

News Digest

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Israel may step away from peace process

■ Palestinian leader's remarks on statehood threaten to end agreements.

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened Monday to walk away from the Mideast peace agreements if Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat unilaterally declares statehood in May.

Netanyahu's warning came a day after Arafat said in Washington that "I hope that this (coming) year will be the year of the independent Palestinian state."

Palestinian negotiator Hassan Asfour said the Palestinians are paying no heed to Netanyahu's threats.

"Let him shout as much as he pleases," Asfour said.

The Palestinians say the peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians do not prevent Arafat from declaring statehood May 4, 1999, the day the five-year period of Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip ends.

The new acrimony came just over a week after the implementation of stage one of the land-for-security agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Under the plan, Israel is to withdraw from 13 percent of the West Bank by the end of January in exchange for Palestinian measures against Islamic militants.

Israel also agreed to free 750 Palestinian prisoners. In the first stage, Israel released 250, most of them criminals, prompting Palestinian complaints that the agreement was breached. The Palestinians demand that Israel free political activists and those jailed for anti-Israeli activities.

The chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, flew to Washington on Monday to raise the issue with the

Clinton administration.

"This is a crisis situation, and we have asked for American intervention," Erekat said Sunday.

Netanyahu said he would not compromise.

"I do not free murderers. I do not release people with blood on their hands," he told Israel radio.

Israel holds about 2,500 prisoners. Popular pressure on Arafat has grown, with prisoners' relatives demonstrating daily against the Palestinian Authority and accusing it of abandoning the prisoners.

Netanyahu described Arafat's latest

remarks concerning statehood as "a gross violation" of the Oslo peace accords.

The prime minister's office issued a statement saying that if Arafat declares a state "this will mean the collapse of the Oslo agreements."

Netanyahu has warned that he would respond by annexing parts of the West Bank.

Monday, Netanyahu did not make specific threats, saying only that "we can do a great deal." He said he would raise the issue when his Cabinet meets again to consider the next stage of the Wye River peace accord.

GOP expands Clinton queries

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican-led House Judiciary Committee is expanding its impeachment investigation to fund-raising allegations against President Bill Clinton, committee sources said Monday.

The panel will seek subpoenas for internal Justice Department memos debating whether an independent counsel should have been named in the fund-raising inquiry, said the sources, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Republicans also will seek testimony this week from FBI Director Louis Freeh and Justice Department prosecutor Charles LaBella, both of whom advocated an independent counsel be named to investigate Clinton's 1996 fund-raising activities.

The Republicans will vote behind closed doors today also to send docu-

Clinton under fire

ment subpoenas to Attorney General Janet Reno and Clinton demanding that the secret memos Freeh and LaBella wrote advocating their positions be turned over to the committee, the sources said.

They said Republicans also plan to send a subpoena to Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr seeking evidence and testimony that his investigators gathered from John Huang, a key figure in the fund-raising controversy.

Republicans control the Judiciary Committee, 21-16.

The abrupt move by Republicans came as the panel's chairman, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., sharply attacked Clinton's answers to 81 questions

posed by impeachment investigators. He contended the president "chose to evade" questions in a manner that could force the panel to accept allegations against Clinton as fact.

"He has made it very clear he is going to stick with his reliance on bizarre technical definitions and legalistic defenses," Hyde said.

Meanwhile, the White House brushed off an invitation to have Clinton testify in the panel's impeachment inquiry. "I don't think it's very likely you'll see the president appear before that committee," spokesman Joe Lockhart said.

Hyde said he still would welcome Clinton or his lawyers to make a presentation of facts before the committee to rebut evidence concerning allegations of perjury and obstruction of justice submitted by Starr.

Bosnian Serb faces war crimes tribunal

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — To his Muslim prisoners, Bosnian Serb Goran Jelasic was a genocidal monster who, prosecutors say, once bragged that "he had to kill 20 or 30 Muslims before his morning coffee."

The 30-year-old mechanic used the nickname Adolf "with a perverse pride in the genocidal symbolism it represented," U.N. prosecutor Terree Bowers said at the start Monday of Jelasic's genocide trial at the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal.

Jelasic pleaded guilty in October to murdering 12 Muslims and Croats in and around the Serb-run Luka camp in Brcko, northern Bosnia, in May 1992, during the Bosnian war.

Prosecutors accuse him of the even graver crime of genocide, and they plan to present evidence about the killings that includes the possible involvement of more senior Serbs. The trial also gives survivors of Jelasic's killing rampage a chance to tell their story in court.

Bowers, an American, told a three-judge panel that Jelasic admitted

in interviews with investigators to having committed many more murders than the dozen to which he has pleaded guilty.

Jelasic will be convicted of those murders and sentenced at the end of his trial, which is expected to last well into next year. He faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

"We will never be able to fix the exact number" of victims, Bowers said. "But if we are to believe even a small percentage of the totals which Goran Jelasic claimed, then his victims certainly number well over 100."

The U.N. court, set up in 1993, has already convicted two Muslims, two Bosnian Croats and a Bosnian Serb of murder, rape, torture and other war crimes, but it has yet to register a genocide conviction.

The first witness, a 37-year-old Muslim who testified on the condition that he be identified only as Witness A, said he saw Jelasic, helped by Serb guards, murder two men by shooting them once each in the head despite the victims' pleas for mercy.

"It was my impression that they enjoyed it more when the victim pleaded with them," Witness A said.

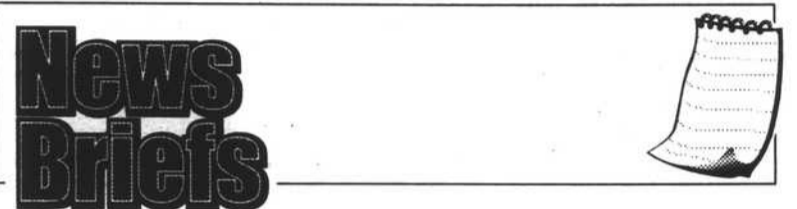
Jelasic's campaign of murder stands out for its cold-bloodedness, even at a tribunal set up to deal exclusively with atrocities.

"Once, Goran Jelasic even declined assistance from a guard, noting that he was still in 'good form' even though he had killed over 60 people," Bowers said, citing statements by witnesses who were to testify later.

Bowers told the judges that Bosnian Serb authorities released Jelasic from jail, where he had been serving three years for fraud, and sent him to Brcko to murder Muslims.

"Goran Jelasic was not a reluctant tool of the genocide who was being compelled by Serb authorities to act against his will. Quite to the contrary... Jelasic was an efficient and enthusiastic participant," Bowers said.

"To victims in Brcko, the face of genocide was the face of Goran Jelasic."



Reno to decide on counsel for former White House aide

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno postponed a decision Monday on whether an independent counsel should investigate a former top White House aide who is accused of lying about aid for a union that contributed to Democrats.

A special court gave Reno up to 60 more days to review the case of former White House deputy chief of staff Harold Ickes.

Justice aides were divided on how Reno should handle the allegation that Ickes committed perjury before a Senate committee about the administration's efforts on behalf of the Teamsters Union in a 1995 strike against Diamond Walnut Co.

Ickes has denied any wrongdoing in the matter, which stems from one question he was asked during the third day of a private deposition he gave the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee on Sept. 22, 1997.

In 1995, Ickes met with Teamsters leaders about the Diamond Walnut strike. An administration memo prepared for him noted that the union had given \$2.4 million for Democratic candidates in 1992 and suggested that the party should consider helping the Teamsters on key issues, like the strike, if it wanted to continue to receive that support.

GOP, Clinton battle in court about 2000 census results

WASHINGTON (AP) — With money and votes across the nation at stake, the Clinton administration asked the Supreme Court on Monday to reject a Republican challenge and let it adjust the 2000 census results to make up for an expected undercount of minorities.

No census finds everyone, but the government's plan "will best achieve the Constitution's goal of determining the number of persons in each state," Solicitor General Seth Waxman told the court. "It is in effect a quality check" on the initial head count to be conducted April 1, 2000.

But lawyers for the Republican-led House and a group of private citizens insisted the proposal violates the Constitution and federal law.

"A 100 percent head count is the only permissible means of apportioning the population," said Michael A. Carvin, representing private citizens from six states. So far, two lower courts have ruled the government's plan unlawful.

AIDS virus may develop into South African crisis

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — AIDS has rapidly crept up on South Africa and poses a tragedy worse than apartheid, the United Nations AIDS branch said Monday.

"We are faced with an unprecedented crisis," said Dr. Peter Piot, head of the U.N. AIDS program. He said the scourge is worse than South Africa's former system of white minority rule or natural tragedies such as drought.

Global AIDS figures released last week show the crisis is burning hottest in Africa, particularly the southern part.

HIV infection rates in Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe — South African neighbors — hover between 20 percent and 25 percent of the adult population, the United Nations said.

Apartheid, which ended in 1994, helped isolate South Africa and made it a latecomer to the AIDS epidemic. But it is fast catching up with its neighbors.

An estimated 3.2 million South Africans are HIV positive, or about 12 to 14 percent of adults.

Quebec voters choose separatist government

MONTREAL (AP) — Quebec voters, courted more persistently than voters almost anywhere, chose a provincial government Monday in an election that could move Canada closer to another traumatic show-down over secession.

The separatist Parti Quebecois, under the charismatic leadership of Premier Lucien Bouchard, was widely favored to return to power.

If victorious, Bouchard planned to call another referendum on independence whenever he felt conditions were right for a separatist triumph.

Bouchard's main rival was Jean Charest, leader of the anti-separatist Quebec Liberal Party, who tried to convince voters that the province would prosper only if the decades-old threat of secession was abandoned.

Charest, 40, was an early favorite, but despite his family roots in Quebec, he was widely perceived by the province's French-speaking majority as more of an outsider than the 59-year-old Bouchard and less likely to do battle for the province in any confrontations with the federal government.

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Questions? Comments?
Ask for the appropriate section editor at (402) 472-2588
or e-mail dn@unl.edu.

Fax number: (402) 472-1761
World Wide Web: www.unl.edu/DailyNeb

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