

## IN THE NEWS

## Groups seek immigration reform

Eleven Jewish organizations asked the U.S. Senate to pass a comprehensive immigration reform plan. In a letter to the 100 lawmakers, the Jewish leaders cited the Jewish tradition to "welcome and prevent the oppression of the stranger that dwells among us" in seeking immigration reform that would aid the plight of undocumented migrants and end bureaucratic backlogs for immigration visas.

The Jewish groups also sought support for several measures to address immigration issues, including bills to aid farm workers' immigration needs and ease education burdens for undocumented immigrant students.

## Refugee official repudiates Lantos

The leader of one of the oldest U.S. refugee groups praised the work of the leading Palestinian refugee relief organization.

Lavinia Limon, who heads the Immigration and Refugee Services of America, said UNRWA has "done a credible job of it for over 50 years."

Limon was reacting to Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), who recently wrote a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan calling for a probe of the U.N. body that runs services for Palestinian refugees. Lantos accused UNRWA of fostering "a culture of anger and dependency."

Limon, whose group has run refugee programs in the United States for 80 years, said Palestinian anger results from their status. "I think if you put yourself in one of those situations, you too would find, if your life was being wasted," that "you might be a little angry and certainly dependent," Limon said Monday.

**Reminder: JTA World Report will not be published on Thursday, May 27, Friday, May 28, or Monday, May 31.**

# WORLD REPORT

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

## To Bush, images of Gaza dead show need for speedy withdrawal

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — If Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was wondering how much time the White House would give him to come up with a new exit strategy from Gaza, the answer came last week: As little as it takes to wipe those awful photos off the front pages.

The Bush administration's swift and tough reaction to Israeli tank fire that killed at least seven Palestinian protesters — including four children — in the southern Gaza Strip on May 19 made it clear that Bush sees Israel's presence in Gaza as an albatross around the neck of U.S. and Israeli interests.

Israel's operations in the Palestinian refugee camp of Rafah, on the Gaza-Egypt border, which were aimed at uncovering arms-smuggling tunnels and clearing out sniper nests, "have worsened the humanitarian situation and resulted in confrontations between Israeli forces and Palestinians, and have not, we believe, enhanced Israel's security," a White House statement said.

The United States also allowed to pass a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel's operations in Gaza and demanding "the complete cessation" of house demolitions in the Rafah refugee camp.

Usually, the U.S. delegation vetoes such resolutions — especially if they fail to mention the Palestinian terrorism that elicits Israeli incursions — but this time the United States merely abstained.

That in itself was significant: A Security Council "demand" to end home demolitions could carry the force of international law.

Israeli diplomats were not worried.

Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative at the United Nations, called it an "isolated case" reflecting the intensity of international criticism of the killings.

But the same Jewish and pro-Israel groups that exulted last week in Bush's speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, where Bush likened Israel's war on terrorism to the United States' own, were taken aback.

"The United States abstained on the final vote, sending an inconsistent and inappropriate message," said Bernice Manocherian, the president of AIPAC. "The United States must maintain its consistent policy of vetoing one-sided anti-Israel resolutions."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said the U.N. resolution was especially galling coming just weeks after terrorists in Gaza murdered a pregnant woman and her four small children.

"A family was killed at point-blank range, and there was no Security Council resolution," Hoenlein said. "Here, almost a similar number was killed, and the whole world rises in indignation."

Pro-Israel lobbyists were unlikely to draw succor from Democrats in Congress, usually eager to exploit wedges between the president and Jewish voters in an election year.

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, hewed close to the White House line. Israel has a right to defend itself with a "proper measure of restraint," Kerry told The Associated Press.

A senior Democratic staffer on Capitol Hill said...  
*Continued on page 2*

NEWS ANALYSIS

## ■ *To Bush, images of Gaza dead show need for speedy withdrawal*

*Continued from page 1*

Hill said Bush needed to make a strong statement because of U.S. national security interests.

Bush is in an especially sensitive position in the Middle East. His hopes of handing over Iraq to civilian rule next month have been frustrated by increased insurgency, a prison abuse scandal and the deaths of some 40 Iraqi civilians in a U.S. airstrike on what Iraqis said was a wedding party.

"He had to do something," said the staffer, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "How could we not? This is a case where, through no fault of its own, what Israel has done not only threatens Israel's self-interest but America's self-interest."

Furthermore, the bloodshed in Gaza has not helped efforts by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to bring Arab allies of the United States on board for the Iraqi transition.

Sharon presented a withdrawal plan to Bush last month, in return winning important U.S. commitments on Palestinian refugees and Israel's West Bank land claims. But Sharon's ruling Likud Party later rejected the plan.

Sharon has said he is working on a new plan but has not set a firm deadline to present it, frustrating U.S. officials. Egypt has said it is ready to step up security on its Gaza border once Israel leaves, but Egyptian officials say any such plans are on hold until Sharon announces a new proposal.

Getting a Gaza withdrawal plan out in

the open would help erase the images of Palestinians rushing dead and wounded children to ambulances, administration officials suggested.

The news in Gaza "shows that there is a considerable amount of conflict and friction that would be reduced by an Israeli disengagement along the lines of the one we discussed," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said May 20.

"These events in fact serve as a grim reminder of the wisdom of Israel disengaging from Gaza," said Ambassador James Cunningham, the deputy U.S. representative to the United Nations.

Israelis said they understood the U.S. need to face down Arab pressure.

"They thought that this was the right opportunity to send a message of evenhandedness," Mekel said.

Mekel even saw a bright side: Palestinian representatives at the United Nations did not undertake their usual efforts to toughen the resolution, reflecting the success of recent U.S. efforts urging the Palestinians to assume control in the Gaza Strip after Israel withdraws.

If anything, the debacle shows the

need for a reliable Palestinian Authority security force to be in place when Israel withdraws. Israeli forces should be replaced by "reformed Palestinian security forces that will — and must — themselves act to stop smuggling and halt terrorism," Cunningham said.

Israeli officials need to make clearer how they plan to hand over such authority to the Palestinians, said Jess Hordes, Washington director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"It underscores the need, the problems the security vacuum would create in the event of a withdrawal without something to replace it," he said.

UNRWA, the U.N. agency that administers assistance to Palestinian refugees, who form the bulk of Rafah's residents, said a clear post-withdrawal transition to Palestinian rule is essential for stability.

"No amount of economic aid is going to make Gaza viable" without security, said Maher Nasser, the UNRWA liaison to the United Nations.

*(JTA Washington correspondent Matthew E. Berger and Staff Writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)*

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## Too early to clear Sharon

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Justice Ministry denied reports that the nation's top prosecutor has decided to clear Ariel Sharon in a corruption case.

After Israeli media reported that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz likely would close the case against Israel's prime minister, the Justice Ministry said Tuesday a decision is still pending.

Mazuz is expected to decide by June 15 whether to indict Sharon in connection with a case in which a businessman is suspected of trying to bribe him in exchange for help in buying a Greek island resort.

Israel's Channel Two television on Monday said Mazuz believes the prime minister's conduct in the case was "unbe-

coming" but did not constitute a felony.

Earlier this year, State Attorney Edna Arbel had drafted an indictment against the prime minister.

But Sharon's attorney accused Arbel aides of leaking the draft indictment in a politically motivated "media manipulation" before Sharon traveled to the United States to meet President Bush.

In what is being called the Greek Island affair, property developer David Appel is suspected of paying Gilad Sharon hundreds of thousands of dollars in the late 1990s, while his father was foreign minister.

Investigators allege Ariel Sharon may have illicitly used his influence to help Appel's business dealings.

For his part, Sharon has consistently denied wrongdoing.

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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](http://www.jta.org).

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# Jewish groups rally to help on aid deadline

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish groups are leading a coalition to prevent refugees in the United States from losing benefits for food and housing.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society has been joined by several other Jewish groups and federations in pushing legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives that would extend a benefit deadline for refugees and other humanitarian immigrants who are elderly, disabled or blind.

HIAS estimates that 8,000 refugees from the former Soviet Union have lost or could lose their benefits because of a provision in the 1996 welfare reform law that capped Supplemental Security Income benefits at seven years for non-citizens who arrived in the United States after 1996.

The organization estimates that more than 950 refugees from the former Soviet Union lost benefits in 2003, and many more are expected to lose them this year. HIAS estimates that 90 percent of the FSU refugees who arrived since 1996 are Jewish.

The SSI benefits provide a cash payment of more than \$500 per month for a single person and \$800 for a couple. Most immigrants aren't eligible for the aid, but refugees and other humanitarian cases are.

"For many refugees, that's their only form of cash assistance," said Gideon Aronoff, HIAS' vice president for government relations and public policy. "Either the person is going to be destitute or the community will have to act."

Current rules allow for permanent benefits for those who were receiving them

before Aug. 22, 1996, or who entered the country before that date and later became blind or disabled. For residents who came after Aug. 22, 1996 or came before then but later turned 65, benefits are capped at seven years.

Refugee groups say the cap cuts aid to a needy population and makes it almost impossible for refugees to keep their benefits.

"The Jewish community has had a strong commitment to seeing the refugees through the process until a person becomes a citizen and has a stable future in America," Aronoff said. "The group eligible for SSI, the elderly and disabled, these are the people that need more of a hand than your average refugee."

■

While it's technically possible for refugees to get citizenship within seven years, Aronoff said that logistically it's all but impossible.

Refugees first must become lawful permanent residents for five years before applying for citizenship.

But because only 10,000 applicants receive that status each year, the backlog can extend for 15 years.

Those who receive permanent status must fight processing delays in the Department of Homeland Security, which now oversees immigration issues, to naturalize within a two-year window.

In addition, elderly and disabled refugees often have difficulty learning English, a requirement for citizenship.

Jewish groups are working with refugee organizations, such as Refugee Council USA and the National Immigration Law Center, on the issue. Other partners include

Florida's Cuban and Haitian communities and the Southeast Asian community.

Introduced in March by Reps. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and Amo Houghton (R-N.Y.), the bill would extend SSI benefits for refugees for two additional years. That would give refugees more time to gain citizenship.

Similar legislation is expected to be introduced in the Senate when it returns next month. Aronoff said the additional funds needed for benefits already have been budgeted by the White House, a sign of support.

But election-year politics has slowed the process. No single legislator is leading opposition to the subsidies but a number are expected to vote against them, heeding constituents who oppose federal subsidies for refugees and other non-citizens.

In the meantime, many Jewish federations are being forced to pick up the slack for community members who are not seeing the income they have come to expect. Some states have supplemented the income, but many others have not.

"We expect in many communities people will have developed close relationships with these refugees and feel a compulsion to help them when they are in need," Aronoff said.

Right now, because only a handful of people in each community have lost benefits, stop-gap solutions are being found, such as requests for expedited citizenship. But without the extension, Aronoff said, the problem of refugees without income will be too big to handle on a case-by-case basis. "You can't expedite 2,000 cases," he said. ■

## Greek journalist accuses Jews of muzzling free speech

By JEAN COHEN

ATHENS, Greece (JTA) — A prominent Greek journalist has accused Greek Jews of being puppets of the Israeli government and of censoring criticism of "fascist" Israeli policies. Kostas Betinakis, a former foreign editor of the Ta Nea newspaper, Greece's largest, made his comments on his news Web site.

The incident raises the issue of anti-Semitism in Greece at a time when a Jewish group has reiterated its call for a travel boycott of Greece just months before Athens hosts the 2004 Olympics.

Betinakis, known for his anti-Israel views, criticized the country's Jews after the Central Board of Greek Jewish Communities wrote to the Greek Journalists Union about anti-Semitism in the media following a series of editorial cartoons after Israel's assass-

ination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin in March.

The letter was intended to be private, but Betinakis — who had access to it as a member of the Journalists Union's board of directors — called it an official protest and publicized it.

On April 16, the president of the Central Board, Moses Konstantinis, met with Manolis Mathioudakis, the Journalists Union president, to discuss the portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Greek media.

Several leading Jewish organizations, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Anti-Defamation League, have sent several protest letters to the Greek government over anti-Semitic expression in the Greek media. Unless Greece takes action against anti-Semitism, the Wiesenthal Center will keep in place its call for a travel boycott against Greece. ■

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### P.A. officials use deception to get around

Palestinian Authority officers posed as sick patients to infiltrate Israel in fake ambulances, Israeli police said.

Some of the officials are members of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's security guard, the police said. The police added that some terrorists also may have been smuggled into Israel using this method.

### Deep trouble for weapons smugglers

Gaza Strip arms prices reportedly have spiked since Israel began cracking down on weapons-smuggling tunnels.

Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that a contraband AK-47 bullet, which cost just more than \$1 before the start of the intifada in September 2000 now goes for five times as much in Gaza.

Israeli authorities monitor such inflation as a gauge of the army's success in uncovering tunnels in Rafah, which lies on Gaza's southern border with Egypt.

### Teens held for Hezbollah links

Two teenagers from a village on Israel's border with Lebanon are suspected of links to Hezbollah.

The Shin Bet this week lifted a gag order on the arrest of the two youths from Ghajar, an Israeli Arab village where regular drug smuggling from Lebanon takes place.

The two were arrested May 2 on suspicion of illicit deals with Hezbollah agents in which they may have been persuaded to spy on Israel for the Lebanese terrorist group.

### Lifeguards back

Striking lifeguards returned to Israel's beaches for Shavuot. The lifeguards went on strike earlier this month to protest local authorities' layoff plans.

The Interior Ministry wants the number of lifeguards posted at each beach lookout cut from three to two. But on Tuesday the lifeguards were back at work, calling it a goodwill gesture for the holiday.

### Get your cheesecake here

What is believed to be the largest cheesecake in the world will be baked in Haifa for Shavuot. The cake is expected to measure more than three yards in diameter and more than one yard high. Dairy food traditionally is eaten on Shavuot.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Tisch re-elected at Conference of Presidents

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations re-elected James Tisch as chairman.

The group unanimously voted Tisch in for a second one-year term at its meeting Monday.

The Presidents Conference also adopted a resolution that the U.N. General Assembly should adopt the declaration denouncing anti-Semitism that was approved at last month's OSCE meeting in Berlin.

### Rabbis, the Navy wants you

The U.S. Navy is looking for a few good rabbis.

The Navy's Chaplain Corps recently sent a letter asking for rabbis to make a three-year commitment to serve.

The 11 "active-duty Navy rabbis serving from Okinawa to Italy, backed up by a handful of reservists, simply can't do the job," the letter said.

### Jewish music archive grows

Nearly 600 recordings of Jewish music were donated to Florida Atlantic University's music archive. The university's Judaica Music Rescue Project, which was started in 2002 and maintains an archive of more than 6,000 Jewish musical recordings, received some 600 78-rpm recordings and several LP albums.

They were donated by David Weintraub, director of the Dora Teitelboim Center for Yiddish Culture in Florida, and by Milly Nyman, daughter of Jacob Schacter, a pioneer of Jewish radio in Miami.

### Bigwigs turn out for Wiesel

The Anti-Defamation League assembled a star-studded lineup in honor of Elie Wiesel's 75th birthday.

Celebrities at Monday's dinner for the Nobel laureate included U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.); Gen. Wesley Clark, actors Jon Voigt, Ellen Burstyn and Lynn Redgrave; Ralph Reed; and Cameron Kerry, brother of Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the presumptive Democratic nominee for president.

Wiesel, who turned 75 last September, is "an irresistible moral force on a global scale that transcends governments and institutions," Ambassador Richard Holbrooke said. "I cannot imagine the world understanding the Holocaust without him."

## WORLD

### Hungarian court opposes free-speech law

Hungary's Constitutional Court refused to approve a new version of the country's hate-speech law.

The law, which was approved by Parliament, is incompatible with the right to freedom of speech, the court ruled Monday. In the new version, the word "incite" was replaced by the word "instigate."

The Jewish community expressed its disappointment with the decision and vowed to press for a new law.

### Morocco postpones interfaith forum

Morocco postponed a conference of Jewish and Muslim religious leaders because of Middle East turmoil.

More than 100 religious leaders from around the world, including Israel and the Palestinian-populated territories, had been set to attend the World Congress of Rabbis and Imams for Peace, slated for May 31-June 3.

The conference was to have been hosted by the king of Morocco at the University of Ifran.

The organizers, Hommes de Parole, said in a statement released in Paris on Tuesday that "the degradation of the situation in Gaza, in the Palestinian territories and in Iraq had dangerously altered the climate of serenity indispensable for the success" of the conference. The conference now will take place in the fall, the statement said.

### Berlin theater to fund trip to death camps

A Berlin movie theater stepped in to save a school trip to death camp memorials outside Germany.

Jurgen Paster, spokesman for the Kinocenter Spandau, said he was moved to act after he learned that the Berlin Senate did not want to subsidize 15 students from the Spandau school for the educational trip to Majdanek and Sobibor in Poland. The cinema has supplied the necessary funds with one stipulation: The students must make a film about their visit, to be shown at the theater.

Paster said the theater will supply a video camera and will help with editing.

The school's principal, who had canceled the trip, said he would try to get the trip off the ground again.