

## IN THE NEWS

## No Gaza pullback under heavy fire

Israel will not evacuate settlements in the Gaza Strip under fire.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, in his first detailed discussion of the plan, told Israeli lawmakers Monday that security forces would clear out small Gaza settlements before attempting to evacuate the large Gush Katif bloc.

According to Mofaz, Israeli military forces will move into key positions in Gaza to pre-empt attacks by Palestinian terrorists, but the plan will be put on hold if the settlements come under heavy fire.

## Supreme Court won't rehear case

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to reopen a challenge to the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance.

On Monday, the court refused a California atheist's request to revisit its ruling against him in June. At that time, it discarded his case on a custody issue while side-stepping the controversial issue of the language "under God."

Michael Newdow brought suit on behalf of his 10-year-old daughter to remove that phrase from the pledge, claiming that the recital in class violated his constitutional religious rights as a parent.

Leaving the constitutional question unaddressed, the justices ruled that Newdow had no standing to file a lawsuit without full custody of his daughter.

Jewish groups split on the case.

## N.Y. Jewish sites get more security

Security at synagogues and other Jewish institutions in New York City will be increased for the High Holidays.

In making the announcement Monday, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said there were no specific threats against

# WORLD REPORT

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## Down on the farm, Sharon weighs a slew of tough options

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — Ariel Sharon has been weighing the options for his government and "disengagement plan" since his humiliating defeat at last week's Likud Party convention, but none of the alternatives looks particularly good.

Formally, the convention merely voted against continuing coalition talks with the dovish Labor Party. But the subtext of the vote was clear: Hawkish party members are intent on preventing the Israeli prime minister from going ahead with his plan to pull Israeli troops and settlers out of the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank next year.

In the wake of the vote, Sharon retired to his Sycamore Farm to consider his next move. There are no easy options.

Sharon could:

- stumble on with the minority government he now has, but that would make carrying out the disengagement plan virtually impossible;
- continue coalition negotiations with Labor in defiance of the Likud convention decision, but that almost certainly would draw fierce opposition in both parties;
- try to build a stable coalition with the fiercely secular Shinui Party and the fervently Orthodox parties, a daunting task; or
- bring in the fervently Orthodox and the far-right instead of Shinui or Labor — which likely would be the final blow to Sharon's disengagement plan.

If there's no simple route to beef up his shaky coalition, precipitating early elections won't be easy for Sharon either. Given the

current turmoil in Likud, Sharon wouldn't be sure of winning the party nomination for prime minister.

If he splits the party to run at the head of a centrist alliance composed of Likud breakaways, Labor and Shinui — a realignment so profound that pundits have labeled it the "big bang" of Israeli politics — Sharon would be embarking on a political adventure, the results of which no one can foresee.

Should Sharon decide to persist with his minority government, he first will have to shore up his position in his own party. That would entail making deals with Likud strongmen like Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

For a proud man like Sharon, that would be the ultimate humiliation — not to mention the fact that neither prospective ally is enamored of the disengagement plan.

Shalom has said he will help Sharon push the plan through, but the trade-off for his support would probably be further modification of the plan and vacillation.

Moreover, if the government votes next March, as scheduled, to begin evacuating settlers from Gaza, the four National Religious Party members who still support Sharon will bolt, leaving the prime minister with a coalition of only 54 in the 120-member Knesset, and an opposition threatening to topple him at any moment over a host of issues.

Sharon's preferred government remains a national unity coalition with Labor. The first thing he did after retiring to his farm was to send a message to Labor leader Shimon Peres saying that he wanted to continue coalition

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ANALYSIS

## ■ *All of Sharon's options are fraught with difficulty*

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talks, the Likud vote notwithstanding.

The next day Peres convened a news conference to announce that he was no longer interested, that instead he would press for early elections and that he would be Labor's candidate for prime minister.

The idea was to soften up Sharon's Likud opponents who don't want elections any time soon, but Peres may have overplayed his hand: His announcement that he would run as Labor's candidate for prime minister sparked a mini-rebellion in his own party.

About a dozen Labor legislators, led by Matan Vilnai and Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, came out against any further talks with the Likud, and against Peres as the party's automatic choice for prime minister.

They demanded that the coalition negotiating team change its function and start preparing the party for new elections. And they insisted that a date be set soon for primaries to elect Labor's candidate for prime minister.

Peres countered by dismissing the rebellion as a tempest in a teacup. More significantly, he changed his tack on national unity: The coalition negotiations with the Likud, he said, were almost wrapped up, with far-reaching agreements already achieved on key political and economic issues.

And despite what he had said at his earlier news conference, Peres left no doubt that he intended to resume coalition talks with Sharon.

But will Sharon and Peres, the long-

time rivals and grand old men of Israeli politics, with all their proven political skills, be able to outmaneuver the rebels in their respective parties?

If not, Sharon could try for a coalition with Shinui and the fervently Orthodox. But Shinui is insisting that the fervently Orthodox agree to a form of civil marriage and a military draft of yeshiva students, demands they reject out of hand.

Instead of Shinui, Sharon could bring back the far-right National Union bloc and the two dissenting National Religious Party legislators, building a solid 69-member coalition. But that would mean abandoning disengagement altogether, sparking a potential showdown with the next U.S. administration and the rest of the international community for breaking Israel's much touted promise to withdraw.

The only way out for Sharon, political analyst Ben Caspit wrote in the Ma'ariv newspaper, is for him to "rock the boat." One way of doing this would be to go to new elections.

But, as Caspit writes, Sharon has become a leader without a party — and, in an election situation, he might well face a strong leadership challenge.

To head this off, the Likud's Reuven Rivlin, the Knesset Speaker, is proposing that Sharon and Netanyahu agree in

advance on a leadership rotation: That Sharon be prime minister for two years after the next election, and then make way for Netanyahu.

An even more radical solution for Sharon would be to trigger the "big bang" and form a centrist electoral alliance incorporating his wing of the Likud, Labor and Shinui, running together on a pro-disengagement ticket.

Polls show such an alignment would win about 60 Knesset seats. That would give a new Sharon-led government the political base for disengagement and more. But Israeli pundits doubt

that the three aging party leaders — Sharon, Peres and Shinui's Yosef "Tommy" Lapid — would have the daring and stamina to pull together their disparate parties.

Leading analyst Nahum Barnea wrote in the Yediot Achronot newspaper: "This plan did not have much chance to start off with. Now that the three old men are battered and beaten, the chances are even smaller."

Taken together, these factors don't augur well for the disengagement plan or for Israel's international standing. Most Israelis want to see disengagement proceed. The question is, can the unwieldy Israeli political system allow any government a political base solid enough to carry it out? ■

Some analysts say Sharon has become a leader without a party.

## Survivors' champion dies at 78

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — Karl Brozik, a long-time advocate for Holocaust survivors, has died at age 78.

Brozik, a survivor of Auschwitz, passed away on Aug. 18 during a visit to Prague, according to the Conference for Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, whose Frankfurt office Brozik had led since 1987. The cause was a chronic heart ailment.

Mourners on both sides of the Atlantic remembered Brozik as a tireless champion for moral justice for survivors, and as a person who knew how to enjoy life.

Though they knew of his longtime illness, friends and colleagues were shaken by news of Brozik's death, Claims Confer-

ence spokesperson Cornelia Maimon Levi told JTA.

Despite health problems, Brozik represented the Claims Conference in negotiations for reparations from the German government, Levi said. "It is really impressive how many people cherished him."

Born in 1926 in what is now the Czech Republic, Brozik was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. Deported from the Lodz Ghetto to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, he joined the secret resistance movement in the death camp.

The Nazis forced inmates to leave Auschwitz on foot as the Soviet Army approached in January, 1945. Brozik survived the "death march" to Mauthausen, where he was liberated in May, 1945. ■



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# French Jewish community wants more security

By PHIL CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — Jewish officials here have called for increased security measures outside community institutions after a meeting place for elderly Jews was destroyed in an arson attack.

Firefighters called out to tackle the blaze early Sunday morning at the Judeo-Spanish social center in Paris' 11th District found the institution gutted, with anti-Semitic slogans and graffiti daubed on refrigerators.

The center is housed in a former synagogue once used by Greek and Turkish Jewish immigrants.

Since the 1960s, it largely has served as a social club and soup kitchen for elderly people in the neighborhood.

The center, on the ground floor of a five-story apartment block, is well known as a Jewish communal institution. Yet it wasn't permanently guarded and there were no security cameras near the institution, a community security official told JTA.

A police night patrol that circulates in the area had passed the building some two hours before the attack but noticed nothing suspicious, he added.

The spray-painting of swastikas at the site, as well as the presence of anti-Semitic slogans, appeared initially to indicate a far-right source to the attack.

On Monday morning, however, a previously unknown group calling itself

Partisans for Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the arson. The claim could not be verified.

In a statement on a French-based Islamist Web site, the group said young Islamic warriors "had set the Jewish temple in Paris alight" in response to "the desecration of Muslim tombs and also to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the fire which ravaged Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem."

On Aug. 21, 1969, an Australian Christian man started a fire that damaged a number of religious artifacts at the mosque, which stands on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

French President Jacques Chirac condemned the attack at the Jewish center, assuring the community of "the absolute determination of the public authorities to find the perpetrators of these unacceptable acts."

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin cut short a visit to his home town of Poitiers in western France to return to the capital, telling Jewish officials that public prosecutors would demand the maximum 20-year prison sentence for the assailant.

Such comments come amid widespread criticism in the Jewish community of what many see as the justice system's leniency toward acts of anti-Semitism.

Speaking on French radio shortly after the arson, Roger Cukierman, presi-

dent of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jews, said judges had "created a real feeling of impunity by systematically handing out not guilty verdicts" in recent cases.

"This leniency allows anti-Semites from all sides to freely express themselves," Cukierman said. "Why should they deprive themselves when they're not risking anything?"

Similar comments came from Rabbi Claude Zaffran of the Don Isaac Abrahavanel synagogue, located a few hundred yards from the burnt social club.

"France is not anti-Semitic and neither is the president, the government or the ministers, but the acts continue and they're not always judged the way they should be," he told JTA.

Zaffran said he felt "very hurt and angry" over Sunday's attack, adding that it was "unnatural that as a rabbi with a hat and beard, I should even think I should be afraid in a free country like France."

Other Jewish leaders expressed security fears in the run-up to the High Holidays.

Sammy Ghazlan, president of the National Bureau for Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism, told JTA he thought it would be necessary to extend security to Jewish grocery stores and butchers.

"There's going to be huge crowds at shops before the Jewish holidays," he said. "They're as much a target as any synagogue."

## Anti-Semitic attacks up in France in 2004

PARIS (JTA) — This week's arson at a Jewish community center in Paris is the latest in a series of attacks against Jews and their property in France.

Such incidents have nearly doubled in the first months of 2004.

Principal anti-Semitic acts in France since the beginning of the year include:

- Jan. 17 — A Jewish boy is attacked by a group of youths of North African origin at an ice rink near Paris;
- Feb. 23 — Vandals deface a plaque to Paris school children deported to Nazi death camps;
- Mar. 23 — A firebomb is thrown at a synagogue in Toulon in southern France;
- April 30 — 127 tombs are daubed with swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans at a Jewish cemetery in Herrlisheim, near the German border;

- May 4 — A rabbi and his young son are attacked on their way to Friday night services in the Paris suburb of Creteil;

- May 6 — Neo-Nazi graffiti and swastikas are painted on the war memorial to Jewish soldiers who died at the Battle of Verdun during WWI;

- June 6 — A Jewish student is stabbed outside the Mevor Yisrael Yeshiva in Epinay-sur-Seine, north of Paris;

- June 12 — Vandals damage a mural painted by Jewish children Holocaust victims at the Riversaltes concentration camp in south-west France;

- July 28 — 34 tombstones are defaced with swastikas and satanic inscriptions at a Jewish cemetery in Saverne in Alsace;

- Aug. 9 — 60 tombstones are daubed with neo-Nazi insignia in Lyon;

- Aug 22 — A Jewish community center in Paris is destroyed in an anti-Semitic arson.

— P.C.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Settlement expansion forges on

Israel plans to add 533 homes to settlements around Jerusalem. Construction on 200 new housing units in Har Gilo began this month and is due to be completed by 2005, political sources said Monday.

Another 333 homes are planned for Har Adar, Adam and Immanuel, but final government approval is pending.

Most of the plans were approved under the government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak, but Palestinians said they showed Israel's poor faith in peacemaking.

Over the weekend, the Bush administration drew further Arab ire by saying it was flexible about allowing "natural growth" in some West Bank settlements as long as they are not physically expanded.

Israel long has argued that its commitment to a settlement freeze does not preclude natural growth in settlements close to the pre-1967 border that it expects to annex in any final peace deal.

### Israel mending fences

Israel will reroute its West Bank security fence to reduce the appropriation of Palestinian land.

Sections of the planned fence route that Palestinians challenged in Israel's High Court of Justice have been redrafted, despite the fact that this will hold up the entire project until late 2005, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz was quoted as telling the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday.

According to Mofaz, of the 125 miles of fence erected so far, half is within Israel proper or along the Green Line, while the rest runs through the West Bank.

## WORLD

### Serbian Jewish cemetery gets rehabbed

Serbian soldiers began helping to clean the historic Jewish cemetery in the city of Nis.

The cemetery has been at the center of a dispute between local Jews and dozens of Roma, or Gypsies, who have lived on the site for decades.

Thanks to an agreement engineered by the president of the Nis Jewish community, Jasna Ciric, 30 soldiers will work at the cemetery for six hours each weekend day for the next few weeks.

In addition, the Nis municipality has agreed to carry out an extensive project to ameliorate sanitary issues surrounding the Gypsy settlement of 120 homes, some of which use tombstones as building materials.

Belgrade Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel visited the cemetery last Friday and said that some of the hundreds of tombstones that are now visible and being cared for date back 400 years.

### Russian Web site has 'enemies list'

Jewish and human rights activists in Russia are alarmed by a list of "enemies of the Russian people" posted on a political Web site.

Posted recently on the Web site of the National Great Power Party, known as NDPR, the list consists of 47 Russian journalists, politicians, human rights activists and experts on political radicalism, mostly Jews.

For some entries on the list, individuals' contact information is given.

NDPR, a small far-right party whose ideology is considered by many to be anti-Semitic, repeatedly has been criticized for ultranationalism by the liberal media.

Last year the group was barred from taking part in national elections. The Union of Councils for Jews in the Soviet Union's Moscow

Bureau on Human Rights sent a letter to the Prosecutor General's Office demanding that charges be pressed against party leaders for inciting ethnic, religious and racial strife.

### Prague Jews rebel

Jewish leaders in Prague are facing a rebellion from sections of the community.

The dissent comes only months after the leadership was elected on a pledge to create a more transparent and democratic community.

About 40 members of the 1,600-strong community have joined a new platform called A Community for All, which claims the leadership has adopted undemocratic methods by forcing through policies without public discussion.

The platform was formed recently following a series of upheavals in the community, including the removal of Prague's Orthodox rabbi from his post as the city's chief rabbi and the resignation of 17 teachers at Prague's only Jewish school in a long-running dispute over how the school should be managed.

### Estonian memorial controversial

A controversial memorial was dedicated to Estonian soldiers who fought alongside the German SS in World War II.

The memorial, a statue of a soldier wearing a Nazi uniform, was unveiled last Friday in the western region of Lihula in front of about 2,000 people.

The inscription dedicates the memorial "to the Estonians who fought against Bolshevism and for Estonian independence from 1940 to 1941."

Regional Mayor Tiit Madisson said the memorial was dedicated to people who chose the lesser of two evils.

"They had experienced Soviet occupation and did not want to return to it," he said.

### The naked untruth

Ha'aretz accused JDate of posting pictures of porn stars to draw lonely Jewish bachelors.

The newspaper reported Monday that the site's banners "systematically use fictitious characters based on pictures of models taken from pornography sites."

JDate is alleged to have renamed a Hungarian nude model as "Hila from Tel Aviv," who allegedly is "looking for a single Jewish guy."

JDate, the largest Jewish singles network online, says it has 500,000 members.

Company officials said they took the promotional photographs from a database in Germany.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Get out the Russian vote

A new Russian-language voters' guide is being distributed in the United States.

The We Vote handbook, published by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, is part of the Civic and Voter Engagement initiative, which aims to help Russian-speaking Americans participate in the political process.

The program is co-sponsored by the World Congress of Russian Jewry.

The guide gives basic voting information such as how to register and how to file an absentee ballot, along with a sample voter registration form.

The Russian-speaking Jewish community in the United States is estimated at more than half a million people, according to HIAS.