



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Order issued on local councils

Israel's Supreme Court ordered the nation's religious affairs minister to explain why he is blocking meetings of religious councils that include non-Orthodox members.

The court order was issued after Eli Suissa called on the Haifa religious council, which includes a Reform and a Conservative member, not to hold a scheduled meeting this week.

### State Dept. criticizes Israel

The U.S. State Department strongly criticized Israel's ambassador to the United States for blaming the Palestinian Authority for the impasse in implementing the Wye accord.

Responding to a published article by Zalman Shoval, State Department spokesman James Rubin said it is the Israelis who "have not fulfilled any" of their obligations at this point by failing to implement a further redeployment in the West Bank.

### Rabbinic leaders urge censure

The U.S. Senate should censure President Clinton but not hold a trial that could lead to his removal from office, a group of Jewish and Christian religious leaders urged in a letter to the Senate.

Leaders of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Rabbinical Assembly, which represent U.S. Reform and Conservative rabbis, respectively, were among those signing the letter.

### Likud launches campaign

The Likud Party launched its election campaign by taunting Labor Party leader Ehud Barak to reveal what they described as his real agenda — capitulation to the Palestinians.

Labor Party members denounced the Likud campaign, calling it an attempt to distort Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's record.

Meanwhile, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced he is backing Labor Party leader Ehud Barak over centrist candidate Amnon Lipkin-Shahak.

Acknowledging that Shahak could draw votes from Barak in the May 17 vote for prime minister, Peres said he believes that Barak nonetheless has the best chance of unseating Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. [Page 3]

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Large parties will be losers in Israel's two-ballot election

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In the wake of the Knesset's final approval this week of a bill to dissolve itself and call for new elections in May, many political observers here are predicting a chaotic and fragmented new legislature reminiscent of Italy in its worst postwar instability.

Some observers are warning, too, that the fluidity and uncertainty affecting many aspects of the Israeli political system could threaten the very foundations of democracy in the Jewish state.

These observers say the rules of the game have become unsettled — a marked change after Israel's formative decades of dependable and disciplined parliamentary politics.

The likelihood of greater fragmentation of the political map as a result of the forthcoming election stems from the relatively new electoral system, which was first used in the 1996 vote.

When elections are held May 17, Israeli voters will again have two ballots to cast: one for a prime ministerial candidate and the other for the party of their choice.

If no prime ministerial candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, a likely possibility, a runoff will be held June 1. If indeed a runoff is held, it will be the first time in Israel's history.

The conventional wisdom in the political community is that the fragmentation that was exacerbated by the two-vote system in 1996 will be even more sharply felt this time, when even more voters will understand — and implement — their ability to split their vote.

The probable outcome, according to these pundits, is that the two major parties, Labor and Likud, will see their strength in the Knesset further eroded, while middle-sized parties — such as Shas, Meretz, the National Religious Party and a new, as-yet unnamed centrist party — will emerge even stronger on May 17.

Under this scenario, supporters of Labor leader Ehud Barak or Benjamin Netanyahu, the likely Likud prime ministerial candidate, will vote for a party other than Labor or Likud with their second ballot, the vote for the Knesset.

The upshot will be that neither Labor nor Likud will have a sizable Knesset representation.

If Barak or Netanyahu wins the race for prime minister, he will find it more difficult than ever to put together a coalition and keep it together if he succeeds in forming it.

In addition to the expected weakening of the large parties and growth of the middle-sized parties, the next Knesset is likely to see a plethora of small parties.

The same vote-splitting rationale works in favor of the small parties, and all last-minute efforts to raise the minimum number of votes needed to enter the Knesset seem to be failing.

Set by law, this threshold is presently 1.5 percent of the votes cast, which effectively means two Knesset seats.

Meir Sheetrit, the Likud whip, attempted this week to get it raised to 5 percent.

But his proposal was peremptorily dismissed by both the government and opposition.

Even a trial balloon floated by Netanyahu himself, calling for a 2 percent threshold

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Clashes erupt in Hebron

Israeli security forces clashed with Palestinian demonstrators near the West Bank town of Hebron. The protest came a day after Israeli soldiers shot and killed a Palestinian who had been brandishing a toy gun.

### Peres, Arafat meet in Bethlehem

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat will not declare a Palestinian state this May if Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resume, according to Shimon Peres.

The former Israeli prime minister said Arafat gave him this assurance when they met in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

### Israel razes houses in Lebanon

Israeli soldiers and members of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army demolished 14 abandoned houses in southern Lebanon.

The houses were allegedly being used by Hezbollah to launch attacks.

### Israeli-Palestinian work planned

Israeli and Palestinian organizations signed an agreement to engage in joint projects in medical research, tourism, culture, education, music and religious dialogue.

The agreement, which came despite a freeze in implementing the Wye agreement, was reached under the auspices of UNESCO.

### Rabin killer seeks better cell

Yitzhak Rabin's assassin petitioned an Israeli court to move him from solitary confinement and ease other prison conditions.

Yigal Amir, who is serving a life sentence for the 1995 assassination of Rabin, also asked that he be moved to a jail with other religious inmates and that he be allowed to meet once a month with his brother.

was shot down by Labor — and, not surprisingly, by an instant and vociferous chorus of the small and tiny factions currently represented in the Knesset.

Barak indicated that he favors raising the threshold in principle but is committed to his party's parliamentary allies to oppose it in practice.

Had the present Knesset run its full term, legislation upping the threshold may have succeeded in making its way into law.

But in the present, pre-election climate, further tinkering with the recently reformed electoral system is considered unseemly and impolitic.

This is the reason why an 11th-hour effort spearheaded by Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir to cancel the electoral reforms and return to the pre-1996 system seems doomed to failure.

The two former prime ministers, along with former Defense Minister Moshe Arens, held a news conference last week to urge the political community to go back to the one-vote system now, before the Knesset adjourns in March. They also urged that the coming elections be held under the old system.

The outgoing Knesset recently passed the first of three votes on a bill abolishing the electoral reforms.

But the proponents of the bill, Yossi Beilin of Labor and Uzi Landau of Likud, said it was not intended to go into effect for the upcoming election.

Both Shamir and Peres warn, though, that if the present Knesset does not act at once, passing all three votes on the bill, the newly elected Knesset, full of medium and small parties, will surely bury it — and the present two-vote system will continue indefinitely.

Along with this present situation on the parliamentary plane, there is uncertainty over the rules of the game within the various parties as they prepare for the May election.

Many of the parties are in a state of crisis as key figures secede, regroup, loudly publish their disgruntlement and cast open aspersions on their party leaders.

In Labor, Barak is trying to engineer matters so that the party forgoes holding primaries to elect its slate of candidates for the Knesset.

Instead, he wants would-be Knesset members selected by the more manageable party convention.

Haim Ramon, a former minister and leader of the Histadrut labor federation and an important figure in Labor, has said he will bolt from the party unless there are primaries. Other Labor legislators are loudly grumbling at what they see as Barak's high-handedness.

In Likud, Netanyahu successfully managed a year ago to abolish his party's primaries.

The Likud Central Committee, where the selection process will take place, is heavily laced with Netanyahu loyalists.

But, with two former Likud ministers, Ze'ev "Benny" Begin and Dan Meridor, already having seceded and others publicly contemplating leaving, the mood of the large-sized committee may not be predictable.

At any rate, forgoing primaries in both of the major parties is a step back from the grass-roots democracy that they both proudly proclaimed at the beginning of this decade.

In the new centrist party, allies of Meridor are battling daily with supporters of Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, the former army chief of staff over who ultimately will be the centrists' candidate for prime minister.

The two issued a statement Tuesday announcing their intention to cooperate regardless of which of them will head the party ticket. But the jockeying for position continues.

Meanwhile, party members have been lobbying Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai to defect from Likud and join their cause.

In this party, if indeed it takes shape as a single grouping, there is no agreed-upon process for the selection of the rank-and-file list of Knesset candidates.

Here again, there is a situation in which the rules and conventions that evolved in the past — and which were intended to entrench participatory democracy — do not apply. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Likud formally opens campaign, charges Labor soft on Palestinians

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Likud Party has formally launched its election campaign with a scathing attack on opposition leader Ehud Barak.

At a news conference Thursday unveiling their offensive for the May 17 election, party officials taunted the Labor Party leader to reveal his true agenda — what they described as total capitulation to the Palestinians.

Former Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said Barak should call Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and tell him, "If I'm elected, don't worry, we'll revert to the concessions, we'll resume the withdrawals."

Naveh, who recently resigned his post to seek a spot on the Likud's Knesset roster, read Arafat's phone number during the televised news conference. This reportedly prompted a flood of calls to the Palestinian leader's office.

Markedly absent from Likud's first round of political campaigning were any references to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself. The premier may face challenges from within his party for the Likud leadership.

Nor was there any mention of any of the candidates other than Barak who are seeking to unseat the premier: Knesset members Dan Meridor and Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, who left Likud to mount challenges of their own, and Amnon-Lipkin Shahak, the former army chief of staff who announced his candidacy this week.

Likud's opening salvos came amid continuing dissension within the party over its direction and leadership.

Campaign organizers said that as part of their political strategy, they would focus on the differences between the Likud and Labor parties, a division analysts say has become increasingly blurred.

"We will underscore the different positions, sharpen the gaps in the different political and security approaches and force Ehud Barak to do what he has not done for three years — reveal his true self," said Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, head of the Likud Party's campaign.

Meanwhile, Labor Party members denounced Likud's opening volley as an attempt to distort what they called the real issue — Netanyahu's total failure as a leader. Labor officials also accused Likud of trying to manipulate the 1999 campaign away from the issues of the day.

This week, Labor unveiled its campaign slogan — "Netanyahu: Too Many Lies for Too Long."

Likud has a slogan of its own: "Barak Runs Away From the Truth," a reference to allegations that he hurried from the scene of an army training accident when he served as chief of staff. Barak was later cleared in an investigation.

In a related development, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced he is backing Barak over Shahak.

Acknowledging that Shahak could draw votes from Barak, Peres said he believes that Barak nonetheless has the best chance of beating Netanyahu.

In a move seen as aimed at winning Peres' support, Barak recently made a special point of recognizing the past contributions of Peres, whom he succeeded as Labor leader. □

### Cuts to Hungarian survivors protested

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Hungary's Jewish leaders are asking the country's high court to review a recent decision by Parliament to cut one-time payments to relatives of Jewish Holocaust victims.

The decision by legislators to make the payments lower than those given to relatives of non-Jewish victims is unconstitutional, said Peter Feldmayer, president of Hungary's Jewish community.

The plan, part of this year's government budget, reduces the payments to Jewish relatives by more than 90 percent. □

#### Yeltsin expands arms ban

Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed amendments expanding the list of weapons and technologies banned for export.

The move is aimed at bringing previous Russian legislation into compliance with international agreements on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The United States and Israel have charged Russia with exporting missile technology to Iran.

#### Lileikis trial postponed

The war crimes trial of 93-year-old Aleksandras Lileikis was postponed after he failed to appear in a Lithuanian court, claiming poor health.

Another trial, of Kazys Gimzauskas, 90, was also postponed this week when he, too, cited ill health for his absence. Both men are accused of turning Jews over to Nazi death squads when they served with the Lithuanian security police during World War II.

#### Slave labor fund to be discussed

A top German official will visit the United States and Israel at the end of the month to discuss proposals for a fund to compensate World War II-era slave laborers. The fund received a boost from Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder when he took office in October, but has stalled over disagreements over how it will be structured.

#### Ukraine to protect cemeteries

Ukraine's government issued an order aimed at protecting Jewish cemeteries in the former Soviet republic. The executive order that freezes both commercial and private development of land that contains human remains is being hailed by some Jewish groups. The groups view it as a step toward legislation that bans such development at an estimated 2,000 Jewish cemeteries across Ukraine.

#### Polish leader to visit Israel

The president of Poland will visit Israel in the coming days to boost political and trade ties with the Jewish state. The trip of Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski is being seen as an attempt to improve Israeli-Polish relations, which have been strained by Poland's cancellation of a military deal with Israel and the erection of crosses by Catholic fundamentalists near the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

#### Berlin police mull more security

Police in Berlin are considering installing video cameras at five Jewish cemeteries following an attack on a German Jewish leader's grave last month. The move is among several security measures authorities are weighing following the bombing of Heinz Galinski's tombstone.

## Random House owner denies profiting from Nazi book sales

By Marilyn H. Karfeld

The Cleveland Jewish News

CLEVELAND (JTA) — Bertelsmann A.G., the German media empire that bought Random House last March and is a partner with Barnes & Noble in its Internet bookstore, has joined the ever-lengthening list of corporations being confronted with their wartime past.

Although Bertelsmann has said it was closed by the Nazis for refusing to go along with the Third Reich, a German sociologist and researcher has reported that just the opposite is true.

The company published Nazi propaganda before and during the war, issued anti-Semitic works and produced special lightweight editions for German soldiers at the front, he charges.

"There is no evidence they were ever closed," Hersch Fischler said in a telephone interview from Germany.

In 1943 the publisher was forced to close its theological division. "But they were publishing books throughout the war, at least through 1944. They were the largest supplier to the army and issued books for the SS," Fischler said.

After Fischler's charges were published in a Swiss magazine and in the Dec. 28 issue of *The Nation* magazine, Bertelsmann chief executive Thomas Middelhoff called for an investigation into his company's wartime past.

The company, which Fischler said has \$14 billion in annual revenues, has removed from its Internet site a corporate history that detailed its opposition to the Nazis.

While Middelhoff still maintains the company was closed by the Nazis, he said he will appoint a panel of three historians to look into its past, according to *The New York Times*.

Bertelsmann points to the arrest of several of its senior executives as proof of its resistance to the Third Reich.

But Fischler maintains that the executives were imprisoned because they were war profiteers, not because they opposed the Nazis.

"They were mostly Nazi Party members, imprisoned because the German army found out they were involved in bribery and profiteering and organizing against the war regulations," he said. "Bertelsmann hoarded paper and made illegal trades."

One of their partners, who was sentenced to death, was released because of his connections with the SS, Fischler maintains. There is no evidence that Bertelsmann protested any of the Nazi actions such as book burnings, Fischler adds. "They made very big profits during the war. This was what was driving them," he said.

Heinrich Mohn, the principal owner and chief executive during the war was a "passive" dues-paying member of the SS, according to Fischler. Mohn's son, Reinhold, who still controls the majority voting power of the company, was captured by the Americans in 1943 and released in 1946.

"I don't think he was involved" in the company's dealings with the Third Reich, Fischler said.

Bertelsmann managers "were not fanatic Nazis, but they were profiteers, like many other German industrialists," the researcher said.

"They were afraid to [be part of] the Resistance. So Bertelsmann is not better than the other ones. They have some nasty parts of their history. But they are promoting themselves as clean."

A rival German media empire, the family-owned Georg von Holtzbrinck Publishing Group, has in the last decade purchased several American publishers, including Henry Holt, St. Martin's Press and Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Holtzbrinck, like Bertelsmann, is proud of its history, claiming they were "almost a member of the Resistance" and were stripped by the Nazis of their license to publish, according to an article published in the June 1998 issue of *Vanity Fair*.

Georg von Holtzbrinck was a member of the Nazi Party beginning in 1933, and throughout the war he operated several profitable publishing companies and published Nazi-sanctioned magazines, the magazine reported.

The recent decision by Bertelsmann to investigate its war time past has not silenced the company's critics.

"Now they are saying this will take a long time," Fischler says. He expects more from Middelhoff, who now lives in the United States and says he is "more American than German."

Fischler criticizes Bertelsmann's statements about the company's history as efforts to manipulate public opinion.

"They're saying, 'It's OK if we become the biggest American publishing house. Trust us. Our business and politics were ethical during the Third Reich.'"

Fischler would like to see them do things differently.

"You should deal with your history in a serious way and not use it as a means of business propaganda," he said. □

## Russian police to guard Jewish sites in Moscow

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Since large numbers of Jews were absorbed into the Russian Empire more than 200 years ago, Russian Jews have struggled to avoid the scrutiny of authorities.

Now they're asking Russian officials for increased surveillance.

In response to a request from the Russian Jewish Congress, which is concerned about the rise in anti-Semitism since the country's economy collapsed last year, Russian police will provide special security measures for Jewish institutions in the Moscow area.

Beginning this month, as a result of an order by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Jewish institutions in Moscow will be patrolled around the clock by a special police task force. They include all four functioning synagogues in the Russian capital, Jewish schools, Moscow's Jewish theater and the office of a Jewish weekly newspaper.

According to Luzhkov's office, the mobile police units will also provide security measures for several cemeteries in the Moscow area that have Jewish sections.

Luzhkov has personally experienced the rise in extremist behavior that has hit Russia in the past six months. In December, he was threatened by the leader of the Russian National Unity after he banned a meeting of the group scheduled to take place in the Russian capital. □