanyahu appears victorious

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The drama appears to be over.

The morning after a tumultuous night of voter counting, all that seems to remain is for Likud challenger Benjamin Netanyahu to be crowned Israel's next prime minister.

Headlines in Israel's Thursday newspapers reflected the heady drama of the night before; nearly all the papers ran with some version of the headline "Peres Has Slight Lead."

Cover photos in the newspapers showed grim-faced Likud Knesset members at the Tel Aviv fairgrounds, where they had gathered to watch the first exit polls.

Only at 2 a.m. Thursday did those polls begin showing a turnaround in Netanyahu's favor.

And after dawn broke, the actual vote count was also showing his narrow election victory over Labor Party incumbent Shimon Peres.

The new electoral procedures instituted this year created a second drama that will be played on the stage of the 14th Knesset. Having their first opportunity to cast separate ballots for prime minister and for the incoming Knesset, Israeli voters whittled away at the parliamentary strength of the two leading parties and gave the Orthodox parties and Natan Sharansky's immigrant-rights list a prominent Knesset standing.

In the race for prime minister, the Central Election Committee said Thursday that with all but the absentee ballots counted, the total stood at 50.3 percent in favor of Netanyahu, 49.6 percent for Peres.

The gap separating the candidates was 21,399 votes, the committee said. But the official vote count may not be issued until as late as Sunday, after the approximately 154,000 ballots cast by soldiers, merchant seamen, prisoners, hospital patients and diplomats were tallied.

According to conservative estimates, Peres would need 55 percent of those ballots for a victory. But many observers believe that the absentee ballots would not alter the outcome, because many of these votes were cast by soldiers, a group that traditionally favors the right.

Peres had been relying on the support of the some 800,000 members of Israel's Arab community. But between 80,000 to 100,000 Israeli Arab voters reportedly cast blank votes in the race for prime minister.

They did, however, cast ballots for the next Knesset, helping two Arab lists increase their parliamentary presence.

Until the official count was in, Netanyahu refrained from declaring victory.

Peres convened his senior ministers Thursday morning and asked that they refrain from making public statements until the final vote came in.

Israel Radio quoted senior Labor officials as having raised the possibility of a national unity government in light of the close race.

But Labor Party Secretary Nissim Zvilli dismissed the idea.

"You are talking about two parties with two entirely different sets of principles," he told Israel Television.

### Muted international reaction

International reaction to the elections was muted.

President Clinton said American policy on Israel and the Middle East peace process would remain the same no matter who won the election.

"I'm going to wait for the votes to come in and the winner to be announced, and then we'll see where we go from there," he told reporters.

Yitzhak Rabin's widow, Leah, said the Labor Party's campaign should have stressed her husband's assassination in order to play on voter sympathies. Describing her feelings about a Netanyahu victory, she told Israel Television, "I am looking at where I keep my suitcases. I feel like packing my bags and flying as quickly as possible away from here."

According to the Knesset results available Thursday, the Labor Party won 33 seats, compared with 44 in the outgoing Knesset. The Likud won 31 seats, compared with 40.

The fervently Orthodox Sephardi Shas Party gained five seats, for a total of 11; the National Religious Party, made up primarily of religious

Zionists, won 10, up from eight. The fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc, which includes Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah, retained its same total of four seats.

The secularist Meretz Party lost three Knesset seats, for a total of nine.

Yisrael Ba'Aliyah, the immigrant-rights party founded by Sharansky, won seven Knesset seats.

The Third Way, originally founded as a hawkish lobby within the Labor Party, won four seats.

The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, a Jewish-Arab list also known as Hadash, won five seats, up from three. The United Arab List, an Arab grouping that includes the Islamic Movement, gained two seats, for a total of four.

The right-wing Moledet party lost one seat, for a total of two in the incoming Knesset. □

### Egalitarian prayer group assailed by Orthodox at Wall

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jews praying in an egalitarian minyan at the Western Wall in the early hours of Shavuot morning were verbally and physically attacked by fervently Orthodox men and boys, according to participants in the prayer group.

The group of about 50 men and women, some of whom were from the Conservative and Reform movement's rabbinical seminaries in Jerusalem, had studied throughout the night, as is customary on Shavuot.

Before dawn last Friday, they, along with thousands of other Jews, walked from other parts of Jerusalem to the Wall. The pilgrimage is traditional on Shavuot, one of three holidays on which the Jews used to visit the Temple.

Members of the egalitarian minyan began praying shortly after 5 a.m. in the rear right-hand corner of the plaza that fronts the wall, near the flagpoles that stand at the back.

"A few guys in tallitot (prayer shawls) stood in the front so that others could not see the women in our minyan in tallitot and kipot and to prevent any possible problems," David Lerner, a Jewish Theological Seminary rabbinical student who spent this year in Jerusalem, wrote in an account he sent by electronic mail.

He has participated in many egalitarian prayer groups near the Wall in recent years, he said, and even on Yom Kippur, the worst thing that has occurred has been heckling.

As they finished the morning prayer on Shavuot, the minyan swelled to about 125 people, and as they continued by reading the Book of Ruth, most of the minyan sat down.

"Then others could see into our circle and that's when the trouble began," Lerner said.

A group of fervently Orthodox boys came up to them and began making noises, said Lerner, who engaged some of them in a discussion about the halachic sources he views as justifying women being counted in a prayer quorum.

Haredi men soon walked up and began to curse and shout at members of the egalitarian minyan, said Lerner, booing and yelling and calling members of the mixed group sinners.

"The haredim formed a wall and began pushing against us. I was pushed/punched back several times. One haredi even tried to infiltrate our circle to steal our Sefer Torah!" he wrote.

Lerner appealed to the border police who guard the entrance to the Wall. The police officers said it was not their jurisdiction. Lerner then went to the police station

nearby, which sent out a junior officer, who called for backup.

"We continued the Torah reading under guard and continued shouts. It was pretty rough," Lerner said.

Then Lerner saw the haredim charging the police.

"A wall of police and soldiers formed around us and we felt more protected, but the object of even more hate," he said.

An Orthodox woman who had been part of a prayer group next to the egalitarian minyan approached the haredi men to ask them to be quiet, because they were disturbing other prayers besides those of the mixed group.

"The haredim spit all over this woman. They just spit on her," Lerner said.

And as Lerner read the Haftarah in the egalitarian minyan, he was hit by a rock thrown by one of the haredi men.

"The police were having trouble holding back the haredim and just wanted to get us out of there safely" so the minyan quickly concluded its prayers, he said.

"Many people in the group were understandably angry. I was not. I just felt sad for the Jewish people — we are so far away from redemption, unity and peace," Lerner said.

A spokesman for Agudath Israel of America, an organization representing the interests of the fervently Orthodox community, had no comment on the matter.

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, said of the incident, "The Wall, like the Land of Israel, belongs to all Jews, not just to one sect within Judaism.

"It is obvious to anyone of goodwill that the diversity of modern Judaism will someday have to become a reality in the State of Israel." □

### Ex-chief of Nazi-backed police stripped of his U.S. citizenship

By Alissa Kaplan

NEW YORK (JTA) — The former chief of the Nazi-sponsored Lithuanian security police has been stripped of his U.S. citizenship as a result of a summary judgment issued by a federal judge.

The prosecution of Aleksandras Lileikis, 88, has become the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations highest-profile case, Eli Rosenbaum, OSI director, said in an interview Tuesday.

Rosenbaum called Lileikis' denaturalization an "enormously gratifying victory."

The OSI's next goal is to deport Lileikis from the United States, Rosenbaum said.

Lileikis, 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 police, also known as the Saugamas, in the Vilnius province. He held the position from August 1941 to July 1944.

U.S. District Judge Richard Stearns, who issued the judgment last Friday, said, "The undisputed facts show that as chief of the Vilnius Saugamas, Lileikis ordered the arrest of persons for such crimes as 'suspected of being a Jew,' 'escaping from the ghetto' and 'hiding' a 6-year-old child."

The turnover of these people resulted in their execution.

Lileikis' lawyers argued that he had saved the life of a Jew.

But Stearns said in his judgment, "The fact, if it is one, that Lileikis had saved a solitary Jew from destruction does not atone for the tens of thousands who died under his command of the Saugamas." □

## UAHC publication presents new look at Hebrew prophets

By Heather Camlot

NEW YORK (JTA) — After 15 years of planning and preparation, the first modern English translation and commentary to focus exclusively on the writings of the ancient Hebrew prophets will be published next week by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

"People ask me why I wrote 'The Haftarah Commentary.' It's like Mount Everest. It had to be done. It had to be scaled," said Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, the author and editor of the new work. Plaut is rabbi emeritus of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto.

The 928-page commentary, to be released June 6 by the central body of the Reform movement, covers the full cycle of 85 prophetic selections and some alternative readings from a part of the Bible known as the Writings.

The Hebrew Bible is made up of the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings.

The Haftarat are chanted weekly in synagogue on Shabbat as well as on holidays. They are also often a central element for boys and girls as they become B'nai Mitzvah. According to tradition, the Haftarah, which is derived from the Hebrew root meaning "conclusion," is read after the Torah reading. It was compiled about 200 B.C.E., when the Syrians conquered Israel and prohibited the reading of the Torah.

Jewish scholars of the time composed readings from the prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as a substitute. After the Syrian prohibition ended, the Haftarah readings were kept as part of the liturgy.

In the UAHC publication, each Haftarah reading is accompanied by four types of commentary. The Haftarah is preceded by an introduction that relates the portion to the corresponding Torah portion, places it in a contextual setting and outlines its message. Beneath the text and translation, a commentary explains certain words or phrases from the portion.

Following the text are short essays about the prophets or questions on religious, social, moral and ethical issues raised in the portion. There are also gleanings, or "words to remember," that expand on the Haftarah's theme, written by Jewish and non-Jewish, ancient and modern sources. Previous commentaries focused exclusively on the Haftarah were written in German by Ludwig Philippson in 1859 and by Mendel Hirsch in 1896, and in Hebrew by Issachar Jacobson in 1959.

### Previous works not 'timely'

Part of the impetus for this book, Plaut said at a news conference last week, is that the previous works are "not very useful for our time."

Rabbi Chaim Stern, a co-editor of the work who translated the text from the Hebrew, called the previous works "too confusing" and "too hard for [readers] to grasp." Stern is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth El in Chappaqua, N.Y.

"The Haftarah Commentary" is written in gender-neutral, modern English, "replacing the stilted, arcane and sexist translations previously used," Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president-elect of the UAHC, wrote in the forward of the work. The divine's name, for example, is translated as "Eternal One" instead of "Lord."

Another example of the modern sensibility brought to the text can be found in the reading of 2 Kings. In it, the prophet Elisha was said to have brought a dead boy back to life by placing his mouth over that of the child. In previous interpretations, this act was considered a divine miracle after praying for God's help. In the new commentary, the act is described as an early example of CPR.

The interpretations in "The Haftarah Commentary" are based on the latest findings in archaeology, history, linguistics and literature, according to those involved in its publication.

The work is "a combination of new discoveries and reliable versions of traditional material," said S. David Sperling, a Bible professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion who served as the book's consulting editor. Scholars and archaeologists have been discovering information that have "made the prophets come alive," he said.

"The trick is how do you get this to the public. 'The Haftarah Commentary' is a way of getting to an intelligent audience the results of the scholars in a way they can understand."

"The Haftarah Commentary" was created to stand alone or to be read with "The Torah — A Modern Commentary," also written by Plaut.

The UAHC's next project, to begin in July, will be to update and retranslate a Torah commentary — five volumes published between 1974 and 1981 — in order to create a greater synthesis between the two works. □

## Jewish families to 'stand' with thousands for children

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish families will join thousands of people from across the country this week in a "Stand For Children" at the Lincoln Memorial.

The Saturday gathering, spearheaded by the Children's Defense Fund, is intended to bring together Americans from every race, region, income, age and faith to celebrate and strengthen their commitment to children.

"As tough as times are and as hard as families are struggling for children, each and every one of us can do better," Marian Wright Edelman, president of the CDF and the impetus behind the event, said in a statement. "It is time to hold ourselves to a higher standard in our homes, in our communities and in our government at all levels."

A number of major Jewish groups known for their support of social welfare issues have endorsed the event. They have joined more than 3,500 organizations across the country, ranging from the Girl Scouts of the United States of America to the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

"We come here on behalf of our own children as well as on behalf of all children, which is what our community is all about," said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federations' Washington Action Office.

The timing of the event initially posed a problem for Jewish organizations, many of which normally refrain from participating in events occurring on Shabbat.

Event organizers, however, agreed to reschedule the event for Saturday afternoon to accommodate Jews attending morning Shabbat services.

Also, Jewish organizers will hold special communal Shabbat services within walking distance of hotels and the Lincoln Memorial.

The day will feature an interfaith service, songs by a children's choir, a march to the Lincoln Memorial and a variety of speakers who will call for greater personal, family and community commitment to improving the quality of children's lives.

Although the event will steer clear of political speeches, partisan politics or advocating any specific policies, the event is timed to have an impact on the national dialogue during an election year.

Participating Jewish organizations have decided to take the opportunity to bring Jewish families to Capitol Hill prior to the event to take on legislative issues important to the community. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****France seeks to restore influence in Middle East***By Lee Yanowitch*

PARIS (JTA) — France, determined to recapture its influence in the Middle East, is positioning itself as a new power broker in the region — much to the dismay of Israel and the United States.

From a strategic standpoint, France, which had a mandate over Lebanon and Syria between the two world wars, wants a share of what it sees as an American monopoly over Mideast affairs.

“France does not want to be confined by the United States, as it has been for the past 10 years, in a secondary role, which has been virtually that of a banker” of the Middle East peace process, Dominique Moisi, director of the French Institute for International Relations, said in an interview.

Paris’s diplomatic efforts to end 16 days of cross-Lebanese border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah last month and its presence on a steering committee to monitor the ensuing cease-fire have given France a foothold in the region for the first time in many years.

But foreign affairs specialists here are divided on whether France, which has generally aligned itself with Arab countries since the 1967 Six-Day War, can contribute significantly to fostering a lasting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

“I don’t know whether there is a role for France to play, but it’s absolutely clear that President [Jacques] Chirac wants France to play a role,” said Alain Dieckhoff of the Center for International Relations Studies.

It is also clear, he said, “that if France wants to further its interests — not only political but economic — it must be present in the region.”

For France, the stakes in the region are far from negligible; they include reconstruction contracts in Lebanon and a complete lifting of U.N. sanctions on Iraq, where French companies are keen to resume their pre-Gulf War activity.

In Iran, too, Paris has substantial interests. Along with the European Union, France has adopted a policy of “critical dialogue” with Iran.

The policy combines trade and diplomatic pressure, which has allowed a gradual rapprochement between the two countries. Paris and Tehran, for instance, recently signed a transportation pact.

**Resentment toward the U.S.**

Nostalgic for its pre-World War II status as a world power, France harbors resentment — one might even call it envy — toward the United States for its predominant role on the international scene.

Bertrand Gallet, assistant director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations, believes that it is time for the United States to make room for another broker because Washington’s close ties with the Jewish state disqualify it as an impartial mediator.

“One criticism we can make of the Americans — or perhaps it should be called a handicap — is that they are so unconditionally on the side of the Israelis,” Gallet said, expressing a view also voiced recently by members of the European Union.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who shuttled almost daily between Jerusalem and Damascus in an effort to reach last month’s cease-fire, tried to downplay any concern over France’s effort to compete for influence in the region.

However, at a joint news conference with Israeli

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Christopher made it clear that there could be only “one channel” for negotiating a cease-fire. And when an agreement was reached April 26, it was obvious that the United States was that channel.

For its part, Israel fears that French involvement may disrupt the balance of power which has enabled the peace process to make rapid advances in recent years.

Noting that the collapse of the Soviet Union “allowed the United States to gain influence in Arab countries where it did not have any influence before,” Daniel Sa’ada, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Paris, questioned whether French involvement would jeopardize the U.S. role in the Middle East and would “call into question the continuing progress of the peace process.”

In many ways, Chirac’s goals in the Middle East resemble those of former French President Charles de Gaulle, who reasserted his country’s influence in the Arab world and, after the 1967 Six-Day War, imposed an anti-Israeli arms embargo that soured diplomatic ties with Jerusalem for years after.

According to one Israeli official here, Jerusalem’s desire to maintain good relations — and avoid a rupture similar to that of 1967 — will rule out any efforts to oppose French involvement.

“If we don’t want Mr. Chirac’s Arab policy to work against Israel, we must not be excluded from this policy, and Franco-Israeli relations must preserve their quality,” the official said.

Israel also wants to avoid any chill that could pose an obstacle to continuing financial aid to the Palestinian Authority from the European Union. France is one of the union’s most influential members.

Without the financial support of the European Union, the official said, negotiations with the Palestinians “couldn’t have advanced the way they have, and Palestinian autonomy would not be in the shape it is today.”

One positive development that could emerge from France’s involvement, said the Israeli official, would be France’s role in pressuring Lebanon into disarming Hezbollah. Disarming the Iranian-backed fundamentalist group is one of Israel’s preconditions for a withdrawal of its troops from the 9-mile-wide security zone in southern Lebanon. And the Israeli government hopes to persuade the French to do just that.

One of France’s goals in the region is to support Lebanese sovereignty. Chirac made this promise to his close friend Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri during a visit to Lebanon days before the cross-border fighting erupted last month.

France’s hopes of bolstering Lebanese sovereignty may seem unrealistic, given Lebanon’s weakened state after 15 years of civil war and the presence of some 40,000 Syrian troops there.

**Door opens for France**

But the cease-fire accord did further that cause, because Lebanon was named along with France, the United States, Israel and Syria to serve on the group monitoring the cease-fire.

“For the first time, Lebanon was a participant in its own right,” said Dieckhoff, the foreign relations expert.

In Dieckhoff’s view, greater autonomy for Lebanon would work in Israel’s favor because Syria would have less influence on Lebanon’s internal affairs.

Now that a door has recently opened for French involvement in the Middle East, its ability to make a difference remains to be seen.

“My personal opinion is that there is always a contradiction between France’s ambitions and its means to fulfill them,” said Moisi of the French Institute for International Relations. □