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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, July 4

Headlines:

- **Indian PM Modi to Sign 7 Cooperation Agreements in Israel Visit**
- **Abbas to Africa: No ties Without end of Military Rule**
- **Haley Asks UNESCO to Oppose Palestinian Move on Hebron**
- **1,800 East Jerusalem Homes set For Approval For Jews**
- **Israel's Labor Party Heads to Polls in Race for Leadership**
- **Israeli Reconnaissance Drone Crashes in Gaza**
- **Friedman Invites Settlers to July 4th Event for First Time**
- **Netanyahu Pledges to Make Every Jew 'Feel at Home'**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "The Western Wall and the Jewish Pocket"**
 - By Nahum Barnea, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **Ha'aretz: "Whoever Becomes the Head of Israel's Labor Party Will Face Mission Impossible"**
 - By Yossi Verter, political commentator at Ha'aretz

News Excerpts

July 4, 2017

Ynet News

Indian PM Modi to Sign 7 Cooperation Agreements in Israel Visit

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived today for a historic three-day visit, during which he will sign seven cooperation agreements between the two countries. This is the first time an Indian prime minister visits Israel, attesting to the warming of ties between the two countries after years of a behind-the-scenes thriving military relationship. India has traditionally trodden a careful diplomatic line in the region, wary of upsetting Arab states and Iran—upon whom it relies for its vast imports of oil—and its large Muslim minority population, which numbers at 180 million. It has been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause, even as it quietly pursued ties with Israel, which has also taken steps toward India.

[See also, "Narendra Modi's visit to Israel" \(The Hindu\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Abbas to Africa: No ties Without end of Military Rule

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday told African states that improved ties with Israel should be calculated in relation to the Jewish state's commitment to ceasing its military rule over Palestinian territories. Over the past year, Israel has launched an intensive effort bolster its ties with African states, making inroads in a continent that has long refrained from enhancing such cooperation. "The Israeli state of occupation's efforts to participate in your regional conferences and organize continental conferences encourages it to continue its arrogance, occupy Palestine and deny the Palestinian people's rights," Abbas told the 29th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia."

[See also, "Abbas seeks to turn Africa against Israel" \(Arutz 7\)](#)

i24 News

Haley Asks UNESCO to Oppose Palestinian Move on Hebron

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley sent a letter to two senior UN officials on Friday, asking them to oppose a Palestinian effort to get UNESCO's World Heritage Committee to adopt a resolution declaring Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs Palestinian heritage sites. Haley's letter comes on top of diplomatic protests lodged by U.S. embassies in recent weeks with all 21 countries on the World Heritage Committee. In their resolution, the Palestinians claim that the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Hebron are endangered by the Israeli occupation. Therefore, they have asked the committee to use a fast-track emergency procedure to declare these areas world heritage sites belonging to the Palestinians. [See also, "US UN Envoy Haley steps in to defeat UNESCO Hebron resolution" \(Ynet\)](#)

Times of Israel

1,800 East Jerusalem Homes set For Approval For Jews

The Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee is set to review and advance this month construction for some 1,800 houses in East Jerusalem. During meetings set for both this Tuesday and July 16, the Finance Ministry body is slated to approve a stage known as "depositing" for over 1,060 homes in the Pisgat Ze'ev neighborhood and 684 units in the Gilo, Neve Ya'akov, and Ramot neighborhoods. [See also, "After Long Freeze, Israel Again Promoting East Jerusalem Construction for Jews" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israel's Labor Party Heads to Polls in Race for Leadership

After a year of ugly infighting, 52,504 Labor Party members will begin voting at 11 A.M. on Tuesday to elect a new party leader. The voting is electronic, so the result will be announced almost immediately after the polls close at 9 P.M. However, in the likely event that no candidate wins at least 40 percent of the vote, the top two candidates will face each other in a second-round next Monday. Though two of the original candidates, Amiram Levin and Dina Dayan, have dropped out, seven of them remain in the race. Since actual voter turnout is only expected to be around 50 to 55 percent, these candidates will be splitting roughly 26,000 to 30,000 votes among themselves. This means that even a few hundred votes could be the difference between making it into the run-off and being knocked out. See also, ["In Israel's Labor Race, Herzog Is at Least Bringing Livni With Him" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israeli Reconnaissance Drone Crashes in Gaza

An Israeli surveillance drone crashed early on Tuesday in the Gaza Strip, the military spokesperson confirmed, adding no sensitive information was compromised in the incident. The drone was of the Skylark type, often used for reconnaissance in the field by Israeli troops. "The incident is being investigated," the spokesperson added. The latest such event took place in March when a reconnaissance drone crashed in the northern Gaza Strip. Earlier this month, an Israeli surveillance drone crashed in southern Lebanon. According to reports in Lebanese media, it fell close to the border village of Alma Shaab in the mountainous Naqoura region.

Friedman Invites Settlers to July 4th Event for First Time

US Ambassador David Friedman has invited a large delegation of Israeli settler leaders to an American Independence Day reception at his official Herzliya residence, highlighting the new American administration's openness toward the West Bank settlement movement. Among those invited to the annual event Monday night are Avi Roeh, head of the Yesha settlers council; Yossi Dagan, head of the Samaria Regional Council; the mayors of the settlements of Ariel, Maaleh Adumim and Efrat. Also at the party will be Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Reuven Rivlin, who are expected to deliver remarks, as well as other senior Israeli officials. See also, ["US ambassador invites Israeli settler heads to July 4 celebration for first time" \(i24 News\)](#)

Netanyahu Pledges to Make Every Jew 'Feel at Home'

Prime Minister Netanyahu pledged Monday to make the Western Wall a place where all Jews can feel at home. "I am committed, and I remain committed, to making every Jew feel at home in Israel, including at the Kotel," he said at the annual July 4th ceremony at the US ambassador's residence in Herzliya. "All we need is patience and perseverance." Netanyahu referred to the Wall, after saying the bond between Israel and the US "was so evident in the historic visit of President [Donald] Trump to Israel." Netanyahu said Israel will always remember that Trump was the first president to make his first foreign trip to Israel. See also, [. Bush 'a symbol of good vs evil,' says Netanyahu" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

The Western Wall and the Jewish Pocket

American Jews' threats to withhold donations from Israel are based on the assumption that striking at the Israelis' pocket will make them give in. The panic that has consumed Prime Minister Netanyahu and his colleagues indicates that, sadly, they may be right.

By Nahum Barnea, columnist at Yedioth Ahronioth

- There are several aspects in the conflict between the Netanyahu government and the Jewish establishment in the United States, which are as outrageous as the conflict itself. They should be pondered before this faux pas is buried in another committee.
- 1. Donations: Following the government's decision to freeze plans for an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall, we have been informed time and again that major donors to Israeli institutions and organizations are threatening to withhold donations if the decision isn't cancelled immediately. Every Israeli who respects his country could say to these donors: We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for everything you have given us so far. You have the right to stop, you have the right to continue, but don't threaten us.
- General Barker, who was the commander of the British forces in the Land of Israel towards the end of the British Mandate period, ordered his soldiers to stay away from Jewish businesses. "(We) will be punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as much as any, by striking at their pockets and showing our contempt for them," he wrote. While this comment won him the reputation of an anti-Semite, it was wrong—the damage to the Jewish Yishuv's pocket did not destroy its struggle. Quite the opposite.
- The donors' threats are based on the same assumption: The Israelis won't be able to endure a blow to their pockets; they will give in. And surely, the panic that has consumed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his colleagues following the threats from America indicates that they used an effective weapon. The current Israeli government offers plenty of ardent speeches about national pride, a national flag and applause, but its pride is diminished when dollars are waved in its face.
- Donations from America are but a jot in the national income. They are very important for the institutions that receive them, but Israeli society in general can do without them. In order to receive donations, we pretend to be miserable, in contrast to the state's real condition. We place responsibility for the welfare of our elderly and poor on Evangelical Christians, donors of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. It's shameful.
- 2. Assimilation: I learned from a column written by a journalist who became Haredi that the problem is not the Orthodox establishment's attitude towards Reform Jews, but the assimilation among Jewish communities in the West. "We are losing the Jewish people," she warned.
- Why are we losing them? There has been no record of mass religious conversions among the Diaspora Jewry in recent generations. Jews are not converting to Christianity or to Islam. There is an issue of mixed marriages, which is a result of the fact that Jews live securely among gentiles. The establishment is trying to deal with the problem by investing in Jewish education and in the Taglit-Birthright project, which apart from being a tourist initiative, aims to serve as a matchmaking enterprise. Most non-Jews and people with a Jewish father not considered Jewish

according to Jewish law want to raise their children as Jews—all the more so the Reform and Conservative Jews. The Orthodox establishment is closing the door on their faces. That's causing us to lose the Jewish people.

- **3. The Western Wall: Before 1967, there were only two places in Jerusalem where one could catch a glimpse of the Kotel. One was in the demilitarized area, near East Talpiot, and the other was in the Italian hospital, opposite the new gate. It was so close yet so far away. There was a huge attraction. It faded away when we got there, a paratroopers' company, from a different front, on the eighth day of the Six-Day War, and saw the bulldozers tearing down the Mughrabi neighborhood and turning the Kotel into a wall. As the Kotel was expanded, widened and uncovered, it lost its uniqueness. We had dreamt of a Kotel but we got a wall.**
- **The state had trouble defining the Western Wall. Is it a national or religious site? And if it's both, which is more powerful? The Rabbinate, and the Haredi parties that control it, entered this void. The seculars were pushed away; the Reform and Conservative Jews were humiliated. The national-religious Jews, who once saw the Kotel as the beginning of our redemption, are now looking up to the Temple Mount. They are flocking to the site in droves, despite the rabbinical ban.**
- **Occasionally, I ask senior officials in the Reform movement why are they so interested in the Western Wall. After all, they don't believe in trees and stones. I receive unclear answers. The truth is they are demanding access to the Kotel because it's there. They are fighting for real estate.**
- **The solution for the Western Wall is not creating ghettos for women and different Jewish streams, but opening it up to everyone. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, not far from there, a battle has been going on for hundreds of years over every piece of real estate. The Jewish government has been asked to decide. There may be no escape but to pass the decision on the control of the Western Wall to the Muslim Waqf.**
- **4. Zionism: Theodore Herzl was the visionary of the state of the Jews. Netanyahu's Israel is demanding to be recognized as a Jewish state, but it shirking its responsibility for the Jews. It's time to go back to Herzl's vision: To reestablish the state of the Jews.**

SUMMARY: The solution for the Western Wall is not creating ghettos for women and different Jewish streams, but opening it up to everyone. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, not far from there, a battle has been going on for hundreds of years over every piece of real estate. The Jewish government has been asked to decide. There may be no escape but to pass the decision on the control of the Western Wall to the Muslim Waqf. Theodore Herzl was the visionary of the state of the Jews. Netanyahu's Israel is demanding to be recognized as a Jewish state, but it shirking its responsibility for the Jews. It's time to go back to Herzl's vision: To reestablish the state of the Jews.

Whoever Becomes the Head of Israel's Labor Party Will Face Mission Impossible

By Yossi Verter, political commentator at Ha'aretz

- Seven candidates, only five of them relevant, are competing in Tuesday's primary to be elected [Labor Party](#) leader and its candidate for prime minister. There are newish faces and familiar faces; those with charisma and those liable to put you to sleep; the friendly and the antagonistic; the slightly modest and the incurably arrogant. None of them are the miracle worker the Labor Party needs.
- The graph doesn't lie, and the curve is bleak. The party that won 44 seats a quarter-century ago has barely managed to win 20 over the past 20 years. The 24 seats that Zionist Union won in the last election was a kind of electoral illusion, the fruit of the pact between Labor (led by Isaac Herzog) and Hatnuah (led by Tzipi Livni), along with the 2.5 Kadima seats that evaporated.
- Labor alone, without crutches or airbags, could never get more than 15 seats at the polls. Recent polls have the whole alliance getting only 12 seats – and that's on a good day, when the stars and moon are aligned. That's no way to replace a government.
- Even during the government's toughest days, when the ruling party was down in the polls, the chief opposition party that was meant to be the prime beneficiary was forced to go to bed hungry. Half of Labor's voters are now parked with Yair Lapid's centrist Yesh Atid party. But even if some of them make their way home, Labor won't become more relevant. Its sicknesses, faults, weaknesses and internal dissension won't disappear Tuesday evening, nor next week after the second round of voting, when the outcome will probably become known.
- Whoever is chosen will be fated to cope with a party that consumes its leaders, one beset by rot and despair. True, Yitzhak Rabin was forced to live alongside Shimon Peres, and in their day there were also camps and resentments. But they were Rabin and Peres. Once the great leaders exited and all that was left was the negative phenomenon that grew increasingly worse, we got what we've got.
- To halt the contraction and irrelevance, something greater is needed than just another leader whose days will be numbered from the moment he's elected. The party's current chairman, Herzog, is proposing a "bloc" – the magic word that seeks to reproduce the relative success of the last election. But without Lapid, who at any given time would prefer to don a yarmulke and inaugurate a new neighborhood in the settlement bloc than form a political bloc with a left-wing party, there's nothing to talk about.
- Amir Peretz and Avi Gabbay seem totally confident they can pull it off alone with the disintegrating brand called Labor. Omer Bar-Lev is talking about another round to choose the party leader and Erel Margalit is remaining noncommittal. In the end, though, life will dictate what happens. If the right-wing parties form some kind of alliance before the next election, the

center-left camp will have no choice but to put ego aside in favor of the chance to replace a Likud government that by the next election will have been in place for a decade.

- It could be that this primary is Labor's last chance to rehabilitate itself, if only partially – though it could be that this opportunity has long passed.

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