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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, July 10

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News Excerpts

July 10, 2017

Israel Hayom

Greenblatt to Return to Region for Talks

The Trump administration's special envoy for international negotiations, Jason Greenblatt, was scheduled to leave last night for Israel, said a White House official. The White House official said that the primary purpose of the visit was to meet with US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, but said that Greenblatt was also likely to hold additional meetings as well. According to Israeli media, Greenblatt is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PA Chairman Abu Mazen on Wednesday. Greenblatt is also likely to meet with the families of the Israel citizens who are being held captive by Hamas, Abera Mengistu, Hisham Abu Sayed and Juma'a Abu Janima, as well as with the families of the dead Israeli soldiers, Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin.

See also, ["Greenblatt Returns to Israel to Push Peace Process" \(Forward\)](#)

Ynet News

Labor Party Votes as Candidates Promise Return to Greatness

The Labor party is to open some 80 voting stations across the country for its second primaries round on Monday at 11:00, where its 52,505 registered voters will be able to decide who will be the party's next leader. The two candidates to come out victorious from the first voting round are MK and former Labor leader Amir Peretz and former environmental protection minister Avi Gabbay. Voting is to end at 21:00, with results expected to be announced by 21:45.

See also, ["Israeli Labor Party to Pick Netanyahu Opponent in Primary Runoff" \(Bloomberg\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Submarine Affair: Israel Detains 6, Including Bibi Associate

Police detained six suspects Monday morning on suspicion of corruption offenses in the investigation of Israel's acquisition of three German-made submarines, termed Case 3,000. The six suspects were government officials and worked in the private sector at the time of the submarine deal. Three of the suspects are senior officials and one a close associate of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They were detained on suspicion of bribery, fraud, money laundering, and tax offenses.

Washington Post

Israeli List of Unrecognized US Rabbis Points to Rift

Israel's Chief Rabbinate has compiled a list of overseas rabbis whose authority they refused to recognize when it comes to certifying the Jewishness of someone who wants to get married in Israel. The list includes a number of prominent Orthodox rabbis in North America. The rabbinate, which oversees religious rituals for Israeli Jews, such as weddings, births and burials, would not say why it had rejected the overseas rabbis' credentials or provide the criteria for securing their recognition. The list, which includes 160 rabbis from 24 countries, threatened to deepen a rift between overseas Jewish communities and Israeli religious authorities.

See also, ["Have Israel's Religious Authorities 'Blacklisted' 160 Rabbis?" \(NPR\)](#)

Soldier Hurt After Pal. Attacks Soldiers Near WB Settlement

Palestinian man attempted to run over a group of soldiers near the West Bank settlement of Tekoa on Monday when his car veered off and crashed into a pole. He then exited the car and tried stabbing the group, according to the Israeli army. The Palestinian man was shot and killed, and a soldier was moderately wounded. Soldiers present at the scene said that a Palestinian car sped toward them as they exchanged guard at a watchtower, hitting a soldier standing outside it and wounding him. The car then sped off and hit a nearby safety rail. According to the army, the driver exited the car while brandishing a knife and attempted to stab the soldiers. He was then shot by forces at the scene.

See also, ["Soldier Hurt in Apparent West Bank Ramming Attack" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

PA Takes 'Historic' Step Toward Energy Independence

High-ranking Palestinian and Israeli officials gathered in a field outside the West Bank city of Jenin on Monday to turn on the first-ever piece of Palestinian-owned electricity infrastructure and ink a new electricity agreement between the two sides. The deal, hailed as "historic" by signatories, will for the first time set parameters for the supply of power between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which for years has seen the PA default on billions of shekels of debt and Israel subsequently withhold electricity. After the signing of the agreement, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, Israel's Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water Resources Yuval Steinitz, Israel Electric Corporation Chairman Yiftah Ron-Tal and Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories Major General Yoav Mordechai together turned on the Al-Jalameh Substation.

See also, ["West Bank Gets Israeli Power Boost as Gaza Endures Energy Crisis" \(USA News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Hamas Chief Haniyeh: Prisoner Swap Around the Corner

Newly elected Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday suggested that Hamas is close to reaching a prisoner swap deal with Israel, in his first major speech since assuming the position. "Their [Palestinian prisoners] liberation has become closer than any time in the past," said Haniyeh, who resides in the Gaza Strip's Shati refugee camp, speaking before a number of Gaza-based Hamas leaders. Channel 11 reported last week that Hamas and Israel are negotiating a prisoner swap through an unnamed third party.

See also, ["Israel Denies Reports of Hamas Prisoner Swap" \(BICOM\)](#)

Times of Israel

Report Sheds Light on Missile Factories Being Built in Lebanon

The Iran-backed Hezbollah terrorist group is constructing at least two underground facilities in Lebanon for manufacturing missiles and other weaponry, according to a report by the French Intelligence Online magazine. While reports of these subterranean weapons facilities have been published in Arab media outlets before, the Intelligence Online article included two previously unknown pieces of information: the type of weaponry being produced and the approximate locations of two factories. Sources told the French industry magazine that one of the factories is being built in northern Lebanon, near the town of Hermel in the eastern Bekaa Valley. The second facility is reportedly being constructed along the southern coast, between the towns of Sidon and Tyre.

The Conservative Versus the Hopeful

By Ben Caspit

- I wish I could recommend whom the registered Labor Party members should vote for today. If I had the right to vote, I would deliberate to the last moment. Both Amir Peretz and Avi Gabbai have unmistakable advantages over each other. Both also have glaring drawbacks. The decision, any decision, will be a photo finish. And yet:
- If I believed that there were a chance that the leader to be elected today would be the next prime minister, I would vote for Amir Peretz. His record in politics is long. The Knesset's most veteran legislator, a politician through and through, a former defense minister, Histadrut chairman, a lifelong fighter who's seen it all, who's fallen down and gotten back up, who's known victory and defeat, who's been buried and come back. Peretz is a sure bet for whoever likes to play it safe. He's experienced, sober-minded, and ready. His problem is that at this stage, it doesn't look like the chairman of the Labor Party can threaten the national leadership.
- For that reason, if I believed that I were electing a potential opposition chairman capable of shaking up the party and recreating it, I would vote for Avi Gabbai. If voting for Peretz is a conservative choice, voting for Gabbai is the hopeful option. To vote for Gabbai is to head into the unknown. It would be an unprecedented event in the history of the Labor Party that would be discussed, reviewed and critically examined with an intensity that is disproportionate to the status of the party itself. It would be electro-shock therapy that could wake the dead and put it back on its feet, or kill it for good and give it an ignominious burial.
- Both Peretz and Gabbai say that they know how to make the difference. Peretz says that he beat Netanyahu in 2006. Well, that's not quite accurate. The one who beat Netanyahu in 2006 was Ehud Olmert, thanks to the leftover glory of Ariel Sharon. Peretz managed to finish in second place when he came out ahead of the battered Likud in a number of cities in the periphery. It takes a well-developed imagination to count on that story to beat Bibi.
- Avi Gabbai also seems like a daydreamer, for now. He says that he can bring the voters who are currently in Yair Lapid's court back home in droves. There is no evidence to support Gabbai's self-confidence at the moment. Nevertheless, it must be said that both Peretz and Gabbai have done surprisingly well against all odds. Not long ago, the very fact that both of them are currently competing in the runoff for the leadership of the Labor Party would have been perceived as delusional. Peretz, who returned to life after the political establishment had sat *shiva* for him, and Gabbai, who came out of nowhere and successfully broke into the heart of Israel's most conservative and fossilized party practically overnight.
- Both of them started from the bottom, perhaps the lowest possible. Peretz was born in Morocco and raised in Sderot, a real self-made man who clawed his way up a slippery slope. He never left Sderot, never tried to make money for himself, he is a public servant in the purest sense of the word. Gabbai was born in a transit camp for new immigrants in Jerusalem. His parents are also immigrants from Morocco. No one bet on him at first, either. A Bezeq technician's son who became Bezeq's CEO, who joined the cream of the economic crop and definitely worked to make money for himself and then some. But then he made a U-turn, which is important and respectable in and of itself, and decided to work for us too.

- Both Peretz and Gabbai have since managed to defect from their original platforms. Peretz even did it twice. Gabbai, who founded Kulanu together with Moshe Kahlon, settled for doing it once. Anyone who listens to Shelly Yachimovich in a one-on-one conversation will never vote for Peretz. Anyone who hears Moshe Kahlon in a closed forum won't get close to Gabbai. Their advantages and drawbacks balance each other out completely. They are both similar and different, they complement each other while being total opposites. Peretz talks in an old-fashioned way, Gabbai is more up to date and efficient. Peretz gives cumbersome and sometimes evasive answers, Gabbai strives to give direct answers. Peretz is analog, Gabbai is digital. Both of them are focused, stubborn and goal-oriented. Those who prefer a bird in hand will vote for Peretz. Those who count on having two in the bush will vote for Gabbai. Any outcome is possible.

Ben Caspit is a senior columnist for Ma'ariv and other Israeli newspapers.

Summary:

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Annexing to Jerusalem

By Amihai Attali

- **Who cares more about Jerusalem—the Likud or the Jewish Home? The fight between the two parties for right wing voters continues to gain momentum. After Jewish Home Chairman Naftali Bennett drafted an amendment to Basic Law: Jerusalem that would prevent a future concession of parts of the city, Likud officials felt they couldn't afford to lag behind and responded with an initiative of their own: the greater Jerusalem bill, which is designed to annex major settlements to the city.**
- **Likud officials realized that the goal of annexing settlements to Israel was going to be difficult, so they have now found a work-around solution—to annex them to Jerusalem. Minister Yisrael Katz and MK Yoav Kisch of the Likud intend to submit to the cabinet this morning a bill that would turn Jerusalem into a huge metropolis in which 150,000 Israelis who live in five settlements in Judea and Samaria would become formally residents of Jerusalem: Maale Adumim, Givat Zeev, the [settlements in the] Etzion Bloc, Efrat and Beitar Illit.**
- **The new law would not dismantle the local authorities and their subordinate municipal departments. To the contrary, the bill explicitly stipulates that the five would remain independent authorities that would continue to administer their own affairs and elect their own leaders, but each would also be considered a “daughter city” of Jerusalem and their residents would be eligible to vote in the elections for Jerusalem mayor and the city council.**
- **The result will be that those settlements will not be annexed to Israel, but will be annexed to Jerusalem.**
- **In tandem with upgrading the status of the five Jewish local authorities, the bill also seeks to remove more than 100,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem from the city's municipal responsibility. According to the bill, the residents of the Shuafat refugee camp, Akeb and Anata would be removed from the responsibility of the Jerusalem municipality and become independent local authorities. The residents of those neighborhoods would lose their right to vote in mayoral elections (a right that all residents of East Jerusalem currently possess but which most refrain from exercising).**
- **Minister Yisrael Katz first raised the idea of creating a “greater Jerusalem” a decade ago. MK Yoav Kisch, who co-drafted the bill with MK Bezalel Smotrich of the Jewish Home to annex Maale Adumim to Israel that was scuttled time and again, realized that the chances of full-blown annexation were currently slim—and decided to embrace Katz's ideas instead.**
- **Katz and Kisch's goal is to start out by creating shared interests and resources [between the settlements in question and Jerusalem], in hope that the day will arrive on which Israel will be able to fully annex the 150,000 Jewish Israelis who live in those local authorities. The removal of the roughly 100,000 Arab residents from the municipal census is to be done immediately in order to help offset the impact of the negative immigration of Jewish residents in the city. Katz and Kisch recently met with Eyal Yinon, the Knesset's legal counsel, and honed the wording of the bill so that it would withstand the scrutiny of the High Court of Justice.**

- Minister Katz told *Yedioth Ahronoth*: “The international political reality won’t allow us to apply sovereignty to those areas at present, so for now we are going to annex them to Jerusalem’s territory. I intend to fight with all my might and with all my strength so that this bill is approved without any compromises. I will apply pressure on anyone who describes himself as [belonging to] a Zionist party. This isn’t the application of sovereignty that I would be pleased to see happen, but this is definitely a first step in that direction.”
- MK Kisch took the opportunity to implicitly criticize Minister Naftali Bennett. “This bill will facilitate a solid Jewish majority in greater Jerusalem and in Jerusalem itself. Meanwhile, it will facilitate regional thinking about the Jerusalem metropolitan area and will improve governance in the Arab neighborhoods. Jerusalem is the united and eternal capital of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and we need to do everything possible to strengthen it. I’ll leave the declarations about the delusional idea of partitioning Jerusalem to others. We have to look out for Jerusalem now, it needs to have its status as the capital of Israel with a solid Jewish majority bolstered.”

Amihai Attali is a contributor to Yedioth Ahronoth.

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