

Israeli police recommend Netanyahu's indictment

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — In a move that could bring down the Israeli government and change the direction of the peace process, police have recommended indicting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for breach of trust in an influence-trading scandal.

State attorney Edna Arbel was expected to announce by early next week whether to indict Netanyahu.

Police recommendations are not binding or always followed. Yet this one has the potential to break apart Netanyahu's coalition — more brittle than ever since the allegations surfaced in January.

An indictment would ruin chances of bringing the opposition Labor Party

into the government, a plan Netanyahu has been contemplating as a way of rescuing the disintegrating Middle East peace process.

Labor Party leader Shimon Peres, who lost elections to Netanyahu last May, urged the prime minister to suspend himself from office and call new elections.

Netanyahu did not react to the revelations, meeting instead with advisers and political allies including Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of the Shas party, which also is involved in the scandal.

The trouble started with Netanyahu's appointment of a political crony as attorney general. Jerusa-

lem lawyer Roni Bar-On resigned after only a day in office, under criticism that he was a legal lightweight chosen for his political connections.

Radio reports said Netanyahu had no plans to step down.

An indictment would not force Netanyahu's resignation, but several allies already have hinted they may bolt the ruling coalition and deprive Netanyahu of his majority in parliament. The coalition now has 66 of 120 seats.

Netanyahu could try to govern with a minority, but it would be nearly impossible. New elections would probably have to be called. The next scheduled vote is in 2000.

Girl romanced by man from Offutt found safe

Couple met on the Internet, ran away together

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE (AP) show, and employees then alerted lo— A 14-year-old New York girl who allegedly ran off five months ago with a 22-year-old airman she met on the Internet was found Wednesday in Illinois.

The girl was with Senior Airman Paul Davis of the Monroe County Sheriff's Department in Rochester, Ill. Kevin O'Connell, the girl's uncle, said the family had been asked by police not to reveal where in Illinois the pair had been found until the girl's parents could see their daughter.

The girl's sister, Tracey O'Connell-Jay, told Omaha television station KPTM that Maltais had been arrested and is with local police in Illinois. She was unsure if he had been charged.

"I did speak with her (the girl) briefly," said O'Connell-Jay. "She sounded in shock. She didn't sound real good to me."

The couple was found after Maltais' picture was broadcast on the Maury Povich television show Wednesday morning, O'Connell-Jay said. A viewer apparently called the

Offutt officials said late Wednesday they could neither confirm nor deny that Maltais had been found. The Air Force had offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to Maltais' capture and conviction on charges of military desertion. He could face up to three years in prison and dishonorable discharge.

Maltais also could face other charges stemming from his relationship with the missing girl, police said.

Tobacco companies may axe Joe Camel, Marlboro Man

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talks. "It's extraordinarily unlikely that any agreement could escape contentious congressional hearings," the source said.

Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, a longtime tobacco opponent, said he is skeptical of the industry's proposals and will review them carefully if they land on Capitol Hill.

"The great wall of tobacco is coming down," Durbin said. "Tobacco companies are in a hurry to get out of court, off the front pages of newspapers and back to the business of making billions of dollars in profit."

The companies and attorneys general from Minnesota, Florida, Connecticut, Mississippi, Washington, Massachusetts, Wisconsin and Arizona have been meeting at undisclosed locations over the last two or three weeks. Talks for the week broke up Wednesday outside Washington, D.C.

"The companies (had) vowed never to come to the table, let alone settle any lawsuit. The mere fact that they are talking is historic and unprecedented," said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal.

The negotiations include represen-

tatives of two other major tobacco companies, Lorillard and Brown & Williamson. Deputy White House Counsel Bruce Lindsey is also monitoring the talks.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said any resolution "has to result in the public-health outcome that we want here, which is the decline in use of tobacco products by young people."

The talks come as legal pressure on tobacco companies intensifies. Liggett Group, the maker of L&Ms and Chesterfields, reached a settlement recently with 22 states in which it turned over thousands of internal documents that could show the industry sought to conceal the dangers of smoking for decades.

Tobacco companies also are nervously watching a trial in Jacksonville, Fla., in which a family blames R.J. Reynolds for the death of a woman who smoked for decades.

Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles credited the state's \$2.4 billion lawsuit for pushing cigarette makers to the bargaining table. Florida has a legal weapon that no other state possesses—a 1994 state law that stripped away most of the industry's legal defenses.

A kingdom's fate lies in oil

Power struggles played out against feuds, poverty in Saudi Arabia

EDITOR'S NOTE — Saudi Arabia, key U.S. ally in the Arab world, is one of the last old-style autocracies. How long can "The Kingdom" remain that way? This is the last in a three-part series on the U.S.-Saudi partnership.

BY CHARLES J. HANLEY
Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia—The 456 plush seats in the Majlis al-Shura spread out over a half-acre of deep carpet, under a glittering ceiling of arabesque blue, beneath a dome larger than St. Peter's in Rome.

It is a majestic setting for a parliament enacting the laws of the land. No one meets here.

The Majlis that does meet is a 61-member body that assembles, little-noticed, in a smaller room near the empty grand chamber. It passes no legislation. It has no power.

When inaugurated in 1993, this Majlis al-Shura, or Consultative Council, was portrayed as a step toward Saudi political modernization. "Evolution is the way of the world," Majlis leader Sheik Mohammed bin Jubair tells a visitor to his architectural showpiece. "Stagnation leads to death."

As a body whose members are all appointed by King Fahd, whose agenda is set by the king and whose advisory reports can be ignored by him, the Majlis does little to quiet Saudi voices of opposition.

"We want people's representation, full accountability, freedom of expression and assembly," dissident-in-exile Saad Al-Faqih said from London. Otherwise "there will be a bad scenario, violence followed by violence."

Lines in the sand

Ripples of dissent began with the 1990-91 Gulf War, when the U.S. military threw down a "Desert Shield" between the oil kingdom and an aggressive Iraq.

Many Saudis were angry that the billions in armaments the monarchy had bought could not defend them, and resented the army of "unbelieving" Americans dropped into their midst. Fundamentalist clergymen later appealed to King Fahd to never rely again on "atheist" troops.

Tapes of clerics' anti-government sermons soon circulated. When physicist Mohammed Al-Masari founded a dissident group in Riyadh in 1993, he was quickly arrested. A year later, two leading anti-government clerics were also locked up. Then the bloodshed began.

Terrorist bombs in 1995 and last June killed 24 Americans at two U.S.

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SAAD AL-FAQIH
Saudi dissident

military sites. Saudi officials suggest an Iranian link, but the local connection is clear: Four young men executed for the first attack were from the Saudi heartland.

"Saudis view the American presence at best ambiguously, and at worst as a provocation," said a former high-ranking U.S. diplomat who worked in Saudi Arabia.

"There is a division between the government," the diplomat said, "that is, the royal family — and the man on the street."

Those ordinary Saudis are the target of a flood of faxes the dissidents send from abroad. "Come to the holy war, to a confrontation with the United States!" Al-Masari, now in exile in London, declared in one.

The groups vary in militancy and seem poorly coordinated. No charismatic leader has emerged. Despite claims they are the "tip of an iceberg," no widespread anti-government activity has surfaced inside the tightly controlled country.

Slowly weakening monarchy

While the dissidents build, the ruling House of Saud may need to rebuild.

Public opinion is hard to gauge in a country where phone lines are assumed tapped, restaurant conversations must be guarded, and the press sticks to the government line. But local journalists, speaking privately, say ordinary Saudis sound increasingly fed up with the corruption and ostentatious living of the Saudis.

Those habits are not new, but the proliferation of Saud princes adds to the burden on a society whose royals siphon off billions in oil revenue before it reaches the treasury.

Their internal rivalries could also weaken the Saudis.

After King Fahd, in his mid-70s, suffered a reported stroke in late 1995, he temporarily handed power to half-brother Crown Prince Abdullah. He soon took it back — at the behest, diplomats say, of his full brothers, led by Defense Minister Prince Sultan, who

resented Abdullah's interference in their government business.

Spinning around

Even if these aging sons of founding father King Abdel Aziz paper over their differences, the nation faces a revolving door of elderly princes, tied to the old ways, as successors to Fahd.

Some Saudis apparently favor new ways, and look to an old friend for help. "Senior Saudis asked us to put pressure on their family to clean up their act," a knowledgeable American source said. "We haven't done anything."

Saudi political scientist Abdel-Aziz Al-Fayez, a member of the new Majlis, said pressing for Western-style democracy would be pointless.

"I don't see the demand," he said. "In this part of the world people want stability. And this country is stable."

"Stability" may not include the sight of elected representatives in the grand, unused Majlis chamber, built during a spell of liberalization talk in the 1980s. But stability does include the benefits of an oil-fed welfare state: free health services, transportation subsidies, interest-free housing loans, no taxes.

A slumping oil market had threatened those benefits, but a recent rebound in prices saved them from deep cuts. Now new trouble looms.

The one-industry economy is producing too few new jobs for a population — 17 million — growing 3.5 percent a year. Without work, dispirited university graduates are believed turning to the anti-government message of ultraconservative Islamic preachers.

Their American advisers are pressing the Saudis to diversify the economy. The index to stability, meanwhile, will lie not in the bitterness of faxes from London, but in the spot price of sweet crude pumped from beneath Saudi sands.

Daily Nebraskan

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FAX NUMBER: 472-1761

The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling 472-2588. The public has access to the Publications Board. Subscription price is \$55 for one year. Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, Neb. ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1997 DAILY NEBRASKAN