

IN THE NEWS

Sharon's Washington visit is challenged

Some members of Israel's Cabinet called on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to postpone his U.S. trip.

"It is a matter of the prime minister's dignity. He should not go to the United States while his political future is uncertain," National Religious Party head Effi Eitam told Israel Radio on Tuesday, referring to a corruption scandal in which Sharon could be indicted. The National Unity bloc echoed the demand.

Sharon is due to meet with President Bush in Washington on April 14 in a bid to clinch U.S. support for his plan for unilateral Israeli disengagement from the Palestinians.

Israeli Arabs honor Yassin

Israeli Arabs marched in memory of assassinated Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

Thousands of Israeli Arabs, in annual Land Day protests marking the killing of six Israeli Arabs by Israeli police in a 1976 riot, marched peacefully Tuesday.

This year's rallies included denunciations of the Israeli airstrike in which Yassin, the founder of the terrorist group Hamas, was killed March 22.

Palestinians also marked Land Day with stone-throwing confrontations with Israeli troops. Several thousand Hamas supporters marched in Gaza vowing to avenge Yassin's death.

Jews to meet with Mubarak

A group of U.S. Jewish officials meet Egypt's president next month in Houston.

About 20 Jewish leaders are expected to press Hosni Mubarak on April 14 to support Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and stop presenting anti-Israel initiatives at the United Nations.

Mubarak is slated to meet President Bush on April 12, and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is due to meet Bush on April 14.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

UJC taps veteran professional to become group's next president

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — The federation system has tapped a veteran federation professional to become its new president and CEO.

After some six months of searching, an internal United Jewish Communities committee unanimously recommended an insider to succeed Stephen Hoffman: Howard Rieger, president of the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh.

Robert Goldberg, head of the search committee and chairman of UJC's board, called JTA on Tuesday with the news that the committee had decided to offer the job to Rieger, who has said he will accept it.

The choice of Rieger, 61, continues a tradition of picking federation system heads from communities considered "large cities" — ones that contribute the bulk of funds the systems raises and whose leaders make key decisions.

Rieger, who has headed the Pittsburgh federation since 1981, was unavailable for comment.

Rieger worked for 11 years in various positions at the Cleveland federation before heading to Pittsburgh. He joins what some jokingly call the "Cleveland mafia," since both Hoffman and Goldberg also came from Cleveland.

UJC's board of trustees still must approve the appointment.

Asked if the board would approve Rieger, Goldberg would say only that it "will get a unanimous recommendation from the search committee. I think that says a lot."

The transition, which will take place at

the close of Hoffman's three-year term this summer, comes as the four-year-old UJC, a merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal and United Israel Appeal, still is struggling to define itself.

Despite the respect commanded by Hoffman, individual federations have complained about inadequate services and high UJC dues.

UJC's overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, have blamed the system for failing to boost funds for overseas needs from individual federations.

Hoffman has tried to respond to complaints by reducing the budget and installing reforms to groom top professionals.

With the UJC still at a critical juncture, several say Rieger's lengthy experience in the system positions him well for the job.

"I think continuity at this point is critically important, and Howard has shown a dedication to the UJC that I think will help to ensure that kind of continuity," said the UJC's vice chairman, Richard Wexler of Chicago.

"Whatever progress has been made under Steve Hoffman, I think Howard will build on," he said.

Wexler added that Rieger had been "instrumental" in the merger leading to UJC's creation and understands its purposes.

Wexler has said that one of the merger's key purposes was to boost overseas allocations, which UJC has yet to do.

According to Steven Klinghoffer, who headed the UJC's politically charged Over-

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FEDERATION
ISSUES

■ UJC taps veteran professional to become group's next president

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seas Needs Assessment and Distribution committee, Rieger has what UJC needs: a "very good sense of what the correct relationship between professionals and lay leaders is."

"One of the great failures in the ONAD process" was that professionals "were the ones making key decisions and lay leaders were for a variety of reasons left out," said Klinghoffer, a lay leader from the Metrowest federation in New Jersey.

Hoffman said he was "thrilled" to hand over the reins to Rieger.

"Howard is a great people person and he's very smart. He's very hardworking," Hoffman said.

"I would just advise him to keep in

shape because he's going to run just a little faster," joked Hoffman, referring to the pace of the national scene.

In fact, Hoffman said, "you need the ability to laugh at yourself" at the helm of UJC.

"You need to understand how different parts of the country and different community sizes come at issues differently," he said.

"Yet we're all working for the same end," he added, with "different dynamics at work in each of our communities."

During his time at the Pittsburgh federation, Rieger helped lead a slew of local efforts, including an annual fund-raising campaign that tops \$25 million, a \$15 million campaign to resettle Jews from

the former Soviet Union, a \$60 million campaign to renovate local agencies and an effort to restructure services for the community's elderly.

Rieger also has served in national roles, as adjunct staff to help orchestrate the UJC's merger and as chairman of the publications advisory committee of the UJC's 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey.

A native of Chicago, Rieger earned a Ph.D. in government from Southern Illinois University and a B.A. in political science and a masters of public administration from Chicago's Roosevelt University.

He joined the federation system after a two-year stint as an assistant professor at the State University of New York. ■

As terror fears rise, UJC could help garner security funds

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA)— With Jewish organizations divided over the use of federal homeland security funds to protect Jewish sites, supporters believe they have found a way to assuage concerns over church-state separation.

The United Jewish Communities, which is spearheading the effort to garner federal funds for high-risk non-profit organizations, is touting a plan to give the federal dollars directly to contractors, who would perform security upgrades at Jewish and other vulnerable sites.

"By having the flow of money go from

the federal government to the contractor, there no longer will be church-state concerns," said Charles Konigsberg, vice president for public policy at UJC, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations.

But some Jewish groups concerned that the program may trample on church-state separation aren't supporting UJC's efforts.

"It's a gimmick to avoid the issue," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "It's still going to be synagogues, churches and mosques asking for money."

On Thursday, lawmakers were expected to introduce bills in both houses of Congress authorizing \$100 million to upgrade security at high-risk, non-profit institutions. The legislation is expected to have bipartisan support. ■

Under the plan, non-profit sites would seek qualification from their states' homeland security departments. Each state then would submit a prioritized list of sites to the Department of Homeland Security.

The federal government would decide which sites to fund and would enter into contracts with security firms that would administer the work.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), who is sponsoring the bill in the U.S. House of Representatives with Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.), said, "It's exactly equivalent to what we do in getting a cop outside a synagogue on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur."

The bill would provide some of the \$1 billion that sponsors estimate is needed to secure non-profit institutions.

Some groups argue that the use by synagogues or day schools of federal funds, even if they come through a middle man, violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

Jewish groups have been discussing the issue with the UJC for months, and several organizations were pushing for the community to promote loan guarantees for Jewish sites rather than direct aid.

UJC is backed by the American Jewish Congress, Orthodox Union and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

The American Jewish Committee, Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism and Jewish Council for Public Affairs still are reviewing the suggested provisions.

"While we certainly appreciate the new realities this legislation seeks to address, we continue to have concerns about its application to houses of worship and other pervasively sectarian institutions," said Mark Pelavin, the RAC's associate director. "We are working closely with the bill's sponsors, and our leadership is in the process of reviewing the most recent draft of the legislation."

Even Jewish groups that are not inclined to support the legislation aren't expected to oppose it actively because of the community's pressing security needs.

"We will continue to raise the concerns," Foxman said. "Will I be testifying against it? Probably not." ■



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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Sharon soldiers on under a legal cloud

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The state prosecutor's recommendation to indict Ariel Sharon on bribery charges came just as the Israeli prime minister was putting the finishing touches on his plan for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

If Attorney General Menachem Mazuz decides to press charges, it could mean the end not only of Sharon's political career, but of the policy he hoped would alter radically the contours of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

If indicted, Sharon almost certainly would suspend himself or resign, and his successor would be free to drop the plan to disengage from the Palestinians.

In the meantime, until Mazuz makes up his mind — which could take up to two months — Sharon will find it difficult to garner American and domestic backing for his far-reaching plan while under suspicion of criminal wrongdoing.

Though it carries enormous weight, the prosecution's recommendation is not binding, and it is far from certain that Mazuz will accept it.

Justice Ministry insiders say Mazuz has described the case against Sharon as "problematic" and "borderline." Sharon confidants say they are convinced that, when it comes to the crunch — with tenuous evidence able to determine a prime minister's political future — Mazuz will not indict.

Sharon is suspected of receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars through his son Gilad from Likud activist and millionaire contractor David Appel for helping to promote Appel's real estate interests in Greece and the central Israeli city of Lod.

Appel already has been charged with giving a bribe. Now Mazuz must decide whether Sharon was aware that he was receiving one and whether there is enough evidence to make a charge stick against the prime minister.

In the meantime, Sharon is a prime minister under a cloud and something of a lame duck.

Before the indictment recommendation, Sharon was working hard to move his disengagement plan forward. He was

close to tying up a deal with the Bush administration for American support; he had just made bold moves against Hamas to facilitate Palestinian Authority control of Gaza after an Israeli withdrawal; and he was hoping to use those two factors to win support in his own Likud Party, where right wingers, including some prominent Cabinet ministers, have been highly critical of the plan.

Sharon also was covering his coalition bases. He was close to cutting a deal with the opposition Labor Party for its 19 Knesset members to join the coalition if the 13 legislators from the right-wing National Union bloc and National Religious Party bolted over the disengagement plan.

Now, it will be hard for Sharon to tie up all the loose ends. He might not even be able to get Cabinet approval for the plan: Eleven of 23 Cabinet ministers expressed their opposition before the indictment recommendation, and others may now come out against the weakened prime minister and tip the balance against him.

Labor will stay out of the coalition as long as Sharon remains under a cloud, and party leaders like Avraham Burg, who oppose any alliance with Sharon, will have a stronger case.

In addition, when Sharon flies to Washington for a key April 14 meeting with President Bush, U.S. officials are less likely to make formal commitments to a man who could be out of office within weeks.

The fiercest challenge to Sharon, though, will come from the right. Indeed, leaders of the National Union, the National Religious Party and the Yesha settlers' council are hoping to utilize Sharon's plight to scuttle the disengagement idea.

They hope that if the prime minister is replaced, his successor will shelve a plan that entails the dismantling of nearly all the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and at least six in the West Bank.

If Sharon is forced to resign, Likud insiders say he probably would be succeeded by Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has shown little enthusiasm for the disengagement plan.

By Israeli law, the resignation of a

prime minister does not necessarily trigger a general election. Sixty-one Knesset members can propose an alternative candidate, and the president can confer on him the task of forming a new government.

Though Industry and Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, who backs the disengagement plan, and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who does not, may mount leadership challenges, most Likud insiders believe Netanyahu would win the party nomination easily. But what Netanyahu does about disengagement is not a foregone conclusion, and the right wingers may be disappointed.

Despite his criticism of the plan, Netanyahu is leaving his options open. Rather than rejecting it outright, he has laid down three conditions for supporting the plan: that Israel control border crossing points to prevent arms from flowing into Palestinian areas; that the United States recognize a route for the West Bank security fence that puts more Jewish settlements on the Israeli side; and that the United States publicly back Israel's position that no Palestinian refugees be allowed to return to Israel proper.

Insiders say this stance gives Netanyahu maximum flexibility: If he becomes prime minister, he will be able to keep a right-wing coalition together while negotiating with the United States on his conditions for disengagement.

If Sharon survives, Netanyahu will be able to claim the credit if his conditions are met, or choose his moment to confront Sharon if they are not.

In both his disengagement plan and in targeting Hamas, Sharon has been playing for high stakes.

Some critics even imply a connection between his bold moves and the burgeoning legal case against him. Indeed, Sharon's critics on both the right and the left accuse the prime minister of playing with fire.

In contrast, his supporters say that his twin policy of cracking down on terrorism and disengaging from the Palestinians could transform the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To make those policies work, however, Sharon needs more time. And as Mazuz assesses the evidence, Sharon's time could be running out.

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

Benjamin Netanyahu could be preparing for a possible return as prime minister.

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Wiesel to speak to OSCE

Elie Wiesel will be the keynote speaker at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's upcoming conference on anti-Semitism.

The April 28-29 conference in Berlin begins a day after Wiesel is to address representatives of European Jewish communities at a meeting sponsored by the World Jewish Congress, according to the group's executive vice president, Elan Steinberg.

In addition, the WJC's president, Edgar Bronfman, will address the OSCE conference's plenary session, Steinberg said.

Pope meets Jewish leaders

Pope John Paul II said a meeting this week with Jewish leaders demonstrated interfaith friendship.

"Your visit is yet another sign of the bonds of friendship between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church, bonds which we hope will grow ever stronger," he said Monday during a Vatican audience with a delegation from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. "May God bless your efforts and grant you success in helping those in need."

Greece pressed on cartoons

The Anti-Defamation League called on Greece's prime minister to condemn anti-Semitism after a series of anti-Semitic cartoons appeared in Greek newspapers.

In one of the cartoons in the newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, a woman asks, "Why did the Jewish government kill a religious leader?" A man replies, "They are practicing for Easter."

'Passion' plays on in France

A French court dismissed a legal challenge to "The Passion of the Christ" by three Jewish brothers who claimed the film could lead to attacks on Jews.

The court ruled against Patrick, Gerard and Jean-Marc Benlolo, who claimed the film presented an erroneous version of the Gospels and would exacerbate anti-Semitism by portraying Jews as God-killers. The movie does not appear "to manipulate biblical texts" nor "have the obvious aim to attack the Jewish community," Judge Florence Lagemi wrote in her decision.

The film is slated to open in France on Wednesday.

Media wars hit S. Africa

South Africa's central Jewish organization criticized a South African newspaper that called on Jews to condemn Israel's killing of Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

"Has the Sunday Times ever called upon South African Muslims to condemn the multiple human rights violations that members of their faith are committing all over the world?" said Michael Bagraim, national chairman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

British Jewish lawmaker blasted

A British Jewish lawmaker was labeled a traitor after calling for economic sanctions against Israel.

Gerald Kaufman, a Labor member of Parliament, was heavily criticized by the president of Britain's Zionist Federation, Eric Moonman, after he made the anti-Israel comments at a constituency meeting. Moonman told reporters, "As a Jew, doesn't he have some responsibility at least to consider the impact of what he is saying?"

Though he felt Kaufman was pandering to a largely Muslim audience, "it doesn't mean he has to be a traitor to his own people," Moonman added.

You're never too old for aliyah

A 100-year-old London man moved to Israel. Simon Clyne is thought to be the oldest immigrant ever to move to Israel from Britain. Arriving at Ben-Gurion airport last week, Clyne told reporters, "It is a dream come true to be here in Israel with my lovely family." He will live near his family on Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

NORTH AMERICA

Swastikas in Canada

Several swastikas were painted on a Toronto-area business before it was damaged by fire and an explosion.

Police have been unable to enter the building because it sustained severe structural damage, estimated at almost \$200,000, in the incident Sunday night.

The business was not Jewish-owned, according to Kathleen Griffin, a spokeswoman for the York Region Police.

Al-Aksa Brigade: U.S. out!

A Palestinian terrorist group released a statement saying it would not accept U.S. officials in Palestinian areas.

Tuesday's statement by the Al-Aksa Brigade criticized the United States for vetoing a recent U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

The warning comes as three high-level Bush administration officials arrive in the region to get more details on Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon wants Gaza referendum

Ariel Sharon told members of his Likud Party that he will seek their approval for a Gaza withdrawal after he presents the plan to President Bush.

The Israeli prime minister addressed party faithful Tuesday night in Tel Aviv to counter opposition within his ruling party to his disengagement plan. Sharon said he will hold a binding party referendum on the plan upon his return from Washington next month.

Palestinians tried to recruit boy

Palestinian terrorists reportedly tried to recruit another teenager as a suicide bomber. The family of ninth-grader Tamer Khweirah said he was locked in a dark room and lured with clothes, a cell phone and promises of paradise, according to the Jerusalem Post. He eventually was extricated by an older brother.

National unity government seen

The Sharon corruption scandal reportedly disrupted secret government coalition talks in Israel. Israel's daily *Ma'ariv* reported Tuesday that the ruling Likud Party and opposition Labor Party were on the verge of agreeing to a national unity government this week when State Attorney Edna Arbel recommended that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon be indicted on bribery charges.

Jewish terror suspects charged

Two Israelis were charged in a bomb campaign against Arabs. On Tuesday, Haifa District Court charged Eliran Golan and Alexander Rabinovich with attempted murder for 10 bombings that caused damage to Arab property in Haifa and wounded one woman. The men alleged targeted an Israeli Arab lawmaker, Issam Mahoul, by placing explosives under his car.