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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Netanyahu blames Palestinians

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blamed Palestinian officials for encouraging violent street protests in the West Bank.

The accusation came amid a series of weekend demonstrations that led to dashes between Israeli troops and protesters, who are demanding the release of Palestinian activists being held in Israeli jails.

Meanwhile, American officials upheld Israel's position that its recent release of Palestinian prisoners was done in accordance with the Wye agreement. **[Page 3]**

Pollard wants to defend himself

An American serving a life sentence for spying for Israel asked President Clinton for a chance to defend himself when his case comes up for presidential review.

Jonathan Pollard's letter to Clinton came after Clinton asked several top-level administration officials to submit recommendations by Jan. 11 on whether to release Pollard, who has been in an American jail since 1987.

In the letter, Pollard's lawyer said there were similarities between his client's situation and Clinton's as he faces impeachment.

Court rules on Sabbath work

An Israeli court ruled that members of a kibbutz on the outskirts of Jerusalem can work on the Sabbath.

The court said the day of rest for a collective organization such as a kibbutz could not be determined by outside religious bodies.

The decision came in the wake of charges filed last March against six members of Kibbutz Tzora for working in kibbutz stores on the Sabbath.

Anniversary of document marked

World leaders are marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II, the declaration was intended to prevent a repetition of the horrors of the Holocaust.

But in the time since the document was approved on Dec. 10, 1948, millions of people have been massacred in countries such as Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Israelis along border oppose unilateral Lebanon withdrawal

By Avi Machlis

KIRYAT SHMONA, Israel (JTA) — David Azoulay is proud to have served shwarma sandwiches from his shop here — even when Katyusha rockets periodically rained down from Lebanon, forcing residents underground or out of town.

As a public debate over Israel's continued presence in southern Lebanon rages — spurred by the deaths of seven Israeli soldiers last month — Azoulay's opinions, and those of his neighbors in this northern border town, are very different from what might be heard in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

Increasing support for a unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon is clearly not coming from here.

"They don't live here. They don't know what it's like to raise kids under the fear of Katyushas," says Azoulay.

"The debate has gone on for years, and all the politicians have made the same mistakes.

"The only way to get things quiet here is with a comprehensive agreement with [Syrian President Hafez] Assad. He runs the show up here."

Israeli leaders have defended their policy in Lebanon.

They say the presence of Israeli troops is necessary to protect Israel's northern communities — such as Kiryat Shmona — until comprehensive agreements are reached with Syria and Lebanon.

But many Israelis are growing weary of watching as about 25 soldiers pay with their lives each year to keep Hezbollah gunmen from firing rockets at Israel or infiltrating the border.

Hezbollah's stated goal is to oust Israeli troops from the 9-mile-wide security zone that Israel established after the 1982 War in Lebanon. After ousting the troops, the Shi'ite movement, which is backed by Iran and Syria, says it wants to continue on to Jerusalem.

But more Israelis than in the past apparently believe that Hezbollah — which is gaining political power in Lebanon — may lay down its arms after getting the Israel Defense Force out of Lebanon.

Even if that does not happen, many Israelis believe that the Jewish state will be able to defend itself just as well from the international border with Lebanon, even without agreements with Syria and Lebanon — and with fewer casualties.

A recent Gallup poll in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv showed that support for unilateral withdrawal has doubled, from 20 percent in September 1997 to 40 percent today. Not long ago, this view was considered taboo in Israel.

The shift has been accompanied by the establishment of several movements aimed at getting Israel to withdraw from Lebanon.

Knesset member Yossi Beilin, a minister in the former Labor government, has become one of the most ardent advocates of a unilateral withdrawal.

A grassroots group called the Four Mothers — launched by parents of soldiers — has been protesting nearly every week, and its views have become increasingly popular.

On Sunday, the group was granted its first audience with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

While Netanyahu could hardly have been expected to stray from the familiar government line supporting the status quo in Lebanon, his willingness to speak to the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Levy's return in doubt

Observers are questioning whether attempts to bring former Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy back into the governing coalition will succeed.

As part of the discussions, Levy is demanding that items in next year's budget reflect his policies. Levy resigned from the government last January over differences with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over social spending issues.

Palestinians: We're grabbing guns

Palestinian police said they have launched a campaign to confiscate illegal weapons. Three Palestinian papers ran a statement from police chief Ghazi Jabali that those refusing to turn in their weapons would be brought to trial. Meanwhile, Israel accused the Palestinian Authority of violating security understandings in the Wye agreement by not handing confiscated weapons over to American officials.

Palestinian student arrested

Palestinian police arrested a university student who seized the weapon of an Israeli soldier beaten by protesters last week near the West Bank town of Ramallah. The student at Beir Zeit University turned himself in to Palestinian police and returned the weapon. He was released, but rearrested following demands from the Israeli army.

Raviv testimony published

Testimony from a former informant who worked undercover among Israeli extremists in 1995 indicates that he may have known in advance about Yigal Amir's plans to assassinate Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

According to portions of the testimony, published by the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, Avishai Raviv may have told Amir that he agreed with the plan because Jewish religious law would condone it. Raviv currently faces charges of failing to prevent Rabin's assassination.



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group's members shows just how mainstream their position has become. Even in defense circles, cracks in the Israeli policy are starting to appear.

The Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* has reported that the heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet secret security services are currently backing unconditional, unilateral withdrawal.

Officially, the military opposes unilateral withdrawal. And while top officials insist that they are not involved in the public debate, last week the army invited foreign journalists to hear its opinions.

Brig. Gen. Shuki Shichrur, of the army's northern command, said Israel's presence in southern Lebanon has accomplished its goal of protecting northern Israel, even though Hezbollah has become increasingly daring, launching 1,100 attacks against Israeli forces there in 1998.

This number is nearly twice as many as in 1997.

"Since the establishment of the security zone, no attempts of penetration against civilian targets have succeeded," he told the group of reporters on Dec. 3.

Shichrur said Israeli intelligence had no reason to believe that Hezbollah would lay down its arms if and when the IDF withdrew from Lebanon.

But many of the journalists — among them people who have visited Lebanon — were astounded by his assessment that "99.9 percent of the residents of south Lebanon" prefer the Israeli presence to any other alternative because Israel has paved roads and hooked up towns to electricity.

Such a reading of sentiment in predominantly Shi'ite southern Lebanon would baffle most Middle East experts, who say support for Hezbollah has only grown during the years of Israel's presence, especially since many Lebanese civilians have died in the crossfire.

Hatred of Israel among the residents of southern Lebanon peaked during Israel's April 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath.

During that operation, the accidental shelling of a United Nations camp in southern Lebanon resulted in the deaths of at least 91 Lebanese refugees who had taken shelter there.

Even the army admits that increasing numbers of Hezbollah fighters operate from within towns in southern Lebanon — a sign that the group enjoys growing popularity among the Lebanese people.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers find it more and more difficult to ignore the public debate.

At one outpost located right on the border, a group of young recruits recently started making their first forays into the security zone.

Army spokespeople stood close by as the reporters tried to ask the soldiers how they feel about going into Lebanon.

Official military policy forbids soldiers from expressing their political opinions, and many of the young soldiers appeared intimidated.

Most soldiers said they were very proud to serve in Lebanon, adding that while they were closely monitoring the public debate, it did not affect their motivation to serve there.

But in a nearby barracks, a 35-year-old career soldier who drives patrol vehicles at night, and hears the younger soldiers passing the time in conversation as they wind along the border fence, says they are not united on the issue.

"I hear them arguing when we go out on patrol. There are differences of opinion, and the public debate hurts their morale," says the driver, a Galilee resident who believes Israel should only leave the security zone after it receives security guarantees from the Lebanese government.

"In any case, these kids are young. They might speak differently in another two years."

Back in Kiryat Shmona, where life in the shadow of periodic Katyusha rocket attacks is made only more depressing by rampant unemployment, Shlomo Panduki, 47, is passing time in David Azoulay's sandwich shop.

"There will never be peace here," says the 40-year resident of the town, slapping a 10-shekel coin on the table. "If I could turn this into a million shekels, I'd be out of here in a second." □

JEWISH WORLD

Russia turns over art documents

Russia turned over three documents detailing art looted from Austrian Jews. The move followed a pledge by Russian officials to identify and return looted artworks in accordance with a set of principles agreed to at last week's international conference in Washington on Holocaust-era assets.

The documents list pieces the Nazis confiscated from Jews in Vienna before the war, including works from the Rothschild and Furst collections once destined for Hitler's planned private museum.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat, who convened the conference, said the Russian move "will provide significant leads to identifying stolen assets."

B'nai B'rith gets HUD award

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$2.2 million to B'nai B'rith to add 40 units to its Phoenix, Ariz., residence for low-income seniors. The development, one of 36 B'nai B'rith properties housing more than 5,500 low-income seniors, now provides homes for 85 to 90 elderly residents.

Along with funds for construction, B'nai B'rith received an additional \$490,500 in rent subsidies for the next five years.

Iranian arrested in Argentina

An Argentine anti-terrorist squad arrested an Iranian suspect in Buenos Aires on suspicion that she was involved in the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center. Nasrim Mokhtari was arrested as she was waiting to transfer flights at the local airport. Mokhtari is the only suspect currently under arrest for the attacks.

New election dates urged

B'nai B'rith asked the governors of eight Rocky Mountain states to reschedule their presidential primary elections, which are now set for Saturday, March 11, 2000. Sabbath-observant Jews would be relegated to second-class citizens, the group argues, if the primary dates are not changed in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

Bush backs off comment

Texas Gov. George Bush backed off of remarks made three years ago that only those who accept Jesus as their savior can go to heaven.

At a news conference to discuss his recent trip to Israel, Bush said that while his faith teaches acceptance of Jesus for salvation, "It is not the governor's role to decide who goes to heaven."

Israeli, Palestinian tensions rising ahead of Clinton visit

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has blamed Palestinian officials for encouraging violent protests in the West Bank.

Netanyahu made the accusation amid a series of demonstrations that led to clashes between Israeli troops and the protesters, who are demanding the release of Palestinian activists being held in Israeli jails. Some 20 Palestinians were wounded in the weekend clashes.

The latest argument between Israel and the Palestinian Authority comes as President Clinton is slated to visit the region next week.

Netanyahu said at Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting that Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat must take clear steps to "stop the incitement and violence" in the West Bank. He added that Israel could not consider handing over additional West Bank territory to the Palestinians given the current atmosphere of violence over the prisoner releases.

Israel last month freed 250 Palestinian prisoners as part of the Wye agreement.

After releasing the prisoners, Israeli leaders said no prisoners with blood on their hands would be freed.

But Palestinian officials, noting that many of those freed were common criminals, have demanded the freedom of security prisoners — those jailed for anti-Israel activities.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Palestinian prisoners joined a hunger strike Sunday to demand their freedom.

Last week, Israel's Inner Security Cabinet threatened to suspend any further troop withdrawal in the West Bank pending Palestinian fulfillment of a number of conditions, including a public renunciation of incitement and violence.

The Palestinian Authority rejected that stance, saying Israel cannot present new conditions for implementation of the Wye accord.

The United States also criticized the Israeli threat.

But at the same time, American officials upheld Israel's position that its recent release of Palestinian prisoners was done in accordance with the Wye agreement, which was signed in October.

Tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have been rising in the days leading up to Clinton's arrival in the region on Saturday. The president hopes his visit to Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas will help to further the peace process by building upon the goodwill established at Wye.

During his visit, Clinton is scheduled to attend a meeting in the Gaza Strip at which the Palestine National Council and other Palestinian groups are expected to approve the revocation of those clauses in the Palestinian charter that call for the destruction of Israel.

In another dispute prior to Clinton's arrival, Netanyahu is demanding that a formal vote on the revocation of the anti-Israel clauses be taken at that meeting. Palestinian officials counter that the action will be taken by voice acclamation.

Tensions between the two sides have been further deepened by what Palestinian officials view as Israeli violations of the peace accords.

Senior Palestinian officials met Sunday to discuss efforts by Jewish settlers to set up encampments on West Bank hilltops.

The officials also criticized the Jewish state's construction of bypass roads within the West Bank to link settlements following the redeployments called for in the Wye accord.

The officials called for organized demonstrations, including protest tents near the sites of the encampments, as well as processions in areas where bypass roads are being built.

For its part, Israeli officials maintain that they have fulfilled the Wye accord to the letter, and that the bypass roads are part of security arrangements linked to the redeployments. □

Menorah madness takes off; kitschy kids' styles proliferate

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — How many ways can Mickey Mouse celebrate Chanukah? Five different Mickey menorahs, licensed from Disney, are now available to answer that question.

If you're more into Winnie-the-Pooh, there are two colorful menorahs displaying the whole gang from the Hundred Acre Wood to choose between.

And the latest this year in menorahs for children is the irrepressible Curious George.

It's menorah madness time — and the last couple of years have witnessed an explosion of styles made from almost every conceivable material.

Two decades ago, there wasn't much available beyond a traditional eight-branched candelabra made in brass, say those who sell Judaica. Today menorahs are designed for children and adults, as well as aficionados of a wide variety of hobbies. Prices range from around \$30 to \$1,500 — and more.

Bloomington, which will be carrying Chanukah menorahs in its 22 stores coast to coast, is orienting its merchandise this year to kids, said Gabrielle Schein, the buyer in charge of holiday merchandise.

Everything from ballerinas to baseballs, dancing dreidels to bicycles, can be found on child-oriented menorahs.

And the new menorahs are not just for kids. Mah-jongg your bag? There's a menorah crafted of the game's tiles.

If you're into gazing at tiny replicas of the synagogues of Jerusalem, Eastern Europe or the Lower East Side, each is available on its own menorah this year — as is one with tiny Statues of Liberty, each lady holding aloft a Chanukah candle in place of her famous flame.

Klezmer musicians crowd together on another menorah, and this, along with others, is available with a music-box component which plays the Chanukah classic "Maoz Tsur," or "Rock of Ages."

Top brands in tableware are also extending their lines into Chanukah. Waterford offers an elegant crystal candleholder to mark Chanukah's eight nights. Limoges porcelain has produced delicate, hand-painted dreidels.

The artistic approach to menorahs is also booming. Craftspeople — not all of them Jewish — who have been successful in many media have branched out into the menorah market.

Whether your taste runs to fused art glass, anodized aluminum or hand-painted ceramic, there's a funky menorah available to collect.

"Not a day goes by that I don't get a call from an artist who wants to show me something new," said Claire Schneider, manager of the Treasures of Judaica store at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

Adam Berkowitz is a young designer who describes himself as an "industrial sculptor." He creates cabinets, chairs and wall coverings out of environmentally sound materials. This year, for the first time, he designed a menorah. Crafted from brushed aluminum, with rounded curves, it fits together like a sophisticated puzzle.

"An appreciation for new materials in Jewish objects is trickling down from the secular design world," Berkowitz said, while standing in his drawing- and prototype-filled Brooklyn studio as African music played in the background.

"I'm trying to interest my generation and younger people in Judaica," said Berkowitz, 29.

"Just seeing what's happening to my friends and the rest of the Jewish community with intermarriage, I feel that in some way by having Judaica with a certain edge and freshness it might spark the interest of someone who otherwise might not" light a menorah.

The number of outlets selling menorahs has also expanded in recent years.

Once purchased most often in mom-and-pop Judaica stores, menorahs are now also sold in chic galleries and the largest national chains, from Lord & Taylor to Bed, Bath & Beyond. Even the Home Shopping Network has gotten on board.

Catalogs — those selling only Jewish ritual objects and crafts, along with those who fit in a menorah or other Chanukah object next to their Christmas selections — have proliferated as well, both in their traditional form and on the World Wide Web.

Not all of the newfangled menorahs are kosher, warned some retailers. The moose menorah, which has antlers at different levels, does not meet the requirement for menorahs: that all of its eight candles stand at the same height so that the shamash, which is used for lighting the other candles, is the only elevated flame.

And not all characters are acceptable for the trendy menorah merchandising. Philip Lax, owner of Aviv Judaica Imports, one of the country's largest distributors of Chanukah goods, licensed the right to put Mickey, Winnie-the-Pooh and Curious George on menorahs.

He has been approached by the creators of some characters, including Power Rangers and Superman, to render their characters on menorahs but turned them down, Lax said in an interview in his bustling warehouse in Brooklyn.

Lax, who is Orthodox and permits his own children to use only the oil-and-wick menorahs preferred by the fervently Orthodox community, said that he wouldn't produce a menorah with violent or unpleasant characters.

"It has to be 'geshmakt,'" said Lax, using the Yiddish term for enjoyable, of his kids' designs. "It has to have a 'ta'am,' " or appropriate flavor, he said.

As workers packed orders full of menorahs, musical Chanukah snow globes and Winnie-the-Pooh painted dreidels, Lax said two types of people buy the "kitschy" menorahs — collectors and those "who want a flavor of something Jewish or are trying to get their Jewish child to participate."

But in the experience of one major retailer, most people "choose Noah's arks, or choo-choo trains for kids, which can be charming. When they bring in the real secular stuff, it's almost like they forget the meaning of the holiday," said Daniel Levine, whose Manhattan store, J. Levine Judaica, carries about 300 different menorah styles.

As far as some people are concerned, the Disneyfication of Chanukah is taking things a few steps too far.

"Since when are Mickey and Winnie Jewish?" asked Shari Boraz, proprietor of Galerie Robin Fine Judaica in Hanover, N.H., which focuses on more artistic menorahs in both its traditional and online catalogs.

For many menorah mavens, the tried-and-true works well.

"With all the hoopla, the traditional still sells," said Terry Heller, manager of a large Judaica store at Temple Emanuel in Denver, and proprietor of an online catalog, Artistic Judaic Promotions. Even with all of the alternatives available today, "some people want it to look like a menorah should," she said. □