



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 6

Monday, January 11, 1999

82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Diplomats warned of cult attack

British police warned Israeli diplomats in London of a possible attack by members of a Denver-based doomsday cult whose leader is in hiding in England.

The cultists may be planning a terror attack disguised as the work of Islamic fundamentalists, police said. Monte Kim Miller, the leader of the Concerned Christians cult, is believed to have entered Britain on the pretext of conducting research at Oxford University. Fourteen members of the sect Miller leads returned to Denver over the weekend after they were deported from Israel. [Page 3]

Senators oppose Pollard leniency

The two top members of the Senate Intelligence Committee urged fellow senators to demand that President Clinton not grant demerit to Jonathan Pollard.

The appeal by Sens. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) and Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) comes as law enforcement and intelligence officials prepare to make recommendations to Clinton about whether to release the former U.S. Navy analyst, who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for spying for Israel. Clinton promised to review the matter after the signing of the Wye accord last October.

Lauder nominated for top post

Businessman Ronald Lauder was nominated to be the next chairman of American Jewry's main umbrella group.

The member organizations of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will vote within the next 30 days on the nomination of Lauder, a philanthropist known for his efforts in revitalizing Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Lauder would replace Melvin Salberg, whose two-year term expires this spring.

Israel appeals Shabbat ruling

Israel's attorney general appealed a recent court ruling allowing a kibbutz store to operate on the Sabbath. Elyakim Rubinstein launched the appeal after the court ruled in favor of Kibbutz Tzora, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

The ruling drew strong protests from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of Israel's religious political parties. [Page 4]

NEWS ANALYSIS

Continued presence in Lebanon becoming Israeli campaign issue

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's continued presence in southern Lebanon is likely to be a major issue in the country's upcoming elections.

The continually rising death toll of Israeli soldiers, coupled with periodic Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israeli communities, has repeatedly prompted the question of whether — and how — to end Israel's decade-long involvement in Lebanon.

Intimately linked to this debate is the question of how to deal with Syria, which, with tens of thousands of soldiers in Lebanon, is the undisputed power broker there.

Indeed, whenever the fighting heats up in southern Lebanon, political analysts shift their gaze toward Syrian President Hafez Assad, who allows the shipment of armaments from Iran through Syria to their ultimate destination — the Hezbollah gunmen who are trying to drive Israeli troops out of the 9-mile-wide security zone they have carved out of southern Lebanon. Last month, after seven Israeli soldiers died in Lebanon during a two-week period, demonstrations took place outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem and outside the army high command in Tel Aviv demanding that Israel withdraw from the Lebanese quagmire.

The issue has been high on the agenda of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Inner Security Cabinet, which recently decided to reject proposals for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon.

That decision came after Hezbollah fired Katyusha rockets into northern Israel three weeks ago to retaliate for the deaths of seven Lebanese civilians during an Israeli air strike. Thirteen Israelis were wounded in the rocket assault.

During its meeting, the Security Cabinet in effect agreed to retain the status quo — a deadlocked situation in which there will be no pullback from Lebanon without an accompanying agreement with Syria.

But an agreement with Syria appears as elusive as ever — particularly after the Knesset last week gave its preliminary backing to a bill stating that any withdrawal in the Golan Heights would require at least 61 Knesset votes and a national referendum.

If the bill becomes law, it would hardly be an incentive for Assad — who insists on a return of the entire Golan Heights — to renew negotiations with Israel. Those talks were suspended by Israel in 1996 after Assad refused to condemn a series of Hamas terror attacks against the Jewish state.

While rejecting the call for a unilateral withdrawal, the Security Cabinet decided to adopt the army's proposal regarding Israel's retaliation policy in Lebanon.

The proposal calls for Israel to respond to Katyusha attacks on its northern communities by attacking targets inside Lebanon.

The ministers in effect gave their backing to a policy long espoused by Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani: Retaliate for Hezbollah rocket attacks by hitting important Lebanese infrastructure sites — such as power plants, bridges and roads — so that the Lebanese government will be forced to contain Hezbollah.

Critics point out that this plan has a major shortcoming since Syria, not the Lebanese government, is calling the shots in the region, and Damascus has little desire to take the pressure off Israel.

The importance of Lebanon as an election issue will to some extent be determined by Hezbollah, which could inflict heavy Israeli losses between now and the May 17 elections. Netanyahu's government could also move the issue to the forefront if it

MIDEAST FOCUS

Heckler threatens Shahak

Israel's attorney general instructed police to take speedy action against anyone suspected of threatening politicians. Elyakim Rubinstein's directive came after a heckler threatened prime ministerial candidate Amnon Lipkin-Shahak while he was campaigning in Tel Aviv. Police are searching for a man who told the former army chief that the "next bullet is for you."

Report: Israel may strike Lebanon

U.S. officials are concerned that Israel may launch a military operation in Lebanon aimed at boosting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's chances in the upcoming elections, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. The United States sees similarities between the current situation leading up to Israel's May 17 election and the political circumstances preceding Operation Grapes of Wrath, the 16-day offensive against Hezbollah ordered by then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres in the run-up to the 1996 elections, according to the paper.

Israeli Cabinet warns Arafat

The Israeli Cabinet issued a statement vowing to assert control over portions of the West Bank if Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat unilaterally declares statehood in May. Political observers said the statement was intended to demonstrate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing credentials as he campaigns for re-election. Meanwhile, Arafat sent a letter to 95 nations calling on them to pressure Israel to implement the Wye agreement.

Labor promises spending shift

Israel's Labor Party will shift spending away from West Bank settlements and institutions for fervently Orthodox Jews if it wins Israel's upcoming elections, according to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. The party also reportedly plans to reform the tax system if it wins the May 17 vote.



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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attempts to launch a campaign to change the present stalemate. An indication of the sensitivity of the situation occurred again last week, when Hezbollah fired three Katyusha rockets at Israel's northern border.

The attack came after an Israeli air strike in Lebanon that wounded five Lebanese civilians and one Syrian soldier.

Senior Israeli military sources said the strike was intended to signal to Syria that Israel would not tolerate continued Hezbollah operations.

"The Syrians cannot stay out of the game for a long time," said a military source. The Israeli military "will continue to operate throughout Lebanon, hitting at Hezbollah's infrastructure, and the Syrians better take this into account."

Israel's military operations in Lebanon were a key factor in determining the outcome of the 1996 race for prime minister.

In April of that year, during Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath campaign against Hezbollah, Israeli shelling of a U.N. base in southern Lebanon resulted in the deaths of at least 91 Lebanese refugees who had taken shelter there.

Many Israeli Arabs retaliated for that action by refusing to vote in the election for prime minister, a move that denied the incumbent, Shimon Peres, their much needed support. Netanyahu won that election by a razor-thin margin.

Although Netanyahu's government has opted for now to maintain the status quo in Lebanon, public campaigns continue for a unilateral withdrawal.

Among the most vocal opponents of the present policy in Lebanon is an organization called the Four Mothers, a grass-roots group of mothers of Israeli soldiers serving in the security zone.

Among Israeli politicians, support for — and opposition to — the policy in Lebanon cuts across party lines. For example, Knesset member Yossi Beilin of Labor is one of the most vocal supporters of withdrawal. His party colleague, Ephraim Sneh, is one of the most vocal opponents.

Defenders of Israel's presence in Lebanon say it is necessary to protect Israel's northern communities until comprehensive agreements are reached with Syria and Lebanon. Critics of the policy argue that it only leads to more casualties — and in the process only serves the interests of Syria, which is using Hezbollah as a proxy to secure Israeli concessions regarding the Golan.

Calls for a unilateral withdrawal are strongly opposed by Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, army chief of staff Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz and Uri Lubrani, coordinator of government activities in Lebanon.

A unilateral Israeli withdrawal, they argue, is too much of a risk and will only turn the inhabitants of the northern Galilee into hostages of Hezbollah.

Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon has proposed another alternative: a gradual Israeli withdrawal accompanied by a strong warning to Beirut that continued attacks on Israel from its territory will result in the bombardment of essential infrastructure installations.

Each phase of such a withdrawal would be accompanied by a wait-and-see period to determine whether Lebanon halts Hezbollah activities. If the Lebanese government does not take responsibility for security as Israeli troops withdraw, Israel would retaliate with full force.

Some see Sharon's stance as an effort on the part of the architect of the 1982 war in Lebanon to entrench Israel's hold on the Golan by severing its connection to Lebanon — a move that would end Syria's ability to pressure Israel.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan, who was chief of staff during the war in Lebanon, wants to go back to the same principles which guided that war.

"The formula is simple," he said in a recent interview. "If you want to stop the shelling of the north, you have to keep Hezbollah rockets at a safe distance. The only way to keep them at a safe distance is to widen the security belt."

This plan would necessitate, at least on a limited scale, another Israel invasion of Lebanon.

As the national debate continues, Israel keeps getting painful reminders of the price to be paid for its presence in Lebanon.

Among the latest reminders was the death two weeks of an Israeli soldier by friendly fire. The tragic incident occurred when two Israeli units set out on patrol together in the security zone but were separated when one got lost. □

JEWISH WORLD

Israeli diplomats warned that cult may launch revenge attack

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — British police have warned Israeli diplomats based here of a possible attack by members of a Denver-based doomsday cult whose leader is hiding in England.

The cultists may be planning a terror attack disguised as the work of Islamic fundamentalists, police said.

Monte Kim Miller, the leader of the Concerned Christians cult, is believed to have entered Britain on the pretext of conducting research at Oxford University.

Fourteen members of the sect Miller leads returned to Denver over the weekend after they were deported from Israel.

Acting on information provided by the FBI, Israeli officials tracked the cultists for several months before launching raids earlier this month on two of their homes in the Jerusalem area. The cultists were planning violent actions during the coming year in order to try to bring about the second coming of Jesus, Israeli officials charged.

The 14 cultists surfaced in Israel after Miller and more than 70 of his followers disappeared from their headquarters in Denver last September.

Some of the disciples are said to have accompanied Miller to Britain, while others are reported to be in Mexico and Greece.

Israel and Britain have been sharing information in an effort to track the movements of the cultists. British officials were alerted to Miller's presence in England after the cult members arrived in Jerusalem.

Miller, a 44-year-old former business executive, has reportedly instructed his followers that he speaks the word of God and that they will die if they do not serve him.

Miller is said to have extracted substantial sums of money from his followers. Two reportedly handed over a business to him, and he also acquired a major share in a construction company, which he ran with two other followers.

Miller and his wife, Marcia, were the subject of bankruptcy proceedings in October 1997. He is said to owe tens of thousands of dollars in taxes, as well as debts to a string of Denver radio stations that ran his advertisements. He is reported to have informed his creditors that they should be happy to serve God. □

Russia's major faiths link in move to foster closer ties

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Representatives of Russia's major faiths have created an interfaith body aimed at bringing the country's religious groups closer together.

At a meeting in Moscow last month, representatives of the Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist communities agreed to set up the Permanent Interfaith Council, which is believed to be the first such group in Russia.

The council's aim is to "ensure contacts and avoid conflicts between believers of various denominations," said Vsevolod Chaplin, secretary of the Department for External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church's Moscow branch.

Zinovy Kogan, executive director of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities, who represents Jews on the council, said that, among other things, the council will serve as a unified voice of Russia to react to anti-Semitic incidents. After the council is registered as an official organization, it is expected to issue an appeal to Russia's religious communities to deplore the current surge in anti-Semitism, according to Kogan.

According to Farid Asadullin, deputy chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate for East European Russia, the council's work will be based on the "principle of equality" of all faiths.

Representatives of Russia's Roman Catholic and Lutheran faiths are expected to join the council soon. □

Group starts pluralism campaign

A liberal U.S. Jewish group is urging American Jews to flood the Israeli Embassy in Washington with phone calls to oppose bills in the Knesset that would set back the cause of religious pluralism in Israel.

"It's time for American Jews to tell the Israeli Government exactly what we are. Jews," the group said in an advertisement in *The New York Times*.

The bills would invalidate conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis and counter efforts by non-Orthodox representatives to serve on local religious councils.

Extremism rises in German army

Extremist incidents in the German army increased in 1998, according to German Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping.

The incidents were largely propaganda offenses, ranging from graffiti on army buildings to soldiers wearing tattoos with Nazi insignia.

Public concern about the issue has grown in the past few years after the German media uncovered extremist activities among army soldiers, such as the production of a video with anti-foreigner and anti-Semitic content.

Wellstone decides against run

Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) decided not to run for president in 2000, citing chronic back pain.

Wellstone would have become the second Jew in recent political history to seek his party's nomination. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) dropped out of the primary race during the 1996 campaign.

Polish laborers may sue Germany

Poles who were forced to work as slave laborers for the Nazis may sue Germany for more than \$1 billion in compensation, according to the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

The move would come as Germany is considering the creation of a compensation fund in the wake of class-action lawsuits filed by former slave laborers.

Dignitaries meet at Peres center

Some 150 diplomats and economic officials from around the world converged on the Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv for a conference aimed at boosting economic cooperation in the Middle East.

Participants include former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa and former South African President F.W. de Klerk.

During the conference, attendees are expected to announce the formation of a \$60 million fund to finance joint Israeli-Palestinian technology projects.

THE EMERGING CANDIDATES**Seen as 'honest Abe' of politics, Begin forges principled campaign**

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — He looks like his father and sounds like his father, but Ze'ev "Benny" Begin knows his chances of getting elected Israel's next prime minister are slim.

Just the same, the decision by the only son of the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin to compete against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the May national elections is a matter of principle.

While he is hardly a favorite in the polls, Begin's recent announcement that he was quitting the Likud Party to spearhead a right-wing challenge to Netanyahu reinforced his image as the "honest Abe" of Israeli politics who refuses to compromise his beliefs.

This is perhaps his biggest electoral asset at a time when Israelis are increasingly losing confidence in their leaders.

Begin, 55, the stalwart ideologue of Likud, uncompromisingly defends the fundamental party doctrine that all of the biblical Land of Israel, including the West Bank, is the birthright of the modern State of Israel.

But like the tie that sat awkwardly on his usually open-collared neck when he made his announcement, politics never fit Begin quite right.

Although Begin has been politically active since his days as a student in the 1960s, he is a geologist by training.

When first elected to the Knesset in 1988, he was shocked by the horse-trading and backroom deal-making that is the stock in trade of most politicians.

"The period that I devoted to politics was the most miserable of my life," Begin said several years ago.

Despite his disdain for politics, Begin has steadfastly pursued his ideological aims.

Throughout the years, Begin collected facts to bolster his convictions with strategic "proofs" that the Palestinians are still intent on destroying Israel.

In 1991, he said the land-for-peace formula was a "hereditary disease."

The message was not much different two weeks ago, when he said Israel was in a "vicious cycle of despair and weakness," characterized by an over-willingness among Israeli politicians of all stripes to hand territory over to the Palestinians.

"Capitulation has become a value in and of itself, even when it is clear that it does not lead to any achievements," he said at a news conference announcing the launch of his campaign.

The Wye agreement signed in late October is the "illegitimate child" of the Oslo accords, he said, adding that neither peace nor security could result from the notion of territorial compromise shared by Likud, Labor and the political center.

Begin said his candidacy is the "only alternative today to a way that would most certainly lead to the establishment of a PLO-and-Hamas state, which will bring neither peace nor security."

Begin, whose father forged Israel's 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, a move that included Israel's return of the Sinai, warned that going down "Wye River" would only lead to ceding more land to "those hoodlums" — a reference to the Palestinian Authority

and Hamas. But he offered no concrete solutions for peace or security; nor did he advocate annexing the West Bank.

For Begin, one thing is clear: Ideology takes precedence above everything else.

During Netanyahu's tenure as premier, many Cabinet members made idle threats to leave the coalition if votes on crucial issues did not go their way. But in January 1997, Begin did more than threaten. He resigned as science minister after Netanyahu agreed to transfer most of the West Bank town of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority.

By leaving the government at that time — and the party two weeks ago — Begin dealt a severe blow to Netanyahu's claims to represent the traditional party line.

But leaders of Jewish settler groups, who might be expected to flock to Begin and his emerging party, remain divided.

They fear his candidacy could split the right wing.

Recent polls show Begin does not pose a real electoral threat to Netanyahu. Polls indicate he would receive at most 9 percent of the vote in a four-way race with Netanyahu, opposition leader Ehud Barak and Amnon-Lipkin Shahak. Shahak, a former army chief of staff, officially launched his centrist campaign last week.

Begin, proud of the fact that he rides the bus to work, has never shown any of the personal ambition that characterizes other politicians.

This was true even when he vied for the party leadership in 1993, when he came in third with 15 percent of the vote after Netanyahu and David Levy.

In addition, he has never courted the news media and has always steered clear of muckraking and mudslinging.

Even when he kicked off his campaign, he did not mention Netanyahu by name.

Early in Begin's career, some party members accused him of taking a free ride on his father's name. But after 10 years in politics, he encounters that criticism far less frequently.

"I am trying very hard to restrain myself from speaking in his name," he said with characteristic modesty when asked what his father would think of his leaving Likud.

"It is possible that I would make a mistake, and if I did, he wouldn't be here to correct it." □

Ruling on Shabbat work appealed

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's attorney general has weighed in on a case that recently ignited religious-secular tensions.

On Sunday, Elyakim Rubinstein appealed a district court ruling allowing a kibbutz store to operate on the Sabbath.

In his appeal, Rubinstein said the judge's interpretation of the labor law barring work on the Sabbath was erroneous.

Israeli law bars citizens from working on the day deemed by their religion as the Sabbath. For most Israelis, this is the Jewish Sabbath.

But in his ruling, the judge said that a cooperative association such as a kibbutz is free to determine its own day of rest.

The ruling in favor of Kibbutz Tzora, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem, elicited strong protests from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of Israel's religious political parties.

Netanyahu charged that the ruling implied that kibbutz members are somehow not a part of the Jewish people. □