



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 230

Wednesday, December 23, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Premier: Elections won't halt Wye

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would adhere to the Wye accord even as the country enters what promises to be a heated election campaign.

Reiterating his recent stance, the premier said Israeli implementation of the accord would depend on the Palestinian Authority's fulfilling five conditions. Palestinian officials said the offer meant little, since the conditions were unacceptable to them. [Page 1]

Israel braces for retaliation

Israeli officials warned residents to prepare for possible retaliatory attacks after seven Lebanese civilians were killed during Israeli air strikes against suspected Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon. In the northern part of the country, residents were told to go to bomb shelters. The army apologized after one of the rockets struck a house, killing a Lebanese woman and six of her seven children and seriously wounding her husband.

Netanyahu ridicules rivals

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opened his election campaign by ridiculing the "fantasies and ambitions" of his political rivals. One day after the Knesset voted for early elections, the premier told Israel Radio the "people will give us the support to achieve peace with security." The comment echoed the slogan he successfully used in the 1996 election.

Republican officials blast Duke

Republican party officials denounced former Ku Klux Klansman David Duke's plans to run for Rep. Bob Livingston's (R-La.) seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. "There is no room in the party of Lincoln for a Klansman like David Duke," said Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson. Livingston, the former speaker-designee, said he will resign in June because of reports of marital infidelity.

Russia discusses extremism

Top Russian security and defense officials met in Moscow to discuss the increase of anti-Semitism and political extremism.

At the meeting, Yeltsin's chief of staff displayed anti-Semitic newspapers and brochures that his staff had bought in Moscow over the weekend. [Page 3]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Election contenders in Israel already redrawing political map

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Knesset's dramatic decision to call for early elections is quickly leading to a reshaping of Israel's political map.

One day after the Knesset vote, a new, centrist political party and several potential candidates have emerged to challenge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

As a result of a potential onslaught from the right, left and center, the premier will have to define his own political turf carefully as what promises to be a raucous political campaign unfolds.

The peace process with the Palestinians has become the prime issue around which the various competing political forces are shaping themselves.

On the far right, there is much suspicion of the premier. Though Netanyahu has indeed talked tough to the Palestinian side, he nevertheless became the first Likud leader to cede portions of the Land of Israel to the self-rule government.

Some prominent voices in the settlers movement and the National Religious Party are openly calling for the creation of a new nationalist movement, unsullied by compromises, with a new leader at its helm to run against Netanyahu and what they perceive as his zig-zagging policies.

Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, briefly a minister under Netanyahu and now one of his most outspoken foes, indicated Tuesday that he is seriously weighing the option of declaring his candidacy.

Meanwhile, a new political center is emerging as an alternative to the hard-liners and the doves — and several politicians appear eager to stake it out:

- Knesset member **Dan Meridor** — another of the premier's former ministers, who represents the moderate wing of the Likud Party — announced Tuesday that he would run for prime minister as the head of the new, centrist party.

Meridor, who resigned as finance minister in June 1997 after losing a power struggle with Netanyahu, was an aide and intimate of the late Likud founder, Menachem Begin, and his successor, Yitzhak Shamir. He accuses Netanyahu of using unprincipled power politics to run the party and the country.

- **Amnon Lipkin-Shahak**, the recently retired army chief of staff, is expected to announce his candidacy soon after having declined offers from the Labor Party to join its ranks. Shahak has consistently made a strong showing in the opinion polls and is likely to appeal the crucial middle-of-the-road voter.

- **Roni Milo**, the former mayor of Tel Aviv and Likud Cabinet minister is also joining the crowded battle for the center. Since announcing his candidacy, he has been raising money at home and abroad to finance his campaign.

- Labor Party leader **Ehud Barak**, also a former army chief of staff, is casting himself as a centrist on matters pertaining to the peace process.

Carefully distancing himself from Labor's left wing and from its ally, the Meretz Party, Barak refuses to explicitly endorse Palestinian aspirations for statehood and backs Netanyahu's refusal to release Palestinian political prisoners with blood on their hands.

At the same time, Barak is taking outspokenly leftist positions on matters of social policy. Getting his campaign into full swing this week, he charged that Netanyahu has been earmarking funds for settlement expansion at the expense of education, welfare programs and employment. As though he did not have enough candidates to contend

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon calls for unity government

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon appealed to the opposition Labor Party to consider forming a national unity government. Sharon's call followed Labor's rejection of such a proposal from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Syria apologizes for protests

Syria's foreign minister apologized for his country's failure to control protesters who attacked the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. ambassador's residence in Damascus during last week's air strikes in Iraq. The apologies came after the United States lodged protests with Syria over the incidents. Syria had denounced the strikes as a violation of international norms.

Har Homa incentives mullied

Potential buyers of homes in a controversial project in southeastern Jerusalem may be offered financial incentives, according to Israel Radio. The announcement in March 1997 that Israel would build at Har Homa prompted a 19-month deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

International monitors cite Israel

Israel and the South Lebanon Army were responsible for the death last week of a Lebanese teen-ager, the official international group monitoring the 1996 cease-fire in Lebanon charged. The group said Israel and its ally in southern Lebanon had violated the understanding that ended an Israeli offensive against Hezbollah gunmen in Lebanon.

Palestinian journalists march

Palestinian journalists marched in the Gaza Strip to protest against press censorship by the Palestinian self-rule authority during Operation Desert Fox. The journalists demonstrated after Palestinian police beat several journalists and detained others for covering a protest against the U.S. and British air strikes in Iraq.

with, Netanyahu may also face a challenge for the leadership of Likud.

People like Limor Livnat, the popular communications minister, and Uzi Landau, the hard-line chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, are being touted as possible challengers to the prime minister from within his own party.

There are two other Likud figures who may also jump in: Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

In order to beat all the other candidates — and this is a point that Netanyahu himself frequently makes to his advisers — the premier must not lose his political base: the Likud and its religious and nationalist allies.

But even among his supporters, he is plagued by the perception that throughout his 30 months in office he has repeatedly shifted his stance on the peace process.

A case in point: On Monday, sources close to Netanyahu said that if the Knesset voted for early elections, the peace process with the Palestinians would be put on hold for the duration of the election campaign.

Netanyahu adopted this position to win over hard-liners before the Knesset voted for early elections.

A day later, after the vote, the prime minister said he would implement the Wye accord, even during the election period, as long as the Palestinian Authority lived up to a series of conditions.

With the election campaign under way, Netanyahu had switched course and was steering for the center. Granted, his professed readiness to implement Wye was still hedged by his list of conditions. But the whole tone and tenor of his statement was now positive.

Netanyahu apparently had his eye on the 80 percent of Israelis who, in poll after poll, voice their desire that the peace process with the Palestinians go forward.

This shifting stance has typified his policy on the peace process.

To his detractors, from the right and from the left, it is pure opportunism.

But he describes it as pure consistency — a consistent readiness to move ahead on the peace process, despite the hard-liners in his coalition; but also a consistent toughness in negotiating, which he insists was not displayed by his political opponents when they held power.

He will now have to convince the Israeli public of this consistency.

As all the politicians and parties jostle for position at the starting gate, one thing is certain: The campaign will become more frenetic and unpredictable by the time they reach the finish line.

Israel, after all, has never had an election in which the prime minister was elected in a second-round runoff, which is likely to be the case this time, given the plethora of would-be candidates.

No one is really sure how the voters are likely to behave. □

Court backs pensions for SS members

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A German court has ruled that former non-German members of an elite Nazi unit that participated in the massacre of Eastern European Jews are entitled to pensions.

The ruling by a federal court in Kassel overturns a lower court's denial of a pension to a former Latvian member of the Waffen-SS and to the widow of another veteran.

Disability pensions have been paid to wounded veterans since 1950. Earlier this year, after pressure from the American Jewish Committee and other Jewish groups, the Bundestag, the German parliament, passed a law allowing the government to strip convicted war criminals of their pensions.

But Wilfried Nachtwei, a Green Party lawmaker who has organized private compensation payments for Baltic Jews, said that not all members of the Waffen-SS can be denied pensions under the new law.

However, he cautioned there must be a careful investigation of former Latvian members of the Waffen-SS because of the unit's documented crimes.

The director of the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Efraim Zuroff, told the German news agency DPA that he opposed the court ruling. □



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor (on leave)*
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

German leader criticizes bombing

Germany's chancellor condemned the weekend bombing of the grave of the former leader of the country's Jewish community. "I am certain that the vast majority of Germans are deeply appalled by this horrible crime," Gerhard Schroeder wrote in an open telegram to the widow of Heinz Galinski.

Communist gains support

Leaders of Russian ultranationalist groups are urging a Communist lawmaker who made several public anti-Semitic comments earlier this fall to run for the presidency of Russia in 2000, according to a leading ultranationalist newspaper in Russia. The leaders, who gathered last week in Moscow, also praised Communist lawmaker Albert Makashov for "challenging Zionists."

Argentina releases suspect

Argentina released an Iranian woman who had been arrested in connection with the bombings of two Jewish sites in Buenos Aires earlier this decade. But Nasri Mokhtari was ordered to remain in Argentina while police continue their investigation.

A total of 115 people died and hundreds were wounded in the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center.

Bosnian Serbs want Haggadah

Bosnian Serbs are reportedly demanding one-third ownership of a 13th-century Haggadah currently in the ownership of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sarajevo's Jewish leaders rescued the Sarajevo Haggadah from a building that the Bosnian Serbs shelled in 1992.

French Shoah denier resented

A Paris appeals court handed a tougher sentence to a controversial Holocaust denier found guilty of racial libel earlier this year.

Roger Garaudy, who wrote a book titled "The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics," was fined \$29,000 and given suspended jail sentences of three and six months.

An earlier sentence fined him about \$22,000 and imposed no jail sentence.

Kashrut course planned

A prestigious American university is scheduled to offer an online course in kosher food regulations in the spring 1999 semester.

The Cornell University course, which will teach halal, or Muslim, regulations as well, comes as sales of foods that adhere to these religious dietary laws continue to climb.

Russian defense leadership meets to discuss anti-Semitism

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — In a move underlining the seriousness of the recent surge in anti-Semitism in Russia, President Boris Yeltsin's chief of staff convened a meeting of top security and defense officials this week to discuss the situation and the related problem of political extremism.

At the meeting on Monday, Yeltsin's chief of staff, Gen. Nikolai Bordyuzha, took the lead in highlighting the problem to the Russian ministers of interior, defense, justice and emergency situations; the public prosecutor general; and the heads of the Federal Security Service and the Foreign Intelligence Service.

"This is blatant anti-Semitic literature," said Bordyuzha, holding up copies of, among other things, a brochure titled, "The Jewish Occupation of Russia."

When Bordyuzha was appointed in a surprise move earlier this month, the Kremlin said the move reflected the need to intensify the fight against political extremism.

Manifestations of extremism have occurred throughout the past few months on the national political scene.

Several Communist members of the Russian Parliament have made anti-Semitic remarks, and liberal lawmaker Galina Starovoitova, a longtime supporter of economic reform and Jewish causes, was murdered recently in what many believe was a political assassination.

Anti-Semitic incidents continue on the grass-roots level as well, with leaflets or graffiti appearing in recent weeks in at least two Russian cities.

In Moscow, the literature, purchased by Bordyuzha's staff over the weekend, is sold openly in some Moscow subway stations and on several newsstands, including one just half a block away from the Kremlin.

Russia's criminal code prohibits inciting ethnic, racial and religious hatred, but these laws have rarely been enforced.

During the meeting, Bordyuzha said special representatives of the presidential administration had been sent this week to several Russian regions to monitor the reactions of local law enforcement agencies to the surge of ultranationalism and extremism.

One of these areas is the southern Russian region of Krasnodar, where anti-Semitic literature recently urged the region's notorious governor, Nikolai Kondratenko, to run for president of the country.

Kondratenko has gained notoriety across Russia for regularly peppering his speeches with attacks on Zionists and "Judeo-Masons," whom he blames for all of Russia's troubles.

Amid news reports that the Russian Prosecutor General's Office and Justice Ministry are considering the possibility of investigating him for his remarks, Kondratenko's administration made an awkward attempt last week to reconcile with the region's Jewish community by inviting local Jewish leaders and journalists to meet with Vladimir Melnikov, the head of the regional government.

Jews in Krasnodar say they were outraged that Melnikov tried to whitewash Kondratenko's remarks by saying they reflected anti-Zionist, not anti-Jewish, views.

At the meeting, several Jewish leaders accused Kondratenko of fostering anti-Semitism, one going so far as to call him a "criminal."

"I don't believe that Kondratenko does not understand what he is doing," said Svetlana Minz, an associate professor at a local university, who participated in the meeting.

"When I see swastikas and slogans saying, 'Jews to the Gas Chambers' carved on the tables in the classrooms, I feel scared," Minz said, adding that she views such anti-Semitic acts as a consequence of Kondratenko's propaganda.

Meanwhile, several schools in Krasnodar are refusing to distribute copies of an anti-Semitic textbook in local high schools. "The Secret History of Russia in the 20th Century," printed with public funds, contains several myths about the negative influence of Jews in Russia since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Impeachment may divert focus from Jewish issues, activists fear

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Facing the losing end of a critical budget battle, the Jewish community's heavy hitters turned to Vice President Al Gore for help.

But urgent phone calls late last week went unreturned. Like much of Washington, Gore was busy dealing with the impeachment of his boss.

The episode crystallized the fears of many Jewish activists — that Clinton's plight will distract government leaders from dealing with everything but big-ticket items. To be sure, Clinton has demonstrated his ability to compartmentalize the impeachment issue and carry on with his presidential duties. Look no further than last week's action in Iraq, his supporters say.

But many Jewish activists fear that important but less weighty issues will get short shrift in the weeks and months to come. While Clinton has always faced criticism for his lack of attention to percolating issues, things are now worse, these activists say.

"There's nothing coming down from the White House anymore," one Jewish official said, on the condition that his name not be used. "The bureaucrats will continue to grind away, but there are no initiatives on anything but the top-tier issues."

The Jewish community had high hopes for the Clinton presidency. It supported him with nearly 80 percent of the vote in 1992 and 1996.

And if Jewish Democratic money is any indication, there is no sign that this support is waning. Donors are giving record contributions to the party and Clinton's defense.

As conventional wisdom again shifts in Clinton's favor, it seems that no one wants to risk alienating the self-proclaimed "comeback kid." In fact, what now seem like lost opportunities could emerge as potential policy bonanzas if Clinton survives impeachment and works to rehabilitate his image through a series of expected aggressive policy pushes.

The White House has already begun to consider a national campaign-style presidential road trip following Clinton's scheduled Jan. 19 State of the Union address.

The political and policy situation depends on how the Senate handles the two articles of impeachment delivered last weekend by House leaders. Clinton's agenda, Democratic officials say, is as fluid as ever. The situation has led many to lament the president's second term for what it could have been.

"I keep hearing, 'Just think of what could have been,' " another Jewish activist said, on the condition of anonymity.

But that could shift on a dime if the impeachment issue comes to a quick close.

With the Senate two weeks from voting on whether to open an impeachment trial, here's a look at how the impeachment could affect some issues of concern to the Jewish community:

Russian-Iranian missile trade

One of the greatest casualties of Clinton's troubles, some Jewish activists say, is the president's inattention to the steady flow of missile technology and parts to Iran from the former Soviet states. With reports showing Iran a few years away from deploying

a medium-range missile capable of striking Israel with nuclear, chemical or biological warheads, the matter is viewed as a grave threat by Jerusalem and pro-Israel activists in Washington.

Although some government officials, including Gore's chief national security adviser, have expressed serious concern about the problem, most activists agree that any serious attempt to push Russia to curb the trade will have to come from the top.

So far, the issue has not risen to Clinton's top tier.

Many of the same activists privately say they feel slighted because the White House convinced them to support a presidential veto of congressional sanctions against Russia in exchange for greater presidential attention to the issue. But the White House argues that the issue is complex, especially in light of the weak Russian government and the resurgence of the Communist Party.

Middle East peace process

The entire Monica Lewinsky scandal broke while Clinton was meeting last January with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Clinton is known to consider the Israeli-Palestinian accords one of his crowning achievements and has made the issue a priority throughout his administration.

As he battled impeachment, Clinton has put a greater emphasis on the peace process, including a trip to Israel earlier this month, his fourth as president.

With Clinton looking for ways to rehabilitate his image, Jewish activists believe he will once again turn to the Middle East. While some believe Clinton will pressure Israel to share Jerusalem and accept a Palestinian state, State Department officials say the peace process runs on its own dynamic and will not be directly affected by Clinton's troubles.

It's likely that the parties will not have to wait a long time to find out how Clinton will deal with the issue. The president's top aides have already begun preliminary discussions to convene another summit at the Wye Plantation this spring.

The goal would be to make what one called "significant progress" toward a final settlement in an attempt to avert a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood when the interim peace period ends May 4, 1999.

Aides discouraged speculation of another presidential visit to Israel, as well as any parallels to former President Richard Nixon, who resigned a few months after visiting Israel in an effort to distract attention from the exploding Watergate scandal.

Social spending

With Jewish nursing homes, hospitals and federation agencies still receiving more than \$4 billion a year in federal money, how Clinton goes about reforming Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security could have a seismic impact on the Jewish community.

But like many issues, reforming social spending depends largely on cooperation with Congress. If the impeachment debate is any indication, the raw feelings on both sides of the aisle are not likely to subside any time soon.

With Clinton out to restore his legacy, one Jewish activist involved in preliminary budget talks with the White House said, "Hang on and look out. We could be in for a bumpy ride."

In addition, the Republicans and Democrats will begin soon to position themselves for the 2000 presidential race. Much of the action in Congress has historically been frozen during presidential campaigns. □