

IN THE NEWS

Bush: Sharon's moves deserve world's thanks

The world should thank Ariel Sharon for his planned pullout from Gaza, President Bush said.

Bush told an annual Association of Newspaper Editors meeting in Washington on Wednesday that Sharon's initiative would help create the conditions for a Palestinian state.

"In my judgment, the whole world should have said: Thank you, Ariel; now we have a chance to begin the construction of a peaceful Palestinian state," Bush said.

Unrepentant Vanunu goes free from prison

Mordechai Vanunu was freed from jail, saying he had no regrets about exposing Israel's nuclear secrets to the world.

"I am proud and happy to do what I did," the 49-year-old former technician at the Dimona nuclear reactor told reporters before leaving Shikma Prison on Wednesday after an 18-year sentence.

"Israel does not need nuclear arms, especially now that all the Middle East is free from nuclear arms," he said to cheers from hundreds of supporters and cries of "traitor" from some detractors outside.

"My message today to all the world is: Open the Dimona reactor for inspections."

A convert to Christianity, Vanunu visited a church in Jerusalem immediately after his release.

Vanunu is barred from leaving Israel for at least a year.

Deadly clashes in the Gaza Strip

Israeli forces hunting mortar crews in the Gaza Strip killed at least six Palestinians.

Backed by tanks and helicopters, troops swept Wednesday through the Beit Lahiya village near Gaza's boundary with Israel, sparking clashes with local gunmen. Medics said at least three of the dead were armed.

WORLD REPORT

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Diplomatic and strategic setbacks highlight Palestinians' weaknesses

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The assassination of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantissi, combined with President Bush's backing of Israel's disengagement plan from the Palestinians, has dealt a double blow to Palestinian hopes for strategic leverage in the Middle East.

Palestinians now are looking to the Gaza Strip as the next opportunity to reorganize a political community in disarray.

It remains unclear who will take over in Gaza after the Israelis pull out, but sources say Israel and the Palestinians increasingly are eyeing Mohammed Dahlan, the former Palestinian Authority minister of internal security, as a future strongman.

With the elimination of Hamas' leadership leaving a potential political vacuum in the Gaza Strip, Dahlan, a pragmatist, is the natural candidate to fill it.

"I don't want to discuss names," Palestinian lawmaker Hanan Ashrawi told JTA. "What's important in Gaza is not that name or another, what's necessary is the rule of law — and if it's Mohammed Dahlan that contributes to achieving it, then so be it."

Dahlan has been one of the few Palestinian leaders who dared to speak out in favor of Israel's disengagement plan — or, at least, the Gaza portion of it, praising it as vindication of the Palestinian terrorist strategy. But that was before Bush's endorsement of the plan and the killing of Rantissi.

Now, with Bush supporting Israel's claim to part of the West Bank, Palestinians may find it harder to swallow Dahlan's initial

backing of the plan. Moreover, Israel's preference for Dahlan could work against him, as the Palestinians repudiate any leader favored by Israel.

In a recent interview with Toronto's *Globe and Mail* newspaper, Dahlan said that a reformed, liberated Gaza Strip could serve as a model for a future Palestinian administration. He dismissed suggestions that the Palestinian Authority is threatened by Hamas and said the Palestinian Authority would have no problem reasserting its control over a liberated Gaza Strip.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority has been negotiating with Hamas and Islamic Jihad — another terrorist group — on understandings for the post-withdrawal period.

Palestinian newspapers have compared Bush's declaration of support for Israel's disengagement plan to the 1917 Balfour Declaration. That letter, written by the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour, to the Jewish leader Baron de Rothschild, stated that "His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

Bush's statement on April 15, which demonstrated that the United States accepts permanent Israeli settlement in parts of the West Bank, will be marked as yet another notorious date in the history of the Palestinian national tragedy, Palestinian newspapers said.

Traditionally, U.S. policy has regarded the settlements as illegal, but now that policy has been reversed.

Many Palestinians perceive Bush's warm

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embrace of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a signal that settlements like Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim are permanent.

Even the Clinton administration, in its January 2001 proposal for a peace agreement, had done much the same, proposing that Israel retain major settlement blocs close to the pre-1967 boundary.

Still, even Palestinians who had expressed a willingness to accept minor border alterations and territorial exchanges were devastated by Bush's April 15 statements.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, a Palestinian architect of the unofficial "Geneva accord" peace proposal, said the Bush-Sharon meeting amounted to "the end of the peace process."

P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei described it as a "catastrophe."

The Palestinians virtually have given up hope on the Bush administration, certainly during the current term.

Thus, they will move in two directions: They will try to convince the European Union to push the Americans toward a less pro-Israel policy, and they will try to enlist growing resentment toward Bush in the Arab world for their cause.

Within the Palestinian political community, Rantissi's killing makes dialogue between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority easier in the short run.

P.A. President Yasser Arafat's people in Gaza viewed Rantissi as a constant troublemaker.

After Israel killed Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin last month, Arafat reportedly said, "Sheik Yassin was a serious and balanced leader, but this is not the case with Rantissi."

With Rantissi gone and Hamas weakened, the Palestinian Authority may find it easier to reach an internal understanding with Hamas — provided that Hamas' leadership in Damascus does not get in the way.

With the Palestinian political establishment weak already, unity is key.

National unity was the theme of events marking the second anniversary of Israel's arrest of Fatah's West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouti, and the anniversary of the death of Khalil al-Wazir — also known as Abu Jihad — Arafat's second-in-command in the PLO, who was assassinated at his home in Tunis in 1988.

In a public speech devoted to Abu Jihad, broadcast last week on Palestinian television, Arafat emphasized national unity and declarations that the Palestinians have no intention of forgoing their perceived rights, including the demand that millions of refugees from Israel's 1948 War of Independence, and their descendants, be allowed to return to Israel.

The Palestinians also will try to use next month's likely Arab summit in Cairo to form a united front against Bush, but they probably will fail.

On Sunday, Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, currently on a tour of the Persian Gulf preparing for the summit, called for "a joint political and diplomatic action in a bid to protect Arab interests."

On Saturday, the 22 members of the Arab League said Washington's policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a threat to regional security and stability.

At the Palestinians' request, the Arab League held a special session in Cairo on Saturday to respond to Bush's move.

"The council ... affirmed unanimously that it rejects the new American position, which is likely to wreck the peace process in the Middle East," an official statement said.

While Palestinians could be pleased with Arab rhetoric following the Bush-Sharon meet-

ing, they couldn't overlook the fact that Bush's embrace of Sharon came shortly after the president had met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, that was yet another proof of the Arab world's inability — or unwillingness — to stand up for the Palestinians.

Rantissi's killing makes dialogue between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority easier in the short run.

U.K. officials worry about anti-Semitism

LONDON (JTA) — Anti-Semitism is "infecting" the nation's politics, according to British lawmakers.

Speaking Tuesday at a debate on anti-Semitism in the House of Commons, Stephen Byers, chair of the parliamentary committee on anti-Semitism, said, "The line is now being crossed from legitimate criticism" of Israeli policy to the "demonization, dehumanization of Jews and the application of double standards."

James Purnell, chair of the Labor Friends of Israel lobby group, referred to recent caricatures and cartoons of Jews in the media, adding, "Today overt anti-Semitism is still taboo, but anti-Semitism is a virus that once again has started to

infect our body politic."

The debate follows the release of figures showing that anti-Semitic attacks in Britain have reached record levels.

In a related development, one of Europe's leading experts on anti-Semitism is almost certain to be elected to the European Parliament.

Patrick Gaubert, president of the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, was chosen by France's governing UMP Party executive Wednesday to head the Paris region list for the June elections.

As head of the 12-member list for the region, Gaubert, who is Jewish, is virtually certain to be elected.

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Diaries shed light on early U.S.-Israel ties

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Truman threatened to break with Israel unless it allowed the return of some Palestinian refugees displaced in Israel's 1948 War of Independence, documents newly unearthed by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum show.

The diaries of James McDonald, a top League of Nations refugee official from 1933 to 1935 and the first U.S. ambassador to Israel, have provided a trove of insights into that period, which echo today in the ongoing controversy over the status of Palestinian refugees.

McDonald's records of his interaction with Egenio Cardinal Pacelli — the Vatican secretary of state who later became Pope Pius XII — also bear on current Vatican-Jewish relations, which have been strained by accusations that Pacelli didn't do enough to save European Jews threatened with extermination.

McDonald, who expresses unvarnished affection for many of the Jewish and Zionist leaders of the day in his 12,000 pages of diaries, learned of Truman's threat on June 9, 1949, from Abe Feinberg, a U.S. Jewish leader who acted as an interlocutor between the U.S. and Israeli governments.

McDonald described the threat as "startling." Israel "would have to choose between a break with him and making a constructive contribution to the refugee solution," he writes.

In response, he writes, Israel's leaders considered allowing 100,000 refugees to return.

It was known that David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, had tentatively made such an offer toward a non-aggression pact with Arab states that had attacked Israel, but the degree of Truman's personal involvement in pressuring Israel is news, according to Severin Hochberg, a senior historian at the museum.

"It's known to some extent that Truman had problems with the Israelis from 1948 to 1950," Hochberg said. "But it was much more tense than is the common view."

The same refugee issues that Truman and Ben-Gurion dealt with came up last week, when President Bush addressed the Palestinians' right of return to Israel.

The 100,000 number was resurrected during the Camp David talks of 2000 and was cited by negotiators in last year's non-

binding "Geneva Accord" between free-lance Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

McDonald chronicles other Truman-Ben-Gurion tensions in his diaries, adding nuance to Truman's reputation as sentimentally pro-Israel.

Responding to an Israeli thrust in the Negev toward Egyptian forces in late December 1948, McDonald describes Truman using language like "grave consequences" and "review of our attitudes towards Israel." Truman was concerned that Israeli incursions into Egyptian territory would draw Britain into the fight.

Another revelation is the degree to which McDonald had to reassure his bosses that Israel would not drift into the Communist camp. After a November 1948 meeting with U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall — who was never sympathetic to the Jewish state — McDonald speaks of having to persuade Marshall "of my conviction that the Communist bogie was without substance."

In latter passages, it's clear McDonald had a hand in Ben-Gurion's decision to come down firmly on the side of the United States on the Korea issue, a diplomatic stand that placed Israel once and for all in the Western camp.

In page after page of his diaries, McDonald evinces real sympathy for the Jewish and Zionist leaders he encounters. As a member of the 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, he describes Ben-Gurion's testimony as "leaving no doubt that there would be, if necessary, resistance to any move to liquidate or seriously weaken the Jewish position in the country."

"It was unquestionably a militant if not a fighting presentation," McDonald says.

An Ohio-born, Harvard-educated history professor, McDonald was an admirer of Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader and first Israeli president. But he admits to being shocked in 1949 when Weizmann expressed concern that Jews arriving from Arab lands would "swamp the country" and "destroy its unity."

McDonald's relations with Jewish leaders date back to the early 1930s, when he

was an advocate for refugees, an outgrowth of his role in founding the anti-isolationist Foreign Policy Association in 1919.

By 1933, he was so sensitive to the threat to the Jews that he was among the few opinion leaders — Jewish or non-Jewish — to immediately understand that anti-Semitism was the motor driving the Nazis.

Meeting associates of Hitler in 1933, McDonald writes, "The casual expressions used by both men in speaking of the Jews were such as to make one cringe, because one

would not speak so of even a most degenerate people."

In other passages, he writes of trying unsuccessfully to convince European Jewish leaders of the threat.

From 1933 to 1935, when McDonald was the League of Nations' high commissioner for refugees coming from Germany, he met numerous times with the Vatican's Pacelli.

Some historians have accused Pacelli of not using his office to help the Jews. Pacelli's defenders say that he interceded at times on the Jews' behalf, and at other times held back because of concerns for Catholics living under Nazi rule.

McDonald's account of his meetings with Pacelli reinforces the impression that the future pope was not too concerned about the Jews.

Pacelli "left me with the definite impression that no vigorous cooperation could be expected from that direction," he writes in 1933.

McDonald, who died in 1964, famously quit the League of Nations with a speech accusing the body of ignoring the plight of Germany's Jews.

The Holocaust museum stumbled onto the diaries in 2003 when the daughter of a man who once considered writing a biography of McDonald offered the museum about 500 pages — covering his League of Nations years — that she had uncovered among her belongings.

That led the museum to track down McDonald's two daughters, who agreed to donate the other 11,500 pages. The museum formally dedicated the diaries last week. ■

McDonald writes of trying unsuccessfully to convince European Jewish leaders of the Nazi threat.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Lawmakers concerned with Saudi ties

Lawmakers are pressing President Bush to explain the administration's relationship with Saudi Arabia.

A group of 11 lawmakers, led by Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.), signed a letter to the president Tuesday asking for more information about a Saudi pledge to cut oil prices in the fall to aid Bush's re-election effort, as alleged in the new Bob Woodward book, "Plan of Attack." "American consumers should not be compelled to pay more for gas in order to accommodate your administration's political interests," the letter said. Saudi officials have denied the allegations.

Sephardi visas eased

The United States is easing its visa policy on Israelis born in Arab countries.

The U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv said Wednesday that applicants who declare that they have severed all ties with their Arab birthplaces enjoy speedier service in obtaining visas. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, visitors of Middle East origin were heavily scrutinized by U.S. security services and sometimes refused entry. The new measures also affected thousands of Sephardi Jews from Israel.

Spielberg to dramatize Munich massacre

Steven Spielberg reportedly will make a movie on the aftermath of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre.

According to Reuters and the Hollywood publication Variety, the famed director will dramatize the massacre, in which Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and later killed Israeli athletes during the Games.

Kosher 'show & taste'

Bison, pigeon and other kosher animals will be shown — and then served — at an Orthodox Union "show and taste" event. The organization is hosting a "Tradition of Kosher Birds and Animals" dinner May 2 in New York that also will feature dove, red deer, goat, mutton and cow udder, all of which the O.U. has ruled are kosher.

Non-kosher animals such as giraffe, guinea fowl, peacock, mallard and mulard duck, partridge, swan and sparrow will be discussed, but not eaten.

MIDDLE EAST

Court rules for bomb victims' relatives

An Israeli court ordered the Palestinian Authority to pay \$16.2 million to six relatives of two Israelis killed by a suicide bomber. Tuesday's ruling would benefit the relatives of Ruth Peled and Sinai Keinan, who were killed in a May 2002 attack in Petach Tikva.

The Palestinian Authority did not submit a defense in the case, saying it does not recognize the Israeli court's authority to decide the case.

March a good month for Israeli tourism

Tourism to Israel jumped by nearly 200 percent in March over the same time last year.

Some 106,000 tourists visited Israel last month. The increase may have been due partly to the fact that tourism was so low in March 2003, when the U.S. invaded Iraq.

G-o-o-o-oal!

The governing body of European soccer is lifting a ban on games in Israel after more than two years. The UEFA ruled Wednesday that Israel is now secure enough to host matches, but only in the

Tel Aviv area. Israel has been playing "home" matches abroad since the UEFA ruled in 2001 that it was too dangerous to allow teams to travel to Israel.

Israeli cell phone numbers change

Cell phone numbers in Israel are changing. The new numbers went into effect Tuesday, though the old ones will continue to work through Oct. 31.

Under the new system, the area codes 050, 051, 056 and 068 are being consolidated under 050; area codes 052, 053, 058, 064 and 065 all become 052; and area codes 054, 055, 066 and 067 all become 054. In addition, a seventh digit was added to each cell phone number, derived from the old prefix.

WORLD

U.N. official blames Israel, U.S. for Iraq

A leading U.N. official blamed Israel and the United States for the deteriorating situation in Iraq.

The U.N.'s special envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, said Wednesday that Israel's policy of "total repression" against the Palestinians was making "things difficult to sort out" in the region. "There's no doubt that the great poison in the region is this Israeli policy of domination and suffering imposed on the Palestinians," Brahimi said in an interview with the French radio station, France Inter.

It was also compounded by "the unjust support for this policy by the United States," he said.

ICHEIC looking for end date

The commission to compensate Holocaust survivors and heirs for lost insurance policies wants to set a date to end its work.

The International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, or ICHEIC, hopes a committee being formed to evaluate when it can close up shop will have an answer by the end of the year.

Meeting Wednesday in Washington, ICHEIC officials said most of the claims will be processed by the end of the year. Chairman Lawrence Eagleburger also told Jewish leaders that he would consider reassessing the payment schedule for \$132 million in humanitarian aid for Holocaust victims in hopes of getting money to the victims sooner.

Nazi criminal dies

Karl Hass, a former Nazi officer sentenced for his role in a World War II massacre in Italy, died Wednesday at age 92.

Hass had been under house arrest since his 1998 conviction for his role in the 1944 Ardeatine Caves massacre in which German troops killed 335 people, including 75 Jews.

German Jews to try diplomacy?

Germany's main Jewish body offered to meet with Progressive Jewish leaders over a financial dispute.

After meeting with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on Wednesday, Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, invited representatives of the Union for Progressive Jews in Germany to meet with him to discuss their differences over funding.

The chancellor reportedly urged Spiegel to resolve the strife between the umbrella group and the liberal religious organization. It's unclear whether the offer will be accepted.

The talks between Spiegel and Schroeder were intended to avert a threatened lawsuit by the progressives against the government, on charges that the government has failed to financially back all streams of Judaism, as required by a 2003 government contract with the Central Council.