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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Four outposts going down

Israel ordered the removal Sunday of four illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank.

In response, settler rabbis called upon supporters to physically prevent the settlements' dismantlement and called upon army officers not to order their soldiers to dismantle the settlements.

Opponents have 10 days to protest through legal means the government order to dismantle the settlements. The settlements slated for elimination include West Bat Ayin, Ginot Aryeh, Havat Shaked and Magen David.

Shooting probe

Israel's military is investigating the shooting of an Israeli during a protest against the West Bank security barrier.

Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim said Sunday that an investigation was under way into the shooting of Gil Na'amati, 21, in the knee and hip as he tried to force open a locked gate last Friday on a section of the fence near the Palestinian town of Kalkilya.

But Boim hinted the shooter likely would not face punishment.

Israel: Hamas won't be attacked

Israel will exempt Hamas from retaliation for the Dec. 25 suicide bombing.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decided Friday to target Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in retaliation for a suicide-bomb attack that killed four people at a bus stop outside Tel Aviv, The Associated Press reported.

The PFLP claimed responsibility for the attack. However, Hamas will be exempt from retaliation because it appears the group has decided to call off attacks inside Israel.

Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, the army chief of staff, told the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot that Hamas had made the strategic decision because of Israel's retaliatory attacks. He said a truce with the Palestinians could come within weeks.

Because of the upcoming holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Thursday, Jan. 1 or Friday, Jan. 2.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Settlers at West Bank outpost cite Bible as fight over evacuation nears

By Dina Kraft

MIGRON, West Bank (JTA) — A battered shipping container was Itai Harel's first home on this steep, windswept hilltop.

Now he lives in a trailer with running water and electricity, and land has been leveled for more permanent housing in this illegal settlement outpost. He and his fellow young settlers are gearing up to fight for their new hilltop home.

Migron, the largest and most established of the 100 or so illegal Jewish outposts established across the West Bank, is on the front lines of a looming showdown between the settler movement and the Israeli government.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recently pledged to dismantle such settlements in accordance with the U.S.-led "road map" peace plan.

On Sunday, Israel ordered the removal of four of the outposts in the West Bank.

In response, settler rabbis called upon supporters to physically prevent the settlements' dismantlement, and called upon army officers not to order their soldiers to dismantle the settlements.

Harel expressed similar sentiments.

"We are staying here. It's our home," said Harel, 29, vowing to return if the government somehow manages to remove them.

"It is our right to be here; this is our national home," he said, sweeping his hand toward the view of Arab villages and Jewish settlements on nearby hillsides.

Over the past two years, 42 families have moved here. They are young, defiant and fiercely ideological.

Casting themselves as part of a continuum of ancient and modern Jewish history, they view their unauthorized building of an outpost about 20 minutes drive north of Jerusalem as key to strengthening the Jewish claim to biblical Israel.

They also see it as similar to efforts by early Zionists to create "facts on the ground" in what became Israel proper.

Critics and the U.S. government see the outposts, built hastily and without government approval, as yet another obstacle to peace efforts with the Palestinians.

Harel and his friends at Migron, which is named after a biblical-era settlement in the region, are hesitant to say exactly how they would resist soldiers should they come and attempt an evacuation.

Pinchas Wallerstein, who heads the local settlement region of the West Bank, known as Binyamina, said he hopes the Israeli courts will help prevent an evacuation order.

If that fails, he said he foresees thousands of supporters coming to Migron to help thwart police and army forces.

"If we have 7,000 to 10,000 people here it will not be possible to evacuate us," Wallerstein said, addressing a wedding party from Houston that had come to see Migron as part of a tour of West Bank Jewish settlements.

"Why is it legitimate to evacuate Jewish settlements but we cannot withdraw" Arab villages, he asked, calling any evacuation a reward for terrorism.

Before climbing back on their bus, the visiting Americans posed for pictures with Wallerstein, who has temporarily moved the Binyamina headquarters to Migron to head the campaign against its possible removal.

In a show of solidarity, Israel's well-organized settler movement has helped

MIDEAST FOCUS

Mofaz remarks denied

Israel Radio denied that the country's defense minister said Israel might attack Iran's nuclear installations. Israeli media reported recently that Shaul Mofaz had told a Farsi-language Israel Radio program on Dec. 15 that Israel would consider attacking Iran's nuclear installations if international inspections failed to stop the regime from developing nuclear weapons.

The report elicited counter-threats from Tehran. However, Israel Radio released a transcript of the program showing that, in response to an Iranian listener's question, Mofaz said that if "Iran obtains nuclear weapons and threatens to use them against the State of Israel, the State of Israel will know how to defend its citizens without harming Iranian citizens."

Palestinian reportedly killed

A Palestinian reportedly was killed and three wounded in clashes with Israeli soldiers in the West Bank. The man was shot Sunday in a refugee camp in the city of Nablus.

Egyptian rips Arafat

An Egyptian editor criticized Yasser Arafat for last week's attack in Jerusalem on Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher. Newspaper editor Ibrahim Sa'ada wrote that he didn't appreciate the Palestinian Authority president's attempt to blame the Dec. 21 attack on Maher at Jerusalem's Al-Aksa Mosque on a fringe group of extremists.

Dreary Christmas in Bethlehem

Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem attracted only some 3,000 people. Santas and balloons graced a parade in the town of Jesus' birth on Dec. 25, and vans broadcast carols in English and Arabic.

Before the Palestinian intifada began in 2000, Christmas celebrations attracted tens of thousands of pilgrims to Bethlehem from around the world.



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facilitate the visits of thousands of visitors to Migron in recent weeks.

Jerry Silverman, one of the wedding party members, said he hoped the issue would be resolved in negotiations.

"The American government is not in charge of Israel," he said.

Sharon, long a patron of the settler movement, is under intense pressure from the U.S. administration to fulfill Israel's obligations under the road map, beginning with the dismantling of illegal outposts that have cropped up over the last several years.

Many were established in the immediate aftermath of Arab terrorist attacks on local settlers.

In a speech earlier this month, Sharon said some settlements might have to be evacuated if Israel disengages physically from the Palestinians.

The first Israeli presence on the hill where Migron stands today were cell phone towers built by local phone companies four years ago. Young settlers followed about two years later.

The Israeli government said it expects to begin evacuating settlement outposts in the next few weeks.

Officials hope settlers will leave without a fight.

"If the outposts are illegal, then they will be dealt with — hopefully with persuasion, but otherwise with force," said Zalman Shoval, a foreign policy adviser to Sharon. Shoval added quickly, "Hopefully that won't be necessary."

No outposts have been cited publicly by Israeli officials as the first to be slated for removal, but an unnamed U.S. official told Ha'aretz that Migron had been identified as one of the outposts slated for elimination.

Unlike most other outposts, Migron is more than a small collection of tents and trailers. There is a paved circular road and two buildings with stone facades, one that serves as a synagogue, the other a nursery school.

Still, amenities are basic.

Next to the community's row of portable toilets is a large white plastic tent for meetings and celebrations. Trailers are clustered in muddy patches of land.

A private security guard in a fleece jacket and armed with an Uzi machine gun mans the entrance.

A fence topped with rings of barbed wire surrounds the outpost.

"It's clear it is worth the price. We are here to live a quality life, to live an ideal," said Harel.

Peace activists say that ideal is misguided and dangerous. It also does not represent the views of most Israelis, who according to polls, are willing to withdraw from most West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements in the event of an eventual peace deal with the Palestinians.

As long as settlement building continues, "we will be doomed to more and more international condemnation, economic recession and violence," said Dror Etkes, who coordinates Peace Now's Settlement Watch Project.

"Another settlement is another rock in the occupation and oppression" of the Palestinians, he said.

Etkes said he saw Sharon's recent policy speech as a potential turning point since the Israeli government has yet to dismantle any settlements of significant size.

"If the settlements are uprooted then the first inroads will be made," he said. "Migron could be the first uprooted and this will be a historic event."

Shlomo and Hagit Ha'Cohen, both 25, see Migron's place in history differently.

They say they are living Jewish history in their decision to live and establish a family in Migron. Hagit, who teaches history and civics at a Jerusalem high school, is expecting the couple's first child in January.

"We see this as our home forever, even if there are problems along the way," said her husband, a yeshiva student who plans to study civil engineering. "With all due respect to the Americans, at the end of the day we are the ones who decide."

Sitting in their bookshelf-lined three-room trailer, for which they pay \$70 a month rent, Shlomo cites the story of Chanukah and the conflict between the ancient Greeks and the Israelites.

"Many imperial powers have told us what to do throughout history. They no longer exist. Israel is still here," he said.

"Our path is clear, we know where we want to go." □

JEWISH WORLD

No sweat on nukes

Israel says it is unfazed by an upcoming U.N. Security Council discussion on Israel's presumed nuclear arms. Syria, whose two-year tenure on the Security Council ends this week, called for Monday's discussion on a non-conventional arms ban in the Middle East.

"We see this as Syria's swan song and are not concerned," a Jerusalem official said, adding that Israel does not expect a vote on the proposal given other Security Council members' reluctance to open their own nuclear capabilities to criticism.

Iran quake relief sought

An American Jewish group is raising money for victims of last Friday's devastating earthquake in Iran.

The American Jewish World Service said it hopes to raise money for humanitarian aid in response to the 6.3-magnitude quake, which devastated the historic city of Bam in southeastern Iran, killing at least 20,000 people and leaving thousands homeless. More details can be obtained by calling 1-800-889-7146 or visiting the group's Web site at www.ajws.org.

French mayor 'crosses' the line

A French mayor says he will refuse to marry people who wear religious insignia.

Jacques Martin, mayor of the Paris suburb of Nogent-sur-Marne, said that those wearing Muslim veils, yarmulkes or large crosses would be prohibited from marrying in civil ceremonies in his town hall.

According to French law, all couples must marry in a civil ceremony performed by a local mayor, whether or not they subsequently wish to have a religious wedding.

The mayor's edict was condemned Dec. 25 by France's minister of local authorities, Patrick Devedjian.

Ukraine to pay up

Ukraine will pay more than \$7.5 million to the families of 40 Israelis who died when a missile hit a passenger plane in 2001. A stray missile fired during a military exercise hit the Russian airliner on Oct. 4, 2001, killing 78 people aboard.

Among them were 40 Israelis, many on their way to Russia to visit family. In the agreement ratified Dec. 25 by Ukraine's Parliament, the 101 relatives of the Israeli dead will receive nearly \$200,000 each.

Iraq may return Jewish property

Iraq's governing council is reviewing a 1951 law that confiscated Jewish-owned properties.

The Jerusalem Post reported last Friday that the aim of the review is to restore properties to Jews who fled Iraq at the time.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Rough times for British chief rabbi: Former backer calls on him to quit

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi got a most unwelcome Chanukah present from one of British Jewry's most formidable figures: a call for his resignation.

Writing in London's Jewish Chronicle, Sir Stanley Kalms accused Jonathan Sacks of having a "diffident personality," showing "low-key leadership" and of panicking when confronted by crisis.

Mishandled controversies have reduced Sacks's stature to that of a "shuttlecock" between the "fundamentalist right and the radical left," Kalms wrote.

He accused Sacks of failing to speak out on key issues — anti-Semitism, Israel and kosher slaughter, which is under attack in the United Kingdom.

"The chief rabbi, caught between the activists who said 'come out fighting' and the low-profilers, chose the latter — with apparent relief," Kalms wrote. "And so the chief rabbi has concentrated on his pastoral role and has hardly said a memorable word in public since. The pygmies won the day and Gulliver was tied up."

Sacks has refused to comment on the matter. But the Chief Rabbi's Office pointed out that the recent call is not the first time Kalms has called for Sacks to give up the post; he did so five years ago as well.

"Sir Stanley's favorite hobby seems to be calling for the chief rabbi to resign," said Peter Sheldon, chairman of the Chief Rabbinate Trust.

"This is chutzpah in the extreme," he added, saying it was not for "self-appointed individuals to issue public performance appraisals that are flawed in their assumptions and flawed in their conclusions."

Kalms is not just any disgruntled critic. The 71-year-old businessman was one of the strongest proponents of Sacks' appointment as chief rabbi 12 years ago.

Kalms also is a former officer in the centrist Orthodox United Synagogue, of which Sacks is chief rabbi.

He is one of the Chief Rabbi's Office's "funding fathers," a group of wealthy benefactors who provide much of the money to run the office.

Geoffrey Alderman, a leading historian of British Jewry, said Sacks would not be able to keep his position if Kalms is speaking for the funding fathers.

"Stanley Kalms by himself can't get Sacks to resign, but he has a big stick to wave," he told JTA. "I don't think Sacks will go quietly, but one thing that would push him out is the withdrawal of support from the funding fathers."

But he said it's possible that Kalms went public with his criticism precisely because other influential figures did not support him.

"Did Kalms write the article because he was exasperated that the other funding fathers won't back him?" Alderman asked.

Observers say Sacks' position is weaker than it was when Kalms last went on the attack five years ago.

Two controversies in slightly more than a year have reduced his stature, critics say. In the first, Sacks gave an interview to the Guardian newspaper — which many Jews consider anti-Israel — that the paper portrayed as an attack on the Jewish state.

After the interview, leading Israeli rabbis demanded that Sacks step down.

When that controversy ebbed, a new one arose over his book "The Dignity of Difference." Fervently Orthodox rabbis from Britain and Israel threatened to declare Sacks an apostate over his assertion that other monotheistic religions could be as valid for their adherents as Judaism is for Jews.

Sacks issued a revised edition of the book that quelled criticism from the right but upset more liberal community members who wanted him to stick to his guns.

The apparent unwillingness to maintain an unpopular position has lost Sacks respect, Alderman said.

"He has tried to be all things to all men, and he has been caught out," the historian said. □

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Baptism controversy flares anew between Jews and Mormon church

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — What do Gustav Mahler, Theodor Herzl and Mordecai Anielewicz share, other than their Jewish roots?

The famed Austrian composer who converted to Catholicism, the founder of Zionism and the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto all have been baptized, posthumously, by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

These three notables of Jewish history are among the estimated hundreds of thousands of dead Jews included in the Mormon church's genealogical files, which include some 200 million souls given posthumous baptisms as part of the church's mission to convert all people and thus, they believe, hasten Jesus' resurrection.

For years, Jewish officials have blasted the conversions as an insulting desecration, but the controversy is flaring anew amid charges that the Mormons have broken a 1995 promise not to add Jewish Holocaust victims to their International Genealogical Index.

Church officials insist they've kept to the agreement.

And even among Jewish critics of the policy, there is some dispute over just what the Mormon church originally agreed to, and what it has done wrong.

But all the critics agree that, as Jewish genealogist Gary Mokotoff puts it, the Mormons should take Jews off the list.

"Baptism is the second ugliest word in the English language to a Jew," Mokotoff said. "The first is gassed. The third is raped."

Ernest Michel, a former executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York and chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, hinted recently at legal action. He broached the issue with Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.).

"We have agreed to consider all possible options, including legal options, but we would much prefer to come to an agreement with the church in what I believe is, to all of us Jews, a very crucial and emotional issue," Michel said.

Clinton voiced concern over the issue, Michel said. The senator's office did not return calls for comment.

In 1994, Michel discovered that the Mormons had baptized posthumously his parents and various aunts and uncles who were killed during World War II in the Nazi concentration camp of Gurs, in southern France.

Michel's family members were among an estimated 360,000 Holocaust victims and other deceased Jews listed in the Mormon genealogical archives.

Michel and other Jewish officials met with Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and top officials of the Mormon church, eventually hammering out the agreement to take Holocaust victims and other Jews off the list, and not to add more.

The church agreed to remove "all known posthumously baptized Jewish Holocaust victims" who have no Mormon descendants, and eventually to remove "all deceased Jews" improperly added to the index.

But the contract is worded in such a way that the church is only responsible to strike "known" Jews — that is, those who are brought to its attention — from the list.

D. Todd Christofferson, a church official involved in the talks, said the church removed Holocaust victims listed before 1995 and

has followed the pact by instructing members not to add more.

"When the church is made aware of documented concerns, action is taken in compliance with the agreement," he told The New York Times. Christofferson told the Times that the church cannot monitor the situation completely and that some members might themselves add names.

Church officials were not available for further comment on the eve of Christmas, a church spokeswoman told JTA.

Malcolm Hoenlein, one of the signatories of the 1995 pact and the executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said that all the parties to the agreement understood what was supposed to be done, and that it is not the Jews' responsibility to bring new names to the Mormons' attention.

The Mormons "have an obligation to live up to their commitment," he said.

Mokotoff, who publishes *Avotaynu*, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, and who began finding Jewish names in the Mormon archives before the 1995 conflict, said he sees no evidence the church has added new names to its rolls.

But Helen Radkey, an Australian-born genealogist who has been studying the baptism issue since 1999, prepared a report for Michel in October that found "thousands of entries" of dead Jews, many of them Holocaust victims. Most of the names are from Germany and other parts of Europe, she said.

Radkey said she checks the church's online lists on a daily basis and has found that whenever news reports reveal famous Jews in the index their names are removed quickly.

It remains difficult to discern exactly when names on the list have been added, Radkey said. Most of the records she referred to indicate simply that a name was "submitted after 1991." Only church members with passwords can delve further, she said.

The Mormon church's genealogy lists are separated into CD-ROMS, which go until 2000, and online indexes thereafter, Radkey said. She said names listed online may well have been added in the past three years.

Among the notable Jews still in the online records, she said, are the founder of the Chasidic movement, the Ba'al Shem Tov; the Nobel Prize winning author S.Y. Agnon; and Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann.

Rabbi James Rudin, who helped broker the 1995 deal as director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said the real issue is that Jews remain on the list at all.

"Whatever Mormons want to teach their fellow Mormons to do is their right," he said. "But when it crosses over to people who are not Mormons — and who are deceased and never intended to be Mormons — we have to be a voice for the voiceless." □

High hopes for Israeli satellite

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's second commercial communications satellite is operational.

On Sunday, Israeli media said the first signal had been received by Amos-2, less than 24 hours after its launch from Kazakhstan. Once settled in its orbit 22,000 miles above Earth at week's end, the satellite will offer a new range of television broadcasts and Internet connections.

Among Amos-2's overseas customers are U.S.-based Home Box Office and German television RTL. Amos-1 was launched into space in 1996, and will be replaced in 2007 by Amos-3. □