

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Senate report: Israel started arms deals, diverted funds

JERUSALEM — A parliamentary committee announced Monday it will conduct hearings on whether Israel promoted American arms sales to Iran and had a role in diverting profits to rebels in Nicaragua.

Testimony in a 64-page U.S. Senate report indicated Israel initiated the U.S. arms sales to Iran and played a role in funneling profits to the Contras fighting the Nicaraguan government.

The Israeli government on Sunday denied such findings.

Abba Eban, chairman of the Knesset's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee, said he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir asking that the government provide a written explanation of its role in the arms scandal.

"Israel's official statements have

only been reactions and do not give a positive, contiguous account of Israel's actions and the principles that guided it," Eban said in a statement distributed to reporters.

Eban said he asked for a "detailed document that will explain the government's actions and rationale on the subject of (selling) weapons to Iran."

Committee member Simcha Dinitz told The Associated Press that a six-member subcommittee on intelligence services would begin closed-door sessions Tuesday by questioning two Israeli officials named in the Senate report.

He identified them as Amiram Nir, the prime minister's adviser on anti-terrorism, and David Kimche, former director-general of the Foreign Ministry. They acted as liaison to Washing-

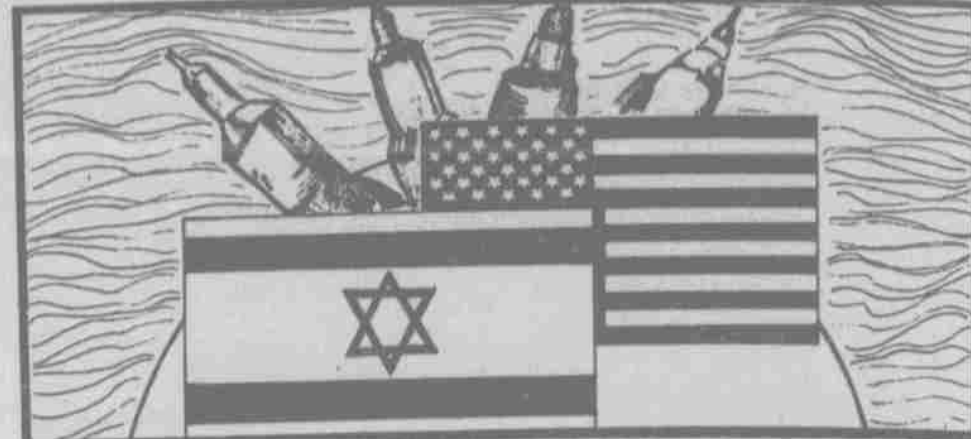
ton in the arms deals.

The Senate Intelligence Committee report published Friday listed Nir and Kimche as initiators of some of the sales. The report said Nir and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin suggested diverting funds from the sales to the Nicaraguan rebels.

"Not only did I not propose, neither I nor any authorized Israeli, proposed that Israel help the Contras directly in any way," Rabin said on Israel Army Radio on Sunday.

"On the contrary, I rejected a request by an American member of the National Security Council who proposed this to Israel." The hearings will be secret and closed to the press, Dinitz said.

Senior Israeli officials have said Israel also has agreed to provide the Senate panel headed by Daniel K. Inouye with written testimony from



Nir, Kimche and two Israeli arms dealers involved in the weapons sales.

Israel has been supplying arms and spare parts to Iran since late 1981, some of them directly and others through third countries and international weapons dealers. Former Defense Minister

Ariel Sharon confirmed news reports in 1982 that Israel had sold Iran arms but said Israel stopped doing so at the request of the United States. However, persistent news reports said shipment of spare parts and light weapons shipments were resumed soon after.

Official reportedly knew of arms sale before disclosure Reagan names new CIA chief

WASHINGTON — Robert Gates, a CIA official who reportedly urged disclosure of secret arms sales to Iran before they were revealed, was picked by President Reagan on Monday to replace the ailing William J. Casey as director of the spy agency.

The 73-year-old Casey, recuperating from surgery seven weeks ago for a brain tumor, was invited to become a counselor to the president when and if he can return to work.

Gates, 43, has been the No. 2 official at the CIA since 1962 and has been running the agency in Casey's absence.

A 20-year veteran of service in the CIA and the White House National Security Council as a Soviet affairs expert, Gates is widely respected on Capitol Hill and likely will not have difficulty winning Senate confirmation.

However, he is certain to be grilled about the CIA's role in the secret sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of profits to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels. A report by the Senate Intelligence Committee said Casey, in testimony about the affair late last year, "was general in nature" and left many questions unanswered.

Casey suffered a seizure last Dec. 15 — a day before he was to appear before the Senate Intelligence Committee — and underwent surgery three days later for removal of a cancerous tumor.

The committee's report, released last week, said a CIA analyst went to Gates last Oct. 1 and said he was concerned that money from the secret arms sale to Iran were being diverted to Central America.

According to Gates' testimony in the



report, he and Casey urged then-national security adviser John Poindexter to have Reagan make the Iran initiative public, rather than have it leak out "in dribs and drabs."

The arms-sale deal was revealed Nov. 3 by a pro-Syrian publication in Lebanon.

In Brief

Spokeswoman: Liberace near death

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — Liberace, the piano virtuoso whose flashy garb and gentle wit made him a television and concert favorite for 40 years, was reported near death on Monday at his desert home here. Spokeswoman Denise Collier said she didn't know if Liberace, 67, was conscious.

Liberace was hospitalized Jan. 23 for what a spokesman reported to be anemia. He returned to his home here four days later, and Collier said then that he was gravely ill, suffering from anemia, emphysema and heart disease.

Spokesmen vehemently denied a report he was suffering from AIDS.

'It ain't over until it's over'

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. — A plump, pampered groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil predicted at least six more weeks of winter Monday when he was pulled out of an electrically heated and lighted burrow and reportedly saw his shadow.

Despite an overcast sky at sunrise, Phil's handlers from the Punxsutawney Groundhog club claimed that he glimpsed a faint shadow.

Groundhog Day folklore has it that if a groundhog, also known as a woodchuck, sees its shadow, six weeks of winter follow.

Early returns show overwhelming approval for Aquino's charter, continued leadership

MANILA, Philippines — President Corazon Aquino won a decisive victory Monday as Filipinos overwhelmingly endorsed her proposed constitution and another 5 1/2 years of her leadership, unofficial returns showed.

Filipinos backed the draft charter by a 4-to-1 margin nationwide, according to the unofficial count by the private National Movement for Free Elections. Only in the northern Luzon Island stronghold of former President Ferdinand E. Marcos did a majority of voters appear to have rejected the proposal.

Final, official returns from the Commission on Elections were not expected before next week.

The private vote-count showed an approval margin of more than 80 percent — 5,374,617 to 1,294,656 with 27 percent of the 86,703 precincts reporting nationwide.

Mutinous soldiers linked to Marcos attempted a revolt last week but were put down by government troops. Some military officials, including one of the coup leaders, have criticized the government's peace overtures to end the 18-year-old Communist insurgency.

Voters were asked to state "yes" or "no" on whether they supported ratification of the 20,000-word draft, which sharply reduces the power of the president, restores a bicameral legislature, bans the military from political activity except voting and expands human rights guarantees.

The charter, completed in October by a 48-member



commission appointed by Mrs. Aquino, also guarantees her a six-year term.

The army placed 79 of its 81 battalions on alert in case of trouble following last week's failed coup attempt.

Mrs. Aquino cast her "yes" vote early Monday in a schoolhouse on her family's nearly 15,000-acre sugar plantation, Hacienda Luisita, in Tarlac province, about 60 miles north of Manila.

The charter provides for self-rule for the Moslem minority and land reform for the peasants but leaves details to a Congress to be elected May 11.

'Baby M's' attorney recommends custody for biological father

HACKENSACK, N.J. — The court-appointed attorney for "Baby M" urged a judge Monday to grant custody of the infant girl to her biological father and deny visitation rights to the surrogate mother who gave birth to her.

The surprise recommendation came during the emotion-packed opening of the second phase of the trial that will test for the first time the legality of surrogate parenting.

The custody phase of the trial began with William Stern testifying that the baby he fathered is "the most important person in my life" and the lawyer for the surrogate mother contending that she can provide the most loving home.

Attorney Lorraine Abraham, appointed by the court to represent the

infant's interests, said she recommended against visitation rights for the surrogate mother "at this time."

Abraham told the judge her decision was based on findings by a psychiatrist, social worker and psychologist who interviewed the surrogate mother, Mary Beth Whitehead, her husband, Richard, and Stern and his wife, Elizabeth.

Abraham said the "overwhelming weight" of her experts' findings compelled her to join in their recommendation but did not elaborate.

Testimony in the trial's first phase last month centered on the validity of the contract under which Whitehead, a 29-year-old housewife, agreed to be artificially inseminated with Stern's sperm and accept \$10,000 to bear the baby for the childless couple.

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