

## IN THE NEWS

**'Action plan' for Gaza**

The diplomatic "Quartet" seeking Israeli-Palestinian peace drafted a plan for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

The United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia are calling for an overhaul of Palestinian Authority security forces and for P.A. President Yasser Arafat to be sidelined after Israel withdraws its troops and settlers from Gaza.

First reported by Reuters on Monday, the draft is a departure for Washington's Quartet partners.

**Israeli ministers quit the Cabinet**

Two Israeli Cabinet members resigned from the government in protest over Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

The resignations of the chief of the National Religious Party, Housing Minister Effi Eitam, and Yitzhak Levy, an NRP deputy minister, leave Sharon's government with only 59 legislators, a minority in the 120-member Knesset. Another NRP Cabinet member, Welfare Minister Zevulun Orlev, is staying put for now.

**Israel files U.N. complaint**

Israel is calling for U.N. intervention to help stop Lebanese shelling of Israeli towns.

Israel said it was sending a letter Tuesday to the U.N. secretary-general and the president of the Security Council asking them to help halt recent Lebanese rocket fire into Israel.

Israel's complaint comes after Lebanon lodged a protest at the United Nations of Israel's bombing of a suspected Palestinian terrorist camp near Beirut. Lebanese terrorist groups shot six rockets at an Israeli navy vessel Monday and fired Tuesday into Shebaa Farms, a town that straddles Israel's northern border.

The activities are a "very severe violation" of U.N. resolutions, said Arye Mekeel, deputy permanent representative of Israel to the United Nations.

# WORLD REPORT

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## After Cabinet vote, Sharon faces major political challenges to plan

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — It has been watered down to placate senior Cabinet ministers and keep the National Religious Party in the governing coalition.

But Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to disengage from the Palestinians, even in the form that passed the Cabinet on Sunday, is potentially of historic significance.

There's no escaping the fact that a right-wing, Likud-led government voted to launch a process that will see Israeli troops and civilians leave the Gaza Strip by the end of 2005 and will draw new lines in the West Bank, creating promising conditions for the vision of two states for two peoples.

Moreover, the chances for implementation seem good: The United States and the other members of the diplomatic "Quartet" working for Middle East peace back the plan.

More importantly, Egypt, the Arab country with most leverage on the Palestinians, has thrown its weight behind it and is ready to take practical steps to help.

But there's a major snag: Despite his impressive victory in the Cabinet, it's not yet clear whether Sharon has the political clout to see the plan through. He fired two dissenting Cabinet ministers from the National Union party, Avigdor Lieberman and Benny Elon, to ensure a majority in the Cabinet, but that only exacerbated strong far-right ferment against the plan.

Two of the six legislators from the hawkish NRP quit the coalition Tuesday, and at least 12 of the Likud Party's 40 Knesset members are threatening to vote against the government on key issues.

Indeed, because of the internal opposition within his own Likud Party, Sharon may not be able to muster a Knesset majority for an alternative coalition with the Labor Party. That could trigger elections and a new political landscape in Israel.

Sharon may have most of the international community behind him.

But watering down the plan — as he was forced to do after Likud members rejected it in a party referendum last month — has only postponed a major political showdown in Israel, and it's not clear for how long.

The revised disengagement plan approved Sunday differs from Sharon's original program in that the settlements are to be evacuated in stages, with a Cabinet vote before each stage.

The text explicitly states that Sunday's decision does not sanction the evacuation of a single settlement, but it does divide the settlements earmarked for evacuation into four groups, establishes committees to plan relocation and compensation for evacuated settlers, and sets a March 1 deadline for a vote on evacuating the first group.

That was enough for the Quartet to welcome the revised plan, and for the United States to describe it as "historic" and "courageous."

But the key outside player, it seems, will be Egypt. The Egyptians fear that if Israel withdraws unilaterally from Gaza without an orderly transfer of power, the strip could become a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, with dangerous consequences for Egypt as well as for Israel.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, dedicated to

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the overthrow of the Egyptian regime, assassinated one of the country's last three presidents — Anwar Sadat — and tried to kill the other two, Gamel Abdel Nasser and Hosni Mubarak.

The last thing Mubarak wants is for Gaza to become a base for political subversion against Egypt. The Egyptians therefore are doing all they can to broker a smooth handover of power to the Palestinian Authority and to give it the tools to keep Hamas and Islamic Jihad at bay.

■  
The Egyptians are proposing a number of far-reaching security and political moves that could give Sharon's plan the impetus it needs to succeed.

In the security sphere, they are ready to train P.A. forces in day-to-day police work and in fighting terrorism and ready to oversee the restructuring of the P.A. armed forces into three services under a unified command.

In return, Israel would stop targeted killings and other counterterrorist actions as part of a new cease-fire. In addition, the Egyptians would send more forces to the border to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza.

On the political level, the Egyptians are pressing P.A. President Yasser Arafat on the assumption that if he relinquishes power, peace talks with Israel can resume.

Therefore, Egypt insists that the commander of the unified Palestinian force be someone other than Arafat, that Arafat hand over most of his authority to Prime

Minister Ahmed Qurei and that a strongman they feel they can work with, perhaps former security chief Mohamed Dahlan, take responsibility for Gaza security.

The Egyptians have given Arafat a June 15 deadline to agree to their terms, and Egyptian officials told Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom during a visit to Cairo on Monday that they would not tolerate Arafat "playing games" any longer.

But the potential for progress could be undermined by Sharon's domestic difficulties. A looming split in the NRP — party leaders Effi Eitam and Yitzhak Levy resigned from the government Tuesday — coupled with Knesset opposition from the 12 rebel Likud legislators leaves Sharon without a reliable parliamentary majority.

His obvious recourse is to bring the Labor Party's 21 legislators into the coalition, but that's easier said than done. Six Labor legislators are against joining

Sharon's government; their supporters say they have a solid majority of 66 legislators in the 120-member Knesset who don't want Labor to join.

For the time being, Sharon can rely on Labor's promised parliamentary "safety net" — its pledge not to bring him down as long as disengagement goes forward.

But that might not be enough when the vote on evacuating the first group of settlements comes along, and right-wing pressures inside the Cabinet resurface. To push the vote through then, Sharon will want Labor in the Cabinet.

In the weeks and months ahead, Sharon and his old friend, Labor Chairman Shimon Peres, will use all their political skills to outmaneuver the many opponents of a unity government. The future of the disengagement plan could depend on their success. ■

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

## Attacks on Jews in France intensifying

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Some Jewish officials are worried that anti-Semites are ratcheting up violence against Jews in France, and that French courts are tacitly giving them a pass with light sentences.

In the latest significant attack, community officials said an assailant tried to murder a yeshiva student, who was stabbed last week as he prepared for Shabbat at one of Europe's top talmudic academies.

Police believe the same man carried out additional knife attacks that night against non-Jewish targets, but Jewish groups don't doubt the anti-Semitic nature of the initial incident.

The attack represented a new level of anti-Semitic assault, the first with a deadly weapon, community leaders say. It comes amid an alarming increase in the intensity of anti-Jewish attacks in recent weeks. In the past month, rabbis in Marseille and in the Parisian suburb of Creteil were attacked, and a rabbi's son was severely beaten near his home in Paris over Shavuot.

Government statistics show a steep rise in anti-Semitic incidents since the beginning of 2004.

The figures also show that attacks against Jews make up the vast majority of

racist crime, despite the fact that the Jewish community is one of France's smallest minority groups.

Paradoxically, the sharp rise has come at a time when Jewish groups acknowledge that the government has shown real willingness to tackle the problem of anti-Semitism.

The attacks have left Jewish community members wringing their hands.

"The government has taken all sorts of measures to deal with this, and our synagogues are like fortresses," Ghozlan said. "They've even put on extra buses from railway stations so people don't walk around at night. What more can we do?"

Ghozlan has sharp words for the courts, which, he says, hasn't been tough enough with offenders.

"People have been arrested, but it's not going to do any good if sentencing is not exemplary," he said. Similar views are being expressed in France's large Jewish communal organizations.

In a forceful statement following last week's knife attack, the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews said that "a new level had been breached" in anti-Semitic attacks in France, aided "by recent court decisions that give the feeling that one can attack Jews with total impunity." ■

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# Ahead of election, shuls try to stay neutral

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Jewish religious establishment is trying to walk a fine line, telling Jews to go out and vote, but not for whom.

The major religious denominations are coordinating to inform rabbis and other synagogue leaders about what they can and can't do to educate congregants about candidates and issues in the upcoming presidential elections.

While the Jewish religious world has done similar outreach efforts in other presidential elections, the efforts take on a new significance this year. They come as President Bush's re-election team is working to campaign through liaisons in the nation's churches and new legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives would allow clergy to endorse political candidates and allow houses of worship to play a more active role in partisan politics.

Some are charging that the administration is stretching the tax-exempt status granted to places of worship, which by tax law are prohibited from partisan political activity.

The news last week that Bush's campaign was seeking advocates to coordinate campaigns in 1,600 "friendly congregations" in Pennsylvania has sparked debate about what's legal to say and do in churches and synagogues. Similar concerns apply to other religious nonprofit institutions, such as Jewish federations, community centers and day schools.

With both national campaigns preparing to reach out to the Jewish community this election season, there's a very real possibility that synagogues will be thrown into the midst of the political squabble.

The Jewish religious leadership's message to followers is two-fold: It wants community members to be active and engaged, hoping to maintain Jews' traditional influence in the political process, but it also wants synagogues and federations to follow the law.

"We're going to be very careful of the rules and continue to both encourage our community to be involved but be cognizant of what the rules are," said Reva Price, Washington director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization for Jewish community relations councils around the country.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs

and the congregational arms of Judaism's four major streams have sent out "Get Out the Vote 2004" guides to leaders across the country. The publications outline how synagogues and other Jewish organizations can participate in the political process by registering members to vote, holding candidate forums and even serving as polling places.

It also suggests that rabbis should give sermons on the important issues for the Jewish community in the November elections, and on the importance of civic participation.

But the guide defines the limits of what synagogues and their leaders can do. It stresses that any candidate forum must include all viable candidates for office, that no endorsements are allowed and that candidate questionnaires must be done with extreme caution to ensure objectivity.

Rabbi Marla Feldman, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the guide's co-author, said it's important for synagogues to follow the guidelines not only to maintain their tax-exempt status, but to avoid alienating members of the community.

"We are very cognizant and respectful of the fact that there is diversity in our pews," Feldman said. "I don't think we would tell people who to vote for."

Political actions that Jewish groups take are likely to be heavily scrutinized in the coming months. Questions already arose when the Jewish Federation of South Palm Beach County, Fla., welcomed Vice President Dick Cheney for a speech last month.

The event was paid for by Bush's re-election campaign but, before allowing Cheney to speak, federation officials set down several parameters to adhere to federal laws for places of worship, said Larry Altschul, the federation president.

The event could not be billed as a campaign event; the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, could not be denigrated; and fund raising, campaign literature and banners were prohibited.

"It's not that you can't deal with candidates, it's that you can't be partisan,"

Altschul said, adding that the federation would be happy to host Kerry as well. "We did get some complaints from folks who were so partisan, it really clouded their objectivity."

There was nothing illegal in the request the Republican campaign issued in Pennsylvania, seeking volunteers to garner support for Bush in the state's churches. But places of worship that allow Bush backers to distribute

campaign materials inside their gates, as the e-mail suggested, could be subject to fines or Internal Revenue Service revocation of their tax-exempt status.

It's unclear whether synagogues would be targeted in Pennsylvania or elsewhere.

Reaching out to members of churches and synagogues was part of the campaign's strategy to seek support through coalitions, said Sharon Castillo, spokeswoman for the Bush/Cheney campaign.

"Our approach is to do person-to-person contact, individual to individual," she said. "We are not in any way advocating for people to get together in places of worship for political activity."

The Kerry campaign has said it will not court voters in their houses of worship.

But new legislation being considered this week would allow churches and synagogues to play a more active political role.

The "Safe Harbor for Churches" provision would allow religious leaders to endorse candidates from the pulpit, as long as it is expressly identified as a statement made by the individual leader, and not on behalf of the place of worship.

Churches and synagogues also would be allowed to engage in political acts up to three times a year without affecting their tax-exempt status.

Many Jewish organizations oppose the legislation, concerned that rabbis and other religious leaders would be pressured by candidates and their supporters to participate in partisan politics.

But Jewish leaders hope that concerns about partisan politics don't stop synagogues from getting their congregants registered to vote.

"The more we vote, the more impact we have in the political arena," Feldman said. ■

(JTA Washington intern Justin Bosch contributed to this report.)

The Kerry campaign said it won't court voters in houses of worship.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Bill would let clergy go political

A new bill in the U.S. House of Representatives would allow church and synagogue leaders to endorse political candidates.

The Safe Harbor for Churches amendment to the American Jobs Creation Act would allow religious leaders to make statements supporting candidates, as long as the statements are made as private citizens and not as representatives of any organizations. Religious leaders would be allowed to participate in political activities up to three times a year without hurting their organizations' tax-exempt status.

The bill is opposed by many Jewish organizations, who fear rabbis and other clergy could be pressured by politicians and their supporters to engage in political activity.

### Jewish congressmen criticize Hollings

Three Jewish Democratic congressmen criticized a Democratic colleague in the Senate who cast the Iraq war as a ploy to help Israel. A letter from Reps. Barney Frank (Mass.), Tom Lantos (Calif.) and Henry Waxman (Calif.) to Sen. Ernest Hollings (S.C.) rejects the analysis that the senator offered in a column last month.

"We believe this is bad analysis, bad history, and an extremely inappropriate singling out of one element in a very complex mix for responsibility," they wrote. Hollings had written that the goal of the war was "to secure Israel" and focused on the role of two Jewish administration officials and one Jewish columnist in its planning.

### Daniel Pearl's father honored

The father of slain journalist Daniel Pearl said he is working to "turn tragedy into life-affirming" experiences.

Judea Pearl made the comment Monday in New York as he was honored by the American Jewish World Service.

Along with his wife, Ruth, Judea Pearl has established the Daniel Pearl Foundation in honor of his son, who proclaimed his Jewishness shortly before his throat was slit by Islamic terrorists in Pakistan in January 2002. The foundation promotes cross-cultural understanding through journalism and music programs.

Like their son, the Pearls are focused on "changing the world and healing the gross fissures in the world," said the American Jewish World Service's president, Ruth Messinger.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Islamist terror fronts hit

Israel shut down Islamist charities linked to West Bank terrorism. Israeli forces on Tuesday sealed the office of an Islamic Jihad front group in Tulkarm and of a banned Hamas charity in Ramallah, confiscating some of the groups' money.

In Nablus, an office of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also was shut down.

In other West Bank operations overnight, troops arrested 25 Palestinian terrorist suspects.

### Turkey recalls envoys

Israel played down Turkey's decision to recall its ambassador for consultations.

Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioglu and his consul to Jerusalem were recalled this week for what Ankara described as "routine consultations." Israeli officials called the move a signal of Turkish displeasure at recent Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, but said no further diplomatic escalation was expected.

Turkey, a strategic ally of Israel, recently has stepped up its

rhetoric against the Jewish state in what analysts called an effort to strengthen ties with the Arab world.

### Israel develops Cruise missile

Israel developed its first surface-to-surface Cruise missile.

Officials in Washington confirmed a report to appear in *Jane's Defense Weekly* next week that Israel modified its Delilah air-to-surface missile to achieve targets 200 miles away when launched from the ground.

Israel plans to expand the range of the missile. Such a missile may prove a deterrent to missiles reportedly developed by Iran.

### Israel to close industrial park

Erez, an Israeli-run industrial zone on the Gaza Strip border that employs thousands of Palestinians, is to close.

Trade Minister Ehud Olmert said Tuesday the closure follows government approval of an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Olmert further said security fears at the fortified complex made operations unviable, and that the 201 factories there would be relocated in southern Israel.

There was no date given for the closure, which would put some 4,000 Palestinians out of work. Erez, which was created after the Oslo peace accords in the mid-1990s, produces textiles, furniture and steel, but frequently was targeted by Palestinian terrorists.

## WORLD

### Paris to honor Herzl

Paris' City Council is naming a street or square after Theodor Herzl.

A resolution on the matter proposed Monday was unanimously adopted by the council. Herzl reported on the trial of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus from Paris, an event that led him to believe that the only solution for the Jewish people was the creation of a Jewish state.

Herzl's utopian vision of a future Jewish state, "Altneuland," was written in a Paris hotel.

### Father of Zionism remembered

The 100th anniversary of the death of Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, was marked in Budapest. Monday's commemoration took place at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Herzl was born in Budapest on May 2, 1860, near the city's Great Synagogue.

### Pope backs tourism to Israel

Pope John Paul II urged Catholics worldwide to visit Israel to support Christians living in the Holy Land.

The Christian communities in Israel "are in great need of your help," the pope said in a recent address to bishops at the Vatican. Christian tourism to Israel has increased dramatically in recent years.

### Moscow eatery touts its kashrut

A new restaurant in Moscow is building its advertising campaign around its adherence to Jewish dietary laws.

The idea behind the King David restaurant campaign is to demonstrate that kosher food can be as tasty as non-kosher food and that it is healthy, a manager at the restaurant said. The King David, which opened Monday, is the most recent addition to a family of restaurants in a historical neighborhood in Moscow that has become known for its posh restaurants.

The King David, which offers continental cuisine, operates under the supervision of Rabbi Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis.

There are now at least four kosher restaurants in the Russian capital.