



IN THE NEWS

Six Palestinians killed in Gaza fighting

Israeli forces killed six Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

Troops patrolling a security corridor near the Rafah refugee camp, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, shot dead three Palestinians who had planted a bomb before dawn Monday.

Hours earlier, three terrorists were killed as they tried to cross the Gaza boundary to carry out an attack inside Israel, military sources said.

House leadership backs Gaza pullout

Republican and Democratic leaders said they would seek Congress' support for an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Reps. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the Democratic whip in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Tom DeLay (R-Texas), the Republican leader, said they also would seek support for assurances that President Bush gave Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. Bush recognized some Israeli claims in the West Bank and rejected the Palestinian demand for a "right of return" to Israel.

"This effort is the latest example of Israel's willingness to take risks and offer a bold initiative toward advancing the cause of peace," Hoyer said Monday at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's policy conference.

Palestinians flee their homes in Gaza

Some Palestinians fled a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip as Israel continued counterterrorist operations there.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the European Union condemned Israel's actions in Rafah, which include home demolitions.

Israel's High Court of Justice reversed a temporary ban on demolishing the homes in Rafah, saying Sunday that the demolitions could proceed if they were justified on security grounds.

WORLD REPORT

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Backlash against Likud vote is wind in sails of Sharon's withdrawal plan

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Likud Party vote earlier this month against Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan may have been a defining moment in Israeli politics — but not in the way the ostensible winners, Likud hawks and the Israeli settler movement, had hoped.

Paradoxically, the Likud's rejection of the Gaza Strip withdrawal seems to have sparked a huge backlash that could help the Israeli prime minister push his plan through.

Angered at being "held hostage" by a tiny minority — the naysayers in the Likud referendum constitute about 1 percent of Israel's population — Israelis have rallied in support of a withdrawal from Gaza and evacuation of Jewish settlements there.

They hope the process will eventually end, or at least contain, Palestinian terrorism.

Opinion columns in the media struck a new, harsh anti-settler note and public opinion polls showed unprecedentedly high support for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

The deaths of 13 Israeli soldiers in Gaza last week further fueled the pro-withdrawal mood.

On May 15, about 120,000 Israelis attended a huge demonstration in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square under the slogan, "Get out of Gaza and Start Talking."

Sharon aides say he is determined to go ahead with his disengagement plan and that the new mood, along with widespread international support, will help him.

But Sharon still will have to find a way to get his recalcitrant Likud Knesset faction and a majority in his Cabinet to back a slightly amended version of the pullout.

In the hardest hitting of the anti-settler articles, Ha'aretz columnist Ari Shavit declared that in "tyrannizing the majority," the settlers had gone too far. Coming from Shavit, an influential commentator who opposed the Oslo accords and often is critical of the Israeli left, the aggressive tone was doubly poignant: He accused the settlers of immorally trying to suck the rest of the population into a war to perpetuate the settlements and the occupation.

For that war, Shavit wrote, there are no soldiers and no volunteers.

"The solid Israeli majority feels disgust for this war. The solid Israeli majority reviles this war. The solid Israeli majority will take no part in

this war," he wrote.

In the clash of interests between the settlers and other Israelis, Shavit wrote, it was a case of "us or them."

"The disengagement referendum has made one thing clear," he concluded. "It is either the Israelis or the settlers."

The settlers were not surprised by the backlash. After the May 2 Likud referendum, Yehoshua Mor-Yosef, political secretary of the Yesha Settlers' Council, declared that though they had won a battle, he expected "the war" to save the settlements to intensify.

Another article in Ha'aretz captured the settlers' mood: The settlers are the perfect foil for the Israeli left, Nadav Shragai wrote, because their presence allows the left to shift

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blame for the disastrous Oslo peace process that created a terrorist quasi-state on Israel's borders.

The settlers argue that it is not their presence in the Gaza Strip that leads to Palestinian terrorism, but the Palestinian refusal to come to terms with Israel.

To counteract the new anti-settler mood, they intend to mount a nationwide door-to-door campaign explaining their case.

But they face an uphill battle. A May 14 public opinion poll in the Yediot Achronot newspaper confirmed the swing against the settlers: 71 percent of respondents said they favored a unilateral pullout from Gaza, compared to 62 percent just 10 days earlier. Among Likud supporters, 63 percent backed withdrawal, up from 55 percent in the earlier survey.

Perhaps most tellingly, 68 percent of those polled said Sharon should carry out his plan despite the results of the Likud referendum.

The pressure on Sharon to proceed with disengagement intensified with the May 15 demonstration in Rabin square demanding an immediate withdrawal from Gaza.

The leitmotif was that the Likud voters were only a small minority, and that the vast majority of the nation wants to see soldiers and settlers out of Gaza.

"This is not a left-wing rally. It's a rally of the majority," Labor Party leader Shimon Peres declared from the podium. "We won't let 1 percent of the people put

us back on the road to war."

Twenty-two years ago, a similar demonstration in the same square called for Sharon's resignation as defense minister during the Lebanon War. Ironically, Israeli left-wingers now are demonstrating in favor of Sharon's disengagement plan, and promising to support him if he carries it out.

The demonstration came after a week in which 13 Israeli soldiers were killed in action in the Gaza Strip, prompting comparisons to Israeli losses during the 18-year guerrilla war in Lebanon, which ended with Israel's withdrawal in May 2000.

Many Israelis on the left and right now argue that Israel similarly will have to withdraw from Gaza, and that it makes sense to do so earlier rather than later, with fewer losses.

Even some Likud activists are making the argument. Leah Oz, chairwoman of the party's Ramat Gan branch, said she had two children close to military age, and she didn't want them to put their lives at risk for a lost cause.

The Shinui Party, Sharon's main coalition partner, also is putting pressure on the prime minister. Shinui's leader, Justice Minister Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, is threatening to bolt the government unless Sharon goes ahead with his unilateral disengagement plan or starts talking to the Palestinians.

Sharon aides say the prime minister welcomes the pressure from all quarters. Indeed, they say the new public mood has

reinforced his resolve to carry out the plan.

Sharon himself says he will present an amended version of the plan to the Cabinet by the end of the month.

But his aides make clear that Sharon will not alter the substance of it, because it was on the basis of his original plan that he got widespread international support, key American commitments on borders and Palestinian refugees, and pledges of major financial support for the Palestinians after Israel withdraws.

"There will be no mini- or midi-plans," an aide told JTA. "But the prime minister may take some new, complementary ideas aboard."

The aides say Sharon will focus his efforts on persuading the Likud Knesset faction to back an amended plan, circumventing the party referendum. With the support of a majority in the Knesset faction, Sharon would be able to get the old-new plan approved in the Cabinet and the Knesset.

Given the pro-disengagement momentum, former Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid says the "die is cast," and that it now is just a matter of time before Israel leaves Gaza.

Still, it's an open question whether Sharon, aided by the public mood and the international consensus, will be able to impose his will on his party and on the settlers.

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

**'We won't let
1 percent of the
people put us back
on the road to war.'**

Shimon Peres
Labor Party leader

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Canadian broadcaster admits error

By **BILL GLADSTONE**

TORONTO (JTA) — The CBC admitted it committed an "editorial lapse" by suggesting in a news report that Israel influenced the U.S. military to abuse Iraqi prisoners.

However, the CBC's editor in chief, Tony Burman, denied that Canada's publicly funded broadcaster has an anti-Israel bias.

"This wasn't a case of willful distor-

tion," Burman said in a statement. "Instead, it was due to editorial lapses that somehow slipped through the system."

Jewish groups had complained after the network broadcast a comment May 4 from former U.S. diplomat Eugene Bird that linked Israel to the prisoner-abuse scandal.

Several groups have been waging a long campaign to get the network to alter its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Gay Jews flock to Bay State for nuptials

By PENNY SCHWARTZ

BOSTON (JTA) — It was late on a Sunday night, but Laura Moskowitz and Robin Shore were lined up outside Cambridge City Hall, waiting for the doors to open.

The two Jewish women — parents of a daughter who will have her Bat Mitzvah in November — were among the first applicants for a same-sex marriage license under a controversial Massachusetts law that went into effect at 12:01 a.m. Monday.

The issue of same-sex marriage has been a divisive one in the Jewish community as well as in society at large. The Reform and Reconstructionist movements have come out in support of gay marriage, while Conservative and Orthodox leaders have opposed it.

But many Jews were in the crowd that gathered Sunday night outside Cambridge City Hall. By 11 p.m., the crowd had grown to about 10,000 people.

"This is a historical event, and we wanted to be part of the community," Moskowitz said.

She and Shore live in Cambridge with their daughter Mariah and are members of Temple Ohabei Shalom in Boston. The couple plans to be married under a chupah by their rabbi, Emily Lipof, and cantor, Robert Solomon, on June 16, in the backyard of their home.

Moskowitz and Shore arrived early enough to be twentieth in line among the more than 250 couples that received numbered tickets to apply for a license.

Cambridge, which has a long history of extending civil rights for gays and lesbians, opened the doors to City Hall shortly before 10:30 p.m., ensuring its place as the first community to usher in the law.

The development resulted from a landmark decision last Nov. 17 by Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court, which ruled that same-sex marriages could not be barred under the state's constitution.

The soggy weather didn't dampen the street-scene festivity of the throngs who filled the massive stone stairway entrance, adjoining lawns and surrounding sidewalks, spilling out onto Massachusetts Avenue, which had to be closed off for several blocks.

Well-wishers handed out glowing light-stick necklaces, party hats, candy necklaces and noisemakers.

There was a small gathering of coun-

terdemonstrators, but their chants largely were drowned out by the noise of the crowd, which was contained by scores of riot police on City Hall grounds and nearby streets.

"Tonight is a night long on celebration and short on politics," Mayor Michael Sullivan announced during an hourlong, formal program in the City Council chambers initiating the new law.

White tulle was draped around the City Hall banisters, and a table was lined with 200 cups of sparkling cider and a three-tiered wedding cake.

Giddy laughter broke out during a choral rendition of the Beatles' hit, "Can't Buy Me Love."

Arthur Lipkin arrived at City Hall early in the afternoon, securing the fourth place in line and becoming the first Jew to complete the license application.

Lipkin and his partner of nearly 20 years will be married in a civil ceremony by state Rep. Alice Wolf on Friday, May 28 — "before sundown," Lipkin quipped, in a nod to his Jewish faith.

Eve Alpern of Roslindale, N.Y., who was seventh in line, will be married in June by a Reconstructionist rabbi, she said.

"I feel very connected to Judaism as a culture," said Alpern, whose partner, Brenda Morris, is not Jewish.

Dawn Beckman and Susan Sommer, who together are raising two Jewish children, were No. 120.

"We left City Hall a little before 3 a.m.," Beckman said later that morning in a telephone interview. "The lines were well organized and there was a guitarist in the City Council chambers all night long, so it continued to be fun."

Beckman and Sommer plan to marry in a civil ceremony June 6. But the important ceremony for them is planned for October, Beckman said, when they will be married by Phil Weiss, religious leader of Temple B'nai Brith of Somerville, Mass., where their families have been members for years.

"I wish I could have done it earlier," Weiss said of his ability to officiate at

same-sex weddings. "Marriage is a serious business. The status and intensity and the moral weight that marriage carries helps a couple trying to live committed lives. I'm looking forward to our being able to provide that moral help."

Jewish leaders in Massachusetts have been divided on the issue of same-sex marriage, with outspoken support from the Reform and Reconstructionist movements and vocal opposition from the Orthodox.

The Conservative movement is reconsidering its 1992 general statement that rabbis should not perform same-sex marriages, said Rabbi Myron Geller of Temple Ahavat Achim in Gloucester. Geller is a member of the Conservative movement's committee on Jewish law and standards.

Within the Conservative movement, Geller said, "We need to stress, no matter where we stand on the halachic aspects of this, the fact that we don't support prejudice against gays and their rights in society," he said, referring to Jewish law. "To a very large extent, this is a generational issue and time is probably going to resolve it."

Wolf, a veteran of Cambridge and Massachusetts politics who was on hand at City Hall, is among the Jewish state legislators who has been a staunch supporter of same-sex marriage, according to Arline Isaacson, co-chair of the Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus.

"The Jewish legislators showed a real understanding of discrimination in a way a lot of other legislators didn't," she said at City Hall. "It's part of our collective history."

Isaacson said the hate mail she gets because of her outspoken support for gay rights has changed in recent years to include harshly anti-Jewish messages.

Describing the jubilation that greeted her and Shore as they emerged from City Hall and descended the stairs, Moskowitz said, "It was very exciting."

With the crowd still in the thousands when they emerged around 1 a.m., Moskowitz compared it to walking through an alley of cheering supporters.

"It was a highlight. It felt like we were getting married," she said with a laugh. ■

'This is a generational issue and time is probably going to resolve it.'

Myron Geller
Conservative rabbi

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

White House Jewish liaison changes

Tevi Troy, the White House's Jewish liaison since 2003, is leaving to work on the Bush-Cheney campaign.

He will be replaced by Noam Neusner. Troy, 37, has worked at the White House since 2002. Neusner is currently a White House speech writer who focuses on economic issues.

Powell presses Arabs on Berg response

Colin Powell criticized the mild Arab reaction to the beheading of Nicholas Berg.

Interviewed from Jordan, the U.S. secretary of state said the Arabs' condemnation of the killing of Berg, an American Jew, fell far short of their attacks on the United States for mistreatment of Iraqi detainees at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison.

Lieberman calls for embassy move

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) urged pro-Israel lobbyists to push for the U.S. Embassy in Israel to be moved to Jerusalem.

Speaking Sunday at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference, Lieberman called the embassy move "unfinished business." Lieberman also stressed his belief that Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, is as pro-Israel as President Bush.

Berg's father: Rumsfeld must go

The father of an American Jew beheaded in Iraq said Donald Rumsfeld should resign.

In an interview with Israel Army Radio broadcast Monday, Michael Berg said he holds the U.S. secretary of defense responsible for the death of his son, Nicholas, and called for his resignation. Michael Berg said his son, a civilian contractor in Iraq, was killed because of American actions in Iraq.

Wigging out

Fervently Orthodox women in Brooklyn burned wigs after rabbis said the wigs' hairs had been used in idolatrous ceremonies. Sunday's wig-burning in Williamsburg, a heavily Jewish neighborhood, follows similar burnings of natural Indian Hindu-hair wigs elsewhere in New York and Israel.

Many Orthodox women wear wigs to comply with a Jewish law requiring married women to cover their hair.

WORLD

French anti-hate rally disappoints

An anti-hate rally in France drew disappointingly small numbers.

Sunday's demonstration, called by the leading anti-racist group, SOS Racisme, and officially supported by France's Jewish communal organizations and its mainstream political parties, drew 10,000 marchers, according to police estimates. Organizers put the figure closer to 25,000.

Qaida plot Down Under?

A convert to Islam went on trial for planning to blow up the Israeli Embassy in Australia. Prosecutors in Perth said Monday that Jack Roche, 50, met with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in March 2000 and was told to form an Al-Qaida cell in Australia.

Czech Jewish archive to open

Researchers will be able to study hundreds of years of Czech Jewish history following the completion of an archive in a Prague synagogue. Prague's Jewish museum recently completed a \$2.2

million renovation and reconstruction of Smichov Synagogue, which was used by the Nazis as a warehouse for storing confiscated Jewish property before it fell into disrepair during the Communist era.

Auschwitz ashes buried in Australia

Ashes of Auschwitz victims were buried in an Australian Jewish cemetery.

The ashes, buried over the weekend at Melbourne's Springvale Jewish Cemetery, were taken from Auschwitz in the late 1980s and had been kept in the Melbourne Holocaust Center.

The ceremony was intended to bring some peace of mind to the 30,000 members of Melbourne's Jewish community who have direct links to the Holocaust.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel Knesset threshold raised

Israel's Knesset raised the country's electoral threshold from 1.5 percent to 2 percent.

The measure was approved Monday by a vote of 67-17. The measure is intended to prevent small political parties from wielding disproportionate power in government coalitions. It bars parties that win less than 2 percent of the vote from holding a seat in the Knesset.

Israel, Jordan trade freely

Israel and Jordan signed a free-trade agreement.

The accord signed Sunday, which was agreed to at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland last month, eliminates tariffs on thousands of goods.

Groups: Israel slow on Palestinian permits

Israel purposefully understaffs its offices where Palestinians must apply for travel permits, human rights groups charged. There are only 16 clerks working on permits at army liaison offices where more than 2 million Palestinians must apply to enter Israel or travel within the West Bank.

The army responded to the report by saying that the permit system is necessary to filter out potential terrorists.

Long arm of the law

Israel jailed a Palestinian bomb maker for 735 years.

Anes Jaradat, who confessed to rigging car bombs used in Islamic Jihad attacks that killed 31 people, was sentenced by Salem Military Court on Monday to consecutive life terms for each victim. He got additional terms for arming five would-be suicide bombers who were captured by Israel.

Barghouti verdict due

A verdict in Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti's murder trial is due Thursday. If convicted by Tel Aviv District Court, Barghouti, a leading deputy to Yasser Arafat, can expect life in prison for terrorist attacks by Fatah's Al-Aksa Brigade that claimed 26 lives.

Barghouti was arrested in 2002, refused to recognize the court's jurisdiction and fired his defense counsel early in the trial.

Israeli suspected of Hamas ties

An Israeli Arab was arrested on suspicion of helping Hamas plan attacks.

The Shin Bet security service said Monday that Basil Mahajane, a resident of Umm el-Fahm, was arrested last month. He confessed to conspiring to carry out attacks in Israel with a Hamas member from the West Bank whom he met at a Jerusalem mosque.