



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Wednesday, June 5

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News Excerpts

June 5, 2019

Ynet News

Nechama Rivlin, Wife of Israel's President, Dies at 73

Nechama Rivlin, the wife of President Reuven Rivlin, died Tuesday at the age of 73, a day before her 74th birthday. The funeral is set to take place on Wednesday afternoon in Jerusalem. Mrs. Rivlin was a popular first lady who focused on the arts, the environment and children with special needs, and was a trusted adviser to her husband.

See also, ["As Rivlin Mourns the Love of His Life, Liberal Israelis Pray He Retains the Strength She Gave Him to Confront Netanyahu" \(by Chemi Shalev, Ha'aretz\)](#)

Channel 12 News

Likud Ministers Oppose Reserving Slot for Shaked

Likud ministers are vehemently opposed to having Ayelet Shaked join the Likud's ranks. They said that after they submissively bowed to the decision to integrate Kulanu's members into the Likud, they would not agree to have anyone else be inserted into the list, which would push them further back. The ministers' opposition will serve to reduce Shaked's chances of being able to join the Likud, which faces several impediments that stem from the complicated procedural problems that would need to be overcome to facilitate placing her on the party's slate.

Israel National News

Kushner Meets EU Official to Discuss Peace Plan

US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and Middle East peace adviser Jared Kushner on Tuesday met European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker for talks in Brussels, *AFP* reported. Kushner arrived in Brussels from London, where his father-in-law is making a state visit. The trip comes at a time when international hopes are dimming for a US peace plan for the Middle East. Acknowledging that economic development was "crucial", the EU insisted "it must be accompanied by viable political progress that takes into account the aspirations of both the Palestinians and the Israelis," the spokesman added in a statement.

Times of Israel

Palestinian Premier Warns of PA Collapse by July or August

Speaking with the New York Times in an interview published Wednesday, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warned that the PA would collapse by July or August if a financial standoff with Israel isn't resolved. Shtayyeh criticized the Trump administration for touting the Bahrain conference as focused on improving Palestinian economy, while withdrawing its funds to Palestinians. Shtayyeh also threatened that the West Bank Palestinian leadership could rescind its recognition of Israel and return to armed struggle if the PA collapses. Israel announced in February that it would withhold \$138 million in monthly payments to the PA — to offset the PA's payments to Palestinians jailed by Israel for terrorism and violence, and to the families of dead terrorists. The taxes Israel collects and transfers to the PA make up hundreds of millions of shekels, more than half of its monthly budget. See also, [New Palestinian Premier Warns of a 'Very Hot Summer' \(New York Times\)](#)

Israel Hayom

A Secret Pay Raise by PA Cabinet Angers Palestinian Public

The Palestinian labor market in the West Bank was limping along in 2017, with unemployment stubbornly high and economic growth slowing. But that didn't stop the Palestinian Authority government from secretly giving itself a series of lavish payouts and perks, highlighted by a 67% salary hike. They were kept quiet for the past two years, but news of the decision leaked this week in a series of documents posted anonymously to social media. The revelations have rocked the West Bank, where the cash-strapped cabinet has been forced to slash the salaries of its employees because of a financial crisis. Coming during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a time of high expenses for struggling families, the report renewed outrage among Palestinians who have long seen their leadership as out of touch and rife with corruption.

Jerusalem Post

Sanders: Netanyahu's Peace is Israel Between Sea, Jordan River

Presidential hopeful Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont raised sharp criticism Tuesday of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In a video clip that was broadcast during the American Jewish Committee Global Forum in Washington, Sanders also said that opposing Netanyahu doesn't make him anti-Israel. Sanders added that "ending the occupation and enabling the Palestinians' independence and self-determination in a sovereign, independent, economically viable state of their own, is in the best interest of the United States, Israel, Palestinians, and the entire region. It is a necessary step in ensuring that Israel is accepted and integrated into the region."

Ha'aretz

Gaza Officials Warn of Escalation Over Israel's 'Foot-dragging'

Officials in Hamas and other Gaza-based organizations warned of escalation in this week's planned demonstration along the border fence with Israel, over what they describe as foot-dragging in implementing agreements reached with Israel. A senior official in the organizing committee of the weekly March of Return demonstrations told Haaretz that Palestinian factions, including Hamas, are demanding the transfer of additional funds from Qatar, a further easing on the import of dual-purpose goods from Israel, meaning goods which can be used for civilian or military purposes, and progressing with humanitarian projects. Some in Gaza say that although the security situation is calm, their conditions other than added hours of electricity and expansion of the fishing zone, have not improved since the last round of clashes ended in early May.

Meet the Conservative Activists Who Want to Override the Supreme Court

The right wing is energetic, well-funded, and, as a recent Jerusalem confab showed, determined to rein in a judicial system it sees as controlled by liberal elites

By SIMONA WEINGLASS

- ... On May 16, The Times of Israel attended the [Israeli Conservatism Conference](#) at the Jerusalem Convention Center, where 700 opinion-shapers, thinkers and activists from the religious and secular right gathered to discuss their beliefs and plans for the future. In stark contrast to the protesters in Tel Aviv, these conservative activists were full of hope. Liberalism is doomed, many said, while the rise of Donald Trump and other right-wing politicians around the world are positive developments.
- Not only were many of the conservative activists confident that the arc of history was bending in their direction, but they had specific plans for policies they sought to implement in the near future. Central among these was the override clause, which was seen by many conference-goers as a major and necessary step toward changing the character of Israeli society by scaling back a judicial system felt to be controlled by unelected elites. Fiercely intelligent, with a unique level of access to Knesset members, and flush with cash from (mostly) anonymous sources, these activists appeared to stand a good chance of success in whatever they undertake.
- If there was a theme to the conservatism conference, which was attended by many of the leading lights of Israel's right-wing media and social media, it was what was perceived as the intellectual and electoral triumph of conservative ideas over liberal ones.
- Amiad Cohen, the director of the Tikvah Fund in Israel, which sponsored the conference, explained that the majority of Israelis are already conservative, and that is why Israel has uniquely managed to avoid the spiritual malaise that plagues other developed nations as a side effect of industrialization and modernity. "In the West there was a breakdown in commitment to religion, to tribes and to communities. Eventually there was a breakdown in commitment to the family and even to the very framework of coupledness," he lamented.
- Cohen pointed to the fact that the United Kingdom had recently set up a government ministry devoted to the problem of loneliness as a symptom of this breakdown.
- Israel, on the other hand, "is the most conservative of Western societies and it is also one of the most vital. There are only two developed countries with a birth rate higher than the replacement rate and these are Israel, at three children per woman, and New Zealand, at 2.3."
- "Children are a project undertaken by people who believe it's worthwhile to be here," he noted.
- Many of the conference speakers warned the audience that Israel's conservative majority is under attack from liberal elites in the media, academia, cultural institutions and the judicial system, who seek to impose their liberal views despite not having been elected to their positions of influence.

- ... A few of the NGOs that had set up stalls at the conference have been around for a long time, like the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, founded in 1976, and the Union for the Public's Right to Know, an organization that monitors left-wing bias in the media, founded in 1995.
- But the majority of conservative organizations were relatively new ventures that have popped up in the last decade.
- These included the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (founded in 2017), the Israeli Center for Immigration Policy (2012), the New Liberal Movement (2011), the Israeli Movement for Governability and Democracy (2013), the Kohelet Forum (2012), National Horizon (2013), Betzedek (2015), the Forum for Civil Society (2017), the Union of Community Rabbis (2014), and Competition–The Movement for Freedom of Occupation (2015). In addition, there were booths devoted to several intellectual and literary publications including Vayehi, a conservative literary journal established in 2019, Mida, an intellectual journal founded in 2012, and Hashiloach, another intellectual journal established in 2016.
- A conservative publishing house, Sela Meir (2014), was offering four books for NIS 100 (\$28). Among their titles were Hebrew translations of Jordan Peterson's "12 Rules for Life," Donald Trump's "How to think like a Billionaire," and David P. Goldman's "How Civilizations Die," as well as books by Israeli authors, including Caroline Glick's "The Israeli solution: A One-State Plan for peace in the Middle East," and Erez Tadmor's "Why Do you Vote Right and get the Left?"
- This proliferation of organizations and activity led some of the conference speakers to remark that Israel's conservative camp is thriving as never before.
- "Look at the left," said Taub during his panel session. "My feeling as a reader is that it's an intellectual wasteland. It's so repetitive and monotonous."
- The right, on the other hand, "has colleges, a publishing house, think tanks, newspapers, television shows, social media, and an abundance of persuasive ideas. The vitality is on the right and people will be attracted to it. That's why I'm so optimistic."
- Many of the participants in the conference were affiliated with one or more of the exhibiting organizations, or were students in educational programs sponsored by the Tikvah Fund. Most of these programs involve reading and discussing seminal works of Jewish and Western political thought.
- One conference participant, a religiously observant man who had participated in a Tikvah Fund seminar, told The Times of Israel he had first been exposed to conservative thought online. "I started reading Jordan Peterson and watching videos and that led me to Thomas Sowell's book 'A Conflict of Visions,' which I think is the best summary I've ever read of the difference between conservative and liberal thought."
- Asked what the ideas of Thomas Sowell and Jordan Peterson have to do with granting Netanyahu immunity from criminal indictments, as some speakers at the conference had advocated, the man said, "I believe that corruption is a corrosive force that can destroy society. But there is a feeling among many conservatives that the left is selective about whose corruption they choose to highlight. After all, Shimon Peres was corrupt but the left kept silent about it."

From reading Great Books to passing legislation

- In an afternoon session entitled “From Vision to Reality,” a number of conservative activists explained how lofty conservative ideas can and should be translated into Knesset legislation aimed at scaling back the power of unelected gatekeepers like judges, legal advisers to government ministers, and the state comptroller.
- “It’s so amazing to sit with 700 people and speak about Burke, de Toqueville and Hayek,” Professor Moshe Koppel, chairman of the Kohelet Policy Forum, exclaimed from the podium, adding, “Until now you’ve heard a lot of theory. My job is to speak about reality.”
- Since its founding seven years ago, Kohelet has been trying to pass laws related to economic freedom, Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and governance, Koppel said.
- “Governance is a euphemism,” he clarified. “What we mean is dismantling centers of power that are unelected and that use the power of the state to coerce their worldview.”
- “You know who we’re talking about,” he said, to laughter from the audience.
- Koppel is an American-born professor of computer science at Bar-Ilan University who has done groundbreaking work in the field of machine learning as well as Jewish scholarship, applying his computer science ingenuity to determining the authorship of ancient Jewish texts. Koppel was also an instigator of Israel’s controversial 2018 nation-state law, a draft of which he first presented to the Knesset in 2004. He also drafted a 2011 law to require Israeli NGOs to report funding they receive from foreign governments. “The goal of the law is only transparency,” he argued at the time the legislation was introduced.

(To read more the entire article click [here](#))

Time to Unite the Left

Editorial

- Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to form a right-wing government, which led to the 21st Knesset being dissolved and a snap election called, has provided a unique opportunity for Israel's democratic camp. It turns out that rather than the outright victory Netanyahu appeared to have won in the April 9 election, the results were really a tie, and this is what prevented him from forming a government.
- The one-time unity of the right-wing bloc, which had been based on ideological similarities and the parties uniting behind the prime minister, has given way to rifts and mutual recriminations. For the first time in a decade of unchallenged right-wing rule, doubts have begun to arise about Netanyahu's leadership inside his own political base, as the date approaches for his hearings in cases in which he's suspected of committing bribery, graft and breach of trust.
- The opportunity that has been created for a possible change in leadership, and to stop the right from moving ahead on extremist plans to annex territory in the West Bank and destroy the judiciary, makes it essential for supporters of peace and democracy to unify their ranks ahead of the September 17 election.
- At the very least they must prevent an unnecessary, dangerous squandering of votes for parties that fail to meet the minimum quota for getting into the Knesset, as happened to the smaller right-wing parties in the last election. It would have sufficed for the Hayamin Hahadash party to pass that quota for Netanyahu to have had a firm majority to form a government of immunity, annexation and oppression. But democracy-seekers cannot rely on such happenstance or rely on Avigdor Lieberman to rescue Israel from Netanyahu.
- At issue is the fate of two left-wing parties – Meretz, which barely made it to the Knesset, and Labor, which has dwindled to just six seats and whose showing in opinion polls barely scrapes the threshold of votes needed to win Knesset representation. Both parties must unite to strengthen the camp that believes in dividing the land between Israel and the Palestinians, and in civil liberties. Meretz leader Tamar Zandberg understood on the eve of the last election that her party was in a crisis, and proposed an urgent merger with Labor. Labor's chairman Avi Gabbay rejected her proposal and considered joining the right-wing government, which in the end didn't come about. Zandberg reneged on the merger idea after the election.
- There are certain ideological gaps between some Labor and Meretz people, but they are negligible in comparison to the opportunity that exists to replace Netanyahu, and considering the risk that the left-wing bloc will disintegrate as a result of wasted votes on parties that do not wind up getting into the Knesset.
- Labor was once a part of an alignment with Mapam, which was one of Meretz's precursor parties. Most of Meretz's founders, such as Shulamit Aloni and Yossi Sarid, were Labor breakaways. There is no reason for these parties not to collaborate anew. They do not need to fully merge their institutions, it would suffice for them to run together as a joint list that could also include such figures as Tzipi Livni, Ehud Barak and Orly Levy-Abekasis. This would allow each party to preserve its ideological independence while their bloc gets stronger.