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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Officials oppose Pollard release

Top U.S. officials unanimously recommended to President Clinton that the United States should not release an American serving a life sentence for spying for Israel. The recommendations opposing Jonathan Pollard's release came as three prominent Jews — Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman and Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz — urged Clinton to delay his decision until they have a chance to personally state the case for releasing Pollard.

Arens to challenge premier

Moshe Arens announced he will challenge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the Likud Party leadership for Israel's May 17 elections.

A former foreign minister known for his hawkish views, Arens said he wants to save the party from what he called its inevitable defeat if Netanyahu heads the ticket. [Page 3]

High court rules on Haifa council

Israel's High Court of Justice ordered the Haifa religious council to convene within a week with the participation of Reform and Conservative representatives. The court deemed illegal Interior Minister Eli Suissa's order to delay the meeting in order to keep non-Orthodox representatives from sitting on the council. The ruling is the latest event in the ongoing battle over religious pluralism in Israel.

Peres supports Palestinian state

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres gave his support for the creation of a Palestinian state during a speech before the Palestinian legislative council.

"It is our deep hope that the Palestinians will gain independence," he said in what was the first speech by an Israeli before the self-rule government's legislature. Members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government called on Labor Party leader Ehud Barak to make his stand on the issue clear.

Israel beefs up security at Wall

Israel heightened security around the Western Wall after receiving warnings of a possible attack by Islamic militants. The attack would reportedly involve militants dropping grenades or firebombs from the Al-Aksa Mosque compound onto the Wall Plaza.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Arab world weighs its options as Israel campaign season unfolds

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Israel enters an election season, the Arab world is watching closely, carefully weighing its options.

If Arab leaders could take part in the Israeli election campaign, it is no secret that they would work hard against the re-election of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Indeed, in June 1996 — days after Netanyahu assumed office — Egypt hosted the first Arab League summit in six years.

The summit had a single goal: to develop a united front against the Netanyahu government's approach to the peace process.

Arab leaders now feel that their initial wariness about Netanyahu's policies has been amply borne out by events.

They point to a peace process with the Palestinians that has been marked by long periods of stalemate.

And now, after the initial euphoria surrounding the signing of the Wye accord last October, stalemate has again set in.

The Arab League is expected to hold a meeting in Cairo at the end of the month, when they are expected to discuss the Israeli elections and another burning issue: how to deal with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

In recent days, Saddam has repeatedly called for the popular overthrow of those Arab governments that support American foreign policy in the region.

His comments were specifically directed at Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

This week, Saudi officials responded by calling for the overthrow of Saddam's regime.

While political analysts view Saddam's remarks as a sign of weakness, his calls are nonetheless viewed warily by Arab leaders.

And Israel's neighbors are equally wary about how to proceed during the Israeli election campaign.

For Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, caution is the prevailing sentiment.

In a recent meeting with Yasser Arafat, Mubarak urged the Palestinian Authority chairman to postpone a unilateral declaration of statehood until after the Israeli elections.

For Mubarak, and most other observers of the Israeli political scene, such a declaration would only play into Netanyahu's hands.

There is no love lost between the Israeli and Egyptian leaders: Their meetings have been tense at best, and Mubarak has repeatedly charged Netanyahu with failing to live up to promises he made during their sessions together.

This week, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa was visiting Israel to participate — along with a host of foreign dignitaries — in a conference hosted by the Peres Center for Peace.

During his stay in Tel Aviv, Moussa got the chance to obtain a first-hand glimpse of the Israeli campaign season.

His visit also gave Israeli political players the opportunity to get his assessment of Arab sentiments.

Meanwhile, Arafat appears to be heeding Mubarak's advice.

In recent speeches, the Palestinian leader has stopped reiterating his intention to declare statehood on May 4, the end of the interim period in the Israeli-Palestinian

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak seeking to unite parties

Israel's Labor Party leader is seeking to unite with other parties in an effort to unseat Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the May elections.

Labor officials have approved Ehud Barak's plan to negotiate with other political movements to create a One Israel umbrella list.

Japanese minister visits Israel

Japan's foreign minister called on Israel to adhere to the Wye accord and on the Palestinian Authority to delay a unilateral declaration of statehood. During a visit to Israel, Masahiko Komura met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, who said Komura had offered Tokyo's assistance in restarting peace talks with Syria. Komura this week addressed Palestinian legislators in Ramallah as part of an effort to have Japan play a larger role in Middle East peacemaking.

Emigres cheer Gorbachev

An audience of Russian immigrants to Israel cheered former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev during a speech he made in Tel Aviv. Gorbachev, who is in Israel along with several other international dignitaries to attend a meeting of the Peres Center for Peace, said he is concerned about the lack of outrage in Russia against the increase in anti-Semitism there.

Telephone war rages

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized his former Cabinet secretary for reading Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's telephone number aloud at a news conference last week launching the party's campaign.

Danny Naveh's speech prompted hundreds of calls by Israelis to Arafat's office. Meanwhile, Naveh was forced to change his home phone number after an adviser to Arafat, Dr. Ahmed Tibi, read out Naveh's phone number during an interview.



Daily News Bulletin

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peace process. He is also reported to have decided not to make the declaration until after the May 17 Israeli elections.

This decision was not taken lightly by Arafat, who is facing strong internal opposition from moderate elements in the self-rule government as well as from militant fundamentalists.

Palestinian moderates are angry at what they view as Israel's suspension of the Wye agreement. But presumably Arafat can get them to see the logic in Mubarak's advice.

The situation is markedly different with Hamas and the other rejectionist groups. Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin recently summed up the militant viewpoint when he declared that there was no difference among the various Israeli candidates for prime minister.

As far as he is concerned, Israel under any leader remains an enemy in need of destruction.

Whether this stance will translate into Hamas terror attacks during Israel's campaign season — a scenario that would play into the hands of the Israeli right — is a matter of no small concern for Arafat, who needs to find ways to keep the fundamentalists at bay.

Walking a political tightrope, Arafat recently released Yassin from house arrest as part of a conciliatory gesture toward the militants.

But at the same time, he instructed his security apparatus to work with Israel to prevent terrorist attacks.

As part of this effort, Palestinian security agents recently increased the number of arrests among Hamas activists in the Gaza Strip.

Another leader with a sizable number of Palestinians living under his government, Jordan's King Hussein, can presumably be counted among those who would like to see a new Israeli premier this spring.

Long considered Israel's closest friend, Hussein was outraged when Israeli agents tried to assassinate a Hamas official in the Jordanian capital in October 1997.

In what was certainly the nadir of recent Israeli-Jordanian relations, Hussein was barely on speaking terms with Netanyahu in the wake of that affair.

Matters improved somewhat when Hussein, ailing with cancer, appeared at the Wye negotiations and the White House signing of that accord.

Just the same, Hussein can be counted among those seeking a moderating role in Israeli-Palestinian relations as part of a broader strategy to unseat Netanyahu.

Among Israel's neighbors, there is one wild card as the election season heats up: Syria.

Syrian President Hafez Assad, whose motives are often inscrutable, may play one of two strategies during Israel's election campaign.

In the first, he may believe that he can extract concessions from Netanyahu, who may be eager to score points among Israeli moderates by restarting Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

Indeed, Netanyahu recently hinted that these talks, which were broken off nearly three years ago, may resume "sooner than many might expect."

Such talks could help Netanyahu divert attention from the stalemated Palestinian track.

But, according to the reasoning of the second strategy, Assad may feel that he has more to gain from waiting and perhaps negotiating with a new, more moderate Israeli leader.

If this is ultimately the tactic he decides upon, Assad can likely be counted on to keep hostilities simmering in southern Lebanon.

A go-ahead from Assad to Hezbollah, Syria's proxy in the decade-long battle with Israel on the Lebanese front, would indicate that the Syrian president has given up on ever achieving any concessions from Netanyahu.

Continued fighting in southern Lebanon could play to any candidate in Israel's election, but it would deny Netanyahu the opportunity to claim progress on the Syrian track.

While other Arab leaders view moderation as the way to unseat the Israeli incumbent, for Assad the opposite strategy would best achieve the same goal. □

JEWISH WORLD

Christians seek use of menorah

B'nai Brith Canada is opposing a legal move that would allow a Christian missionary group to use a menorah logo as part of its campaign to convert Jews.

B'nai Brith Canada warned that attempts similar to the one by Chosen People Ministries, in which the group is attempting to register a menorah as a trademark, may be occurring in the United States.

Records to help survivors

The president of Hungary's Jewish community said thousands of Hungarian Holocaust survivors are eligible for German compensation following the discovery of long-lost records.

The records, recently discovered in the basement of a Budapest municipal building, provide proof that about 6,000 people who had applied for German life annuities were survivors of Nazi concentration camps.

Polish leader speaks of new era

Poland is ready for a "new chapter" in its relations with the Jewish people, the nation's president said during a visit to Israel.

Hoping to defuse an ongoing source of tensions, Aleksander Kwasniewski said Warsaw is trying to enact legislation that would govern the status of concentration camps in his country. Such legislation could end a dispute prompted by the recent erection of hundreds of crosses at the site of the former Auschwitz concentration camp.

Chasidim lease cemetery

A group of Chasidim leased for 99 years the Hungarian cemetery where their spiritual leader is buried. The site of the tomb of Rabbi Moses ben Zevi Teitelbaum is likely to become a popular pilgrimage site.

Compromise reached on guide

Two paragraphs about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals edited out of a U.S. teachers guide about the Holocaust will be sent out separately to teachers in Georgia. The paragraphs will be distributed following a compromise reached with gay activists, who complained after the passages were deleted on the advice of the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust. The commission had deemed the material too sexually explicit.

Australia, Israel discuss security

Australia is unlikely to accede to Israel's requests that its security officials be able to protect Israeli athletes at the 2000 Olympic Games, said an Australian Olympic official. The dispute is part of a larger problem about how to guarantee protection for Israeli participants at the Sydney games.

Netanyahu's mentor launches bid to unseat premier as Likud leader

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has suffered a major political embarrassment at the hands of his former political patron.

In a stunning setback for the premier, Moshe Arens said Monday he will seek to replace Netanyahu as the Likud candidate for prime minister in Israel's May 17 elections.

A former Likud foreign minister known for his hawkish views, Arens said he is making the bid in order to save the party from what he called its inevitable defeat if Netanyahu heads the ticket.

The move was a particular blow to Netanyahu because Arens served as his political mentor at the start of the premier's political career and helped him become Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in 1984.

Arens' challenge confirmed the inner turmoil wracking Likud two weeks before party primaries are to be held.

"In my view, my chances of bringing the Likud to victory in [national] elections are better than those of Benjamin Netanyahu," Arens told a Tel Aviv news conference Monday.

Monday was the deadline for announcing plans to run in the Likud primaries.

A veteran Likud diplomat and politician who left public life some six years ago, Arens said he felt compelled to act to save the party from total collapse.

"I have watched with concern the crisis gripping the Likud only months before elections.

"Top Likud members have left the party. Leading members are considering abandoning it," Arens said.

"In recent weeks, many people appealed to me, members of the party and also people on the street, arguing that only I can reinstate the unity of the Likud and bring the Likud to victory in elections."

Arens, who has grown increasingly critical of the prime minister's policies and performance since the premier's election in 1996, acknowledged that his relations with Netanyahu had at one time been like those between a father and son.

"But this does not make a difference in the situation we face today," he said. "We face fateful decisions ahead."

Arens reportedly decided to mount his challenge after surveys showed that 25 percent of Likud Party members support him.

Polls also indicate 6 percent support among Likud members for Uzi Landau, the chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, who has also announced he would run for the Likud leadership.

Arens called on Landau, who is also considered a hawk, to withdraw his candidacy in the name of party unity.

With the same goal in mind, he said Knesset members Ze'ev "Benny" Begin and Dan Meridor — two former ministers in the Netanyahu government who left Likud to mount their own campaigns — should return to the party fold.

"They will not find a better home elsewhere," he said.

In one bit of good news for the premier, Communications Minister Limor Livnat said Monday she would remain within Likud and support Netanyahu for the party leadership.

The popular Livnat, who had considered joining a new centrist party, said she made her decision because of, not despite, the divisions and difficulties within the party.

"I believe we must rehabilitate the Likud from within," she said.

Netanyahu welcomed her decision and urged Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who has also been thinking of bolting the Likud Party for the centrist bloc, to avoid such a move.

Regarding Arens' announcement, Netanyahu said he believed such challenges are part of the democratic process — but added that he remained convinced he would be re-elected party leader. □

Study: Jews drink less, more likely to get drunk

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jews don't drink, the old myth goes. And now there's scientific evidence to prove it.

Two new studies are bolstering the view that Jews don't drink as much as other Caucasians — and researchers attribute the difference largely to a genetic mutation that is found in a much higher proportion among Jews than among other whites.

Those surveyed possessed a particular genetic mutation that regulates an enzyme responsible for determining how the body breaks down alcohol.

A similar mutation is also found at relatively high rates among Asians.

The mutation makes people "more sensitive to alcohol — in other words, they get drunk very quickly," said Dr. Yehuda Neumark, a research physician at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem.

Neumark, along with a team of researchers in Israel and the United States, recently completed a study that examined the DNA of 145 men in Israel's capital.

"In the Jewish Jerusalemites whom we studied, we found that those carrying this expression of the gene were very light drinkers," he said.

Additional research is currently under way of Jews in America and Russian Jews in Israel to further study the associations — both genetic and cultural — between Jews and alcohol.

The discovery of the gene and its impact comes on the heels of a series of groundbreaking studies of genetic mutations and their impact on cancer rates in the Ashkenazi Jewish population. The study also comes as awareness of Jewish alcoholism continues to rise.

A similar genetic mutation, which researchers described as "providing protective properties against alcohol," is known to be virtually absent in blacks and rare in the general white population, they said.

The mutation was found in about one-third of the men studied in Jerusalem — who were divided between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews — yet it is found only among 1 to 2 percent of Caucasians in the general American population, said one researcher, Dr. Lucy Carr.

Carr, an associate professor of medicine and pharmacology at the Indiana University School of Medicine, helped analyze the genetic material that was used in the Hadassah-Hebrew University study.

Another recently released study, conducted at the University of California at San Diego, has found that about half of the Jewish students studied have the genetic mutation.

The students with the mutation drank half as often as the Jewish students who didn't have it — three times a month rather than six times a month for the male students; and a little more than twice a month, compared with just under five times a month for the women.

There was no difference between those with the mutation and those without it in the amount of alcohol consumed each time they drank, said Dr. Tamara Wall, assistant professor of psychiatry at the California campus, who headed the research team.

She and her associates are in the process of expanding the number of subjects — from 65 Jewish college students to 100. They also are studying an equal number of white, gentile students for comparison.

The Jerusalem men studied ranged in age between 25 and 64. About two-thirds of them were randomly selected, healthy men; one-third were heroin addicts recruited from drug treatment facilities in Jerusalem.

All of the healthy men were light drinkers, according to Neumark, while most of the heroin addicts had been heavy drinkers.

His team found that the amount of alcohol consumed each week was closely associated with the genetic mutation.

Other researchers are currently at work on studies examining the presence of the mutation and its effect on college students and other adults in Indianapolis, as well as the impact of the mutation and cultural factors on Jews from the former Soviet Union who are now living in Israel.

Carr of the Indiana University School of Medicine said she and her associates have studied a range of ethnic groups, including people from China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan; England and South Africa; and the Caribbean.

This year they expect to study 200 Jewish members of sororities and fraternities at Indiana University to find out how having the genetic mutation makes people feel when they drink — whether it makes them feel flushed quicker or gives them a headache sooner than it does to those without the mutation.

Dr. Deborah Hasin, a professor of clinical public health at Columbia University, is preparing to study the various factors that impact the rate of alcohol consumption among Russian Jews in Israel.

Russia has one of the highest rates of per-capita alcohol consumption in the world, Hasin said, while Israel has one of the lowest. □

Neo-Nazism rises in German army

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Extremist incidents in the German army increased in 1998, according to Germany's defense minister.

Rudolf Scharping told a news conference in Bonn last week that the number of incidents rose sharply last summer, shortly after the army inducted a new batch of recruits.

Scharping added that 301 members of the army, most of them new recruits, were involved in incidents of right-wing extremism last year.

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

An army spokesman said the rise resulted in part from an increased readiness to report such incidents.

The display or distribution of Nazi symbols is forbidden in Germany.

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

Last month, Scharping told representatives of the American Jewish Committee that Germany is carefully monitoring such incidents. □