

## IN THE NEWS

## U.S., most Europeans won't go to The Hague

The United States will not attend the Feb. 23 hearings at the International Court of Justice on the security barrier Israel is building in the West Bank.

The U.S. State Department has submitted written briefs saying the court in The Hague does not have jurisdiction because the matter is still under negotiation. Israel and most European nations are taking the same course.

"There were 46 other written statements to the court that covered a wide range of views," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. "Many of those submissions echoed similar concerns to ours. So in that circumstance, we don't feel it's necessary to supplement our written views with some kind of oral presentation."

## Settlers rally against Gaza plan

Thousands of pro-settler activists rallied in Israel against Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza. Demonstrators at Wednesday's rally said the prime minister's plan to dismantle Jewish towns in Gaza would reward Palestinian terrorism.

Spokesmen for the settlers' movement vowed to press right-wing parties to quit Sharon's government if the withdrawal plan is adopted.

## New U.S. bill chastises Syria

A new U.S. congressional resolution on Syria expresses "grave concerns" about human-rights violations there.

The House resolution, introduced last week by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chair of the House International Relations Committee's subcommittee on the Middle East, seeks a resolution at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights addressing Syria.

It also asks the U.S. administration to reach out to dissidents, human-rights activists and other political opponents in Syria.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Looking to block Gaza withdrawal, hawks mobilizing against Sharon

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — The earthquake in Israel that measured 5 on the Richter scale last week is not the only ground shifting these days in the Jewish state.

In the wake of the recent announcement by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that Israel soon could withdraw unilaterally from Jewish settlements in Gaza, the political landscape is shifting as well.

Since Sharon made his remarks two weeks ago, right-wing ministers have been busy mobilizing Cabinet colleagues in an effort to stop the prime minister, while the left-leaning Labor Party has been preparing to embrace Sharon.

Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the hawkish National Union, has written to 10 right-wing ministers urging them to come up with an alternative plan to Sharon's.

The Likud's Uzi Landau is openly trying to drum up a majority against the prime minister in the Cabinet.

And the National Union and the National Religious Party are threatening to bolt the coalition if Sharon goes ahead with his plan.

Some politicians are predicting that Sharon's move will tear apart the government and bring early elections.

What's more, some military officials are saying a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip might encourage more terrorism as Palestinians interpret the withdrawal as a retreat under fire.

But Sharon is not backing down.

To take the wind out of the right wing's sails, the prime minister said he will take the matter directly to the people by calling a na-

tionwide referendum on the Gaza withdrawal plan.

Sharon is hoping that a popular mandate for withdrawal will make it difficult for the right wingers in his own party to continue opposing him, thereby paving the way for a coalition with Labor.

Last week, Matan Vilnai, a Labor leader, said in Washington that the Labor Party would consider joining Sharon's government if the prime minister has a plan to return to peace talks.

Vilnai said the ruling Likud Party could count on Labor's support if Sharon goes ahead with his plan to uproot Jewish communities in Gaza.

The most active Likud opponent to Sharon's plan is Landau, a minister without portfolio, who says he is close to assembling a majority of 12 votes in the 23-member Cabinet against the Gaza withdrawal.

So far, Landau counts seven ministers against — Effi Eitam and Zevulun Orlev of the National Religious Party; Lieberman and Benny Elon of the National Union; and Likud's Yisrael Katz, Natan Sharansky and Landau himself.

Landau says four other Likud ministers — Benjamin Netanyahu, Meir Sheerit, Tzachi Hanegbi and Limor Livnat — are leaning toward voting against Sharon's plan.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom or Shinui's Eliezer Zandberg could provide a decisive 12th vote against the prime minister.

In his letter to the 10 hawkish ministers, Lieberman attempted to build on Landau's work.

He urged them to set up a joint forum to draft what he calls a "plan for the national

*Continued on page 2*

NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ Looking to block Gaza withdrawal, right-wingers mobilize against Sharon

*Continued from page 1*

camp." Lieberman wrote that the "national camp" is divided, merely reacting to left-wing plans like the unofficial Geneva peace proposal.

Instead, Lieberman said, the government should come up with a plan of its own — and quickly.

Lieberman proposes "fencing in the Palestinians" in several cantons, with Israel controlling passage between each one.

Clearly, Lieberman's target is not the Geneva plan, but the prime minister's.

Lieberman wants both to block Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan and set a political agenda for a post-Sharon era.

Elon, Lieberman's colleague in the National Union, has been speaking out against the Sharon plan in the United States.

Such actions on the part of ruling coalition members is tantamount to mutiny in Sharon's government.

The question is: Will Likud Cabinet ministers agree to join the rebel forum, will Sharon vanquish the rebels or will Sharon dump the rebels for new left-wing coalition partners?

Netanyahu's position is key.

Having staked his political future on the success of his stewardship of Israel's ailing economy, the finance minister and former prime minister is believed by some pundits to favor the plan that would help propel the economy out of its current slump.

That would put Netanyahu in Sharon's camp of withdrawal from Gaza.

But, if Netanyahu believes the timing is ripe, he could well vote against Sharon's plan and take the lead of forces in the government opposing Sharon, thereby challenging the prime minister's leadership.

Netanyahu's decision could decide the fate of Sharon's government and the unilateral withdrawal plan.

Several Knesset members and expert observers believe the countdown to early elections has already begun.

One of them is Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin, a former Sharon ally who now opposes the prime minister's disengagement plan.

Rivlin told JTA that he does not believe Sharon will be able to keep his present coalition together for long or form a stable government to replace it.

He also predicted Netanyahu would not make a leadership bid until new elections are called.

Rivlin's reasoning is simple: If Sharon gets his plan through the government, the right-wing parties will leave.

Then, if Sharon replaces them with Labor, he won't be able to count on the support of the right-wingers in the Likud or on Labor's hard left.

That would make Sharon's government quite vulnerable.

Theoretically, Netanyahu then could make his move.

By triggering a vote of "constructive no-confidence" in Sharon, Netanyahu could have an opportunity to take over as prime minister.

But it would be tough for Netanyahu

to assemble and hold together a ruling coalition, according to Rivlin, because Netanyahu's coalition partners would have to be constituted exclusively of hawks and the fervently Orthodox parties.

The hawks would press for special allocations for settlements, and the fervently Orthodox would press for special funding for yeshivas.

These financial demands would torpedo

the tight fiscal policy upon which Netanyahu has staked his political reputation.

On the other hand, if Sharon fails to get his disengagement plan through, that in itself could be enough to spark elections.

Therefore, Rivlin believes, there is no escaping early elections, probably in 2005. Then the battle for the Likud leadership will begin in earnest.

Sharon, of course, sees things differently.

His aides are already making plans for a referendum on the issue of the Gaza settlements, which they are sure he will win. Recent public opinion polls show that an overwhelming 77 percent of Israelis favor withdrawal from Gaza.

Winning a referendum with such an overwhelming majority would give Sharon the moral and political authority to proceed with his plan, perhaps enabling him to set up a stable government with Labor.

But any referendum on the fledgling plan still is a long way off.

In the meantime, Lieberman and the other right-wing members of Sharon's coalition are looking to the future — working, watching and waiting.

*(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)*

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## E.U. pressures Israel on labels

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The European Union is pressuring Israel to label its exports to show whether goods are made in the West Bank and Gaza.

At issue is an export tax that would have to be paid on goods from the disputed territories.

Israel enjoys favored-tax status as an E.U. associate member, but the European

Union does not recognize the disputed territories of the West Bank and Gaza in the agreement.

According to the German trade newspaper *Handelsblatt*, E.U. commissioners Pascal Lamy, Chris Patten and Frits Bolkestein have written to Israel's trade minister, Ehud Olmert, urging that products be labeled more specifically.

# Federations work on deal to adjust overseas funds

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — A handful of federation leaders are working on a deal on one of the most contentious issues surrounding the United Jewish Communities.

Now they have to sell it to the rest of the federation system.

In a Feb. 9 meeting at LaGuardia Airport in New York, federation executives and presidents from Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and New York hammered out a plan to fund overseas needs.

The deal comes after a two-year evaluation by the UJC's Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee, or ONAD, and a bout of politicking leading up to a decision in December.

The decision takes pressure off local federations to raise additional funds, preserves their autonomy in funding decisions and appears to benefit the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, one of two primary agencies working overseas that receive funds from the UJC federation umbrella system.

The battle for funds transmitted overseas by the federation system — more than \$200 million in 2003 — has become increasingly politicized in recent years.

With individual federations increasingly funding local projects, the UJC's two main overseas beneficiaries are competing for tight federation dollars.

The ONAD committee — and, in part,

the UJC itself — was created to reverse that trend by galvanizing a cross-section of federations to understand overseas needs better and make the case for funding them.

In December, ONAD decided to maintain the formula in which 75 percent of the system's overseas funds go to the Jewish Agency for Israel, which runs aliyah and Zionist education worldwide, and 25 percent to the JDC, which operates relief and welfare programs in Israel and abroad.

The committee also decided to ask federations to raise an additional \$20 million to split between the two agencies, putting \$6 million toward that sum from individual federations' discretionary spending.

Before the resolution reached the UJC board of trustees for approval, however, the UJA-Federation of New York balked.

Among other concerns, the New York federation feared the plan was doomed to fail because federations were unlikely to raise additional overseas dollars. It also objected to chipping away at federations' elective funding.

That set UJC leaders scrambling to find a new compromise, which they did at the LaGuardia meeting, according to sources close to the process.

UJC agreed to ask federations, for the next two years, to raise the same amount of what is called "core funding" — \$187 million — as they raised in 2003.

Federations are asked to allocate 90 percent of their overseas funds to core fund-

ing, which is subject to the 75-25 split.

The remaining 10 percent is called "elective funding," meaning that each federation can decide how to divide it between the Jewish Agency and JDC.

Under the "LaGuardia compromise," elective funds would remain untouched, a response to federations' growing desire for control of funding decisions. However, federations would be asked to increase their entire overseas allocations in proportion to any increase in their annual campaigns.

By that logic, the LaGuardia group expects an increase of \$14 million toward overseas allocations, which the UJC would split evenly between the Jewish Agency and the JDC.

In addition to taking pressure off federations to raise an additional \$20 million, the proposal would benefit JDC. Federations will be asked to preserve the amount JDC puts toward relieving hunger in Argentina and the former Soviet Union, about \$6 million last year.

Jay Sarver, the Jewish Agency's budget and finance chair, said he would withhold comment until he sees a formal proposal from UJC.

At the JDC, executive vice president Steven Schwager said he had not yet seen the proposal and could not comment.

To become official, the proposal must be approved by the full ONAD committee and then the UJC board of trustees.

An ONAD conference call is scheduled for March 10 to discuss the issue.

## Not exactly 'mad salmon,' but something fishy about lox

By ANDREW MORRIS

LONDON (JTA) — The latest threat to the Jewish way of life in Britain may not be from anything as nefarious as anti-Semitism. For many of the United Kingdom's 300,000 Jews, it's a malicious attack on the very fabric of Jewish identity.

The community's lox is under threat.

In the latest in a series of food scares, U.S. scientists have published research warning that farmed Scottish salmon — the source of the majority of British Jewry's staple fish — contains high levels of potentially carcinogenic dioxins.

The research, published in the journal *Science*, recommends that consumers avoid eating Scottish farmed salmon more than three times a year to reduce the potential cancer risk.

The findings have caused an uproar at Jewish breakfast tables and Bar Mitzvah buffets across the land.

"I've been serving and eating salmon since I care to remember, and I don't intend to allow some pressure group to put a stop to

that. It's just another silly food scare," said Leslie Silverman, a kosher caterer based in the south of England.

The World Health Organization, the European Union and the British Food Standards Agency, or FSA, all have rejected the study's recommendations, much to the relief of Silverman and her hungry clients.

"This study shows that the levels of dioxins and PCBs" — both toxins linked to cancer — "in salmon are within internationally recognized safety limits and confirms previous studies by the FSA," said the agency's chairman, Sir John Krebs.

The article hasn't caused a stir in the United States, where leading U.S. kosher-certification and kosher-food authorities said they're aware of the issue scare but have received no official warnings or consumer complaints.

"I haven't heard anything in the kosher community that even resembles concern," said Menachem Lubinsky, president of Integrated Marketing Communications, which produces the annual Kosherfest trade show.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### U.N. envoy endorses Gaza first

A top U.N. envoy and critic of Ariel Sharon called Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan "bold." Terje Roed-Larsen urged international support of the Israeli prime minister's plan in remarks at a closed session Wednesday of the U.N. Security Council, according to Ha'aretz.

"No Israeli prime minister has previously had the boldness and the vision to say he will remove settlers — as long called for by the international community — and initiate a plan for its implementation," Roed-Larsen said.

He nonetheless warned that a unilateral withdrawal would present dangers and urged a negotiated withdrawal. In the past, Roed-Larsen has criticized Sharon harshly for his handling of the Palestinian intifada.

### E.U. troops for Gaza?

The Palestinians want international peacekeepers to help them take over the Gaza Strip after an Israeli pullback.

"I think we need international forces or peacekeepers at that time," Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei told the European Parliament on Wednesday, referring to an Israeli proposal to remove 17 of its 21 settlements in Gaza.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana responded positively to Qurei's call. Top U.S. envoys now in the region would be open to listening to the proposal, U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, but U.S. policy remains against such a deployment.

### Settlement money criticized

Israeli lawmakers approved \$22 million in new spending on Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Palestinians criticized Monday night's vote, saying it shows Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has no interest in peace. Sharon has said Israel would withdraw from some settlements in Gaza and parts of the West Bank in an attempt to disengage from the Palestinians.

### Red Cross blasts fence

The International Committee for the Red Cross condemned Israel's West Bank security barrier.

The Swiss-based relief agency said Wednesday that by building the fence Israel has gone "far beyond what is permissible under international humanitarian law." Israel's ambassador in Geneva, Yaakov Levy, said the decision threatens to hurt Israel's relations with the international relief organization.

### Moroccan king: Talk to Arafat

Israel should resume negotiations with Yasser Arafat, Morocco's king told visiting Jewish leaders.

Meeting Tuesday with a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that was visiting Morocco's Jews, Mohammed VI also spoke out against Israel's West Bank security barrier. Nevertheless, the U.S. Jewish delegates said they were heartened by the warmth of the reception their unprecedented visit received; one delegate noted it lead Morocco's TV news that evening. "The king, I think, can be very influential at some point in time when he sees a real opportunity for progress" toward Israeli-Arab peace, said the group's chairman, James Tisch.

### Ire over rabbis

Peace Now called for police to investigate rabbis denouncing any Israeli plan to uproot settlements. The call followed a Jerusalem conference Tuesday by Rabbis for the Unity of the Land of Israel during

which speakers invoked historical anti-Semitic calamities as parallels to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Echoing Peace Now's demand for an investigation, Zehava Gal-On of the liberal Meretz Party called the rabbis "ticking bombs" who could incite violence.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Poll: Jews not guilty for Jesus' death

The vast majority of Americans do not blame the Jews collectively for the death of Jesus, a new poll says. In response to the question, "Are Jews today responsible for the death of Jesus?" 80 percent said no, according to ABCNews.com.

The survey of 1,011 adults conducted Feb. 6-10 comes as the Mel Gibson film, "The Passion of the Christ," which has stirred debate about Jesus' end, is set to open Feb. 25.

Critics say the movie makes it seem the Jews steered the Romans into killing Jesus; Gibson told ABC's Diane Sawyer the movie is "not about pointing fingers."

### Canadian lawmaker blasts fence

Jews are criticizing a Canadian legislator for likening Israel's security barrier to a concentration-camp fence.

Speaking recently in Canada's House of Commons, Pat O'Brien said Israel's West Bank fence violates international law, denies human rights to the Palestinians and reduces the West Bank and the Gaza Strip "to the status of concentration camps."

Rochelle Wilner, national president of B'nai Brith Canada, said, "Mr. O'Brien's comments have crossed the line and are totally unacceptable."

## WORLD

### Another anti-Semitism parley

The Anti-Defamation League will hold an international conference on anti-Semitism in June.

The conference will be held in cooperation with the Italian Foreign Ministry. The ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, told JTA the conference will assess the results of a series of major meetings on anti-Semitism that are being held in the coming months.

They include a seminar Thursday in Brussels hosted by European Commission President Romano Prodi, and a high-level meeting in Berlin in April sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Foxman met with Italy's prime minister, foreign minister and other officials during a two-day visit to Rome that ended Wednesday.

### Let my boss go

A former Russian Jewish leader said he would trade his shares in the Yukos oil company if the company's president is freed.

"What I'm saying is: Let my people go," Leonid Nevzlin said Monday in Israel, where he fled to as the case against Yukos unfolded last year. Yukos' founder, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is in prison along with Platon Lebedev, a shareholder in the company, and Aleksei Pichugin, the head of Yukos' security. The Kremlin responded to the offer by expanding charges against Lebedev.

### Hate preacher stays in jail

A Muslim preacher in London who urged followers to kill Jews, Americans and Hindus will remain in jail. Abdullah el-Faisal lost an appeal on his convictions for soliciting murder and inciting racial hatred. He was sentenced last March to nine years in prison for his crimes; the sentence later was reduced to seven.