

**IN THE NEWS**
**Mahmoud Abbas  
backs peace talks**

The Palestinian Authority presidential front-runner said he intends to resume peace talks with Israel.

"After the elections, we will start negotiations," Mahmoud Abbas, the main Fatah faction candidate, told reporters Thursday during a campaign stop in the West Bank city of Nablus.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is an "elected leader and we will negotiate with him.

We will put the road map on the table and say that we are ready to implement it completely," Abbas said, referring to the U.S.-led peace plan.

Sharon has also voiced willingness to meet with Abbas, as long as the Palestinian Authority cracks down on terror as required by the road map.

**Osama bodyguard  
taken off terror list**

A former bodyguard for Osama bin Laden convicted of plotting attacks against Jewish targets was removed from American and United Nations terror lists.

Shadi Abdalla was removed from the lists after he gave German officials credible information against suspected terrorists, U.S. officials said.

Abdalla was released from prison in Germany in November after serving less than a year of his four-year sentence for the planned attacks against Jewish targets.

The attacks were never carried out.

**Feared tsunami victim  
safe and sound in Asia**

A Jewish woman from the Atlanta area who had been missing since the Southeast Asian tsunami was found.

Ditza Israeli, 24, was traveling in India when the tsunami hit Dec. 26.

She apparently had been traveling in a remote area, unaware that the disaster had struck.

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# WORLD REPORT

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



Brian Hendler

Israeli soldiers face off against Jewish settlers while dismantling an illegal settler outpost in the West Bank in October 2002.

## As withdrawal date looms, debate rages over prospect of army refusal

By **LESLIE SUSSER**

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — As the scheduled start of Israel's Gaza withdrawal approaches, settler leaders are raising the specter of mass refusal by religious soldiers to carry out orders and are warning of disastrous consequences for the Israeli army and society as a whole.

But high-ranking Israel Defense Forces officers say settler leaders are exaggerating in an attempt to scare the government and to encourage soldiers to refuse to evacuate settlers from their homes.

On Monday, the anticipated evacuation drama was played out in microcosm as soldiers

and police dismantled the two mobile homes that made up the unauthorized West Bank outpost of Shalhevet Yitzhar: There were scenes of violent settler resistance, a call by a soldier to disobey orders and wide-scale arrests.

The refusal controversy has sparked a national debate, at the heart of which is the issue of state sovereignty versus rabbinical authority. The debate raises worrying questions: If there is widespread civil disobedience and refusal to carry out army orders, will Israeli society be dangerously divided? Could such a rift scuttle the withdrawal plan?

There have been cases of left wingers advocating refusal to serve in the West

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**NEWS  
ANALYSIS**

## ■ *Fears of army refusal rise as disengagement nears*

*Continued from page 1*

Bank and Gaza Strip or to carry out missions in populated areas, but those calls for disobedience never approached critical mass. On Sunday, however, settler leaders called a meeting with the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, to warn of an impending crisis.

The settler leaders said that they themselves are against soldiers refusing to obey orders, but after rulings by settler rabbis excoriating Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan and expressly forbidding soldiers to participate, thousands of religious soldiers probably would choose to obey their rabbis rather than their army commanders.

"The writing is on the wall," one settler leader was quoted as saying. "The rabbis have spoken, and there is nothing we can do about it."

They said Sharon has only himself to blame for the situation because he failed to build a wide national consensus for his plan. The fact that his policy lacks legitimacy in settler eyes only encourages refusal, and they want the army to help stop the erosion, the settler leaders said.

Sharon, for his part, warned Israeli settlers not to attack troops who evacuate them. "Do not dare raise a hand against soldiers," Sharon said Wednesday during a visit to a West Bank army base. "If you want to lay into someone, lay into me. Lay off the Israel Defense Force."

It wasn't clear just what the settler leaders expected the army to do. In an earlier meeting with the IDF high command, Ya'alon

made it plain that the army takes the refusal threat very seriously, but has no intention of buckling in the face of pressure.

On the contrary, Ya'alon said the army's main challenge for 2005 is to make sure that the withdrawal plan is carried out to the letter.

"As tough as it might be, we will have to be very firm, because failure to implement the decisions of the political echelon will put us as a nation and a society at risk," Ya'alon said.

Top IDF field commanders say they have encountered little evidence of impending mass refusal.

Nevertheless, the army is calling for help from Israeli politicians: The generals say it's up to the political echelon to set the tone and create the conditions for tough action against settlers and soldiers who refuse orders.

An inkling of what may lie in store came Monday at Shalhevet Yitzhar. Even that small outpost proved a handful to dismantle, and it went down only after an angry, three-hour skirmish.

Moreover, though one soldier did call on the others to disobey orders, there was no mass refusal at Shalhevet Yitzhar. How will the army and police cope when large, bona fide settlements are uprooted — and if significant numbers of soldiers refuse to take part?

In the public debate, most speakers have come out strongly against refusal to obey orders. Indeed, some of the most outspoken critics are from the same national religious camp as the potential dissenters.

National religious Jews who make up most of the settler population, serve in the army and take strong right-wing positions face the most acute dilemma: On the one hand, they see settling the Land of Israel as a necessary step toward the coming of the Messiah, and they accept rabbinical rulings; on the other, they're loyal to the State of Israel and its institutions.

While the settlers tend to emphasize the primacy of rabbinical injunctions, other movement leaders and intellectuals elevate the authority of the state. For example, ex-general Ya'acov Amidror, the first religious Jew to serve on the IDF general staff and one of the national religious movement's most articulate spokesmen against disengagement, makes a clear distinction be-

tween refusal by men in uniform — which he says is always illegitimate — and civil disobedience, which he condones.

In a democracy, Amidror says, it's totally unacceptable for army personnel to refuse to do the bidding of the government, to which they and the army are subordinate. Mass refusal, Amidror says, will pose a greater threat to the state than withdrawal — which, he believes, is itself a huge strategic blunder.

Similarly, Moshe Kaveh, president of Bar-Ilan University, where the faculty and student body is made up mostly

of national religious Jews, maintains that most of the religious Zionist movement is against refusal, and he urges the camp's leaders and rabbis to speak out strongly.

Writing in Ma'ariv, journalist Bambi Sheleg, also a member of the national religious camp, came out strongly against the way many religious Jews subordinate their own judgment to that of the rabbis.

"Under the cloak of 'Torah ruling,' the smartest people suppress their independent views and their capacity to interpret reality as they see it," she wrote. "To be an observant Jew you don't need a rabbi to think for you. A rabbi can decide on matters of kashrut, Shabbat and excommunication; he cannot decide for us on questions of life and death, especially when they are national questions."

In Yediot Achronot, political scientist Shlomo Avineri developed the same argument. A secular, left-wing Jew, Avineri maintained that rabbis should not have any special say in matters of state because the Jewish religious law they rely on was developed for the Diaspora, not for conditions of national sovereignty.

"In matters of state, the halachah has nothing to say because it was developed — and that's its power and glory — at a time when the Israeli people did not have a state of their own," he wrote.

Criticism from the left reflected public impatience with the settlers. Labor Party legislator Ophir Pines-Paz accused settler leaders of hypocrisy for claiming to be against refusal but doing little to discourage it.

In fact, more and more pundits are calling on the government to set a final withdrawal date. After that, they say, settlers who decide to stay in their homes will have to fend for

**Could soldiers refusing to carry out orders divide Israeli society?**

### **JTA** WORLD REPORT

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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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# Eyes are on key congressional committee leaders

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After a lengthy pause for the presidential election, Congress is preparing for an ambitious legislative session that is expected to touch on many of the Jewish community's domestic and foreign policy priorities.

No major legislative work is expected to occur before President Bush is inaugurated Jan. 20. The next few weeks will be spent seeking avenues to help relief efforts after the Southeast Asian tsunami, and holding hearings to confirm new members of Bush's Cabinet.

But Jewish policy analysts are busy looking at who will head key congressional committees and what effect the staffing may have on some of the community's legislative priorities.

Many eyes are on Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who is slated to head the U.S. Senate's Judiciary Committee this year.

The appointment originally was seen as a boon by Jewish community professionals, who have had a strong working relationship with the Jewish lawmaker and support his pro-choice, moderate views on many issues.

But Specter ran afoul of some conservatives late last year by suggesting that Bush's choices for federal court vacancies would not have enough support in the Senate. Efforts to dislodge Specter as committee chairman were unsuccessful, but he pledged he would support Bush's nominations, and therefore may not have the leverage to speak for moderate Republicans, some Jewish advisers said.

The first test for the committee will be the confirmation hearings of Alberto Gonzales as attorney general, which were to begin Thursday.

Jewish officials already are pushing Specter to remain true to his moderate views. Eight Philadelphia rabbis who met with Specter on Monday called on him to question Gonzales about the legality of torturing terrorist suspects in order to gain information in the war against terrorism, and to continue his support for abortion rights.

The battle will intensify further if any Supreme Court justice steps down, as is anticipated, and a replacement comes before the committee.

Jewish professionals also will be look-

ing at Sen. Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.), the new chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Enzi replaces Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), who will head the Budget Committee.

Gregg was a supporter of faith-based initiatives — which endeared him to the Orthodox community — and he supported hate-crimes legislation that was touted by several liberal Jewish organizations. He also backed the Workplace Religious Freedom

Act, which was supported by a wide range of Jewish groups.

Enzi, however, does not have the same relationship with Jewish lobbyists. He did not support the hate-crimes legislation and has not traditionally been engaged in church-state issues in the Senate.

The addition of Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) to the committee is expected to add some conservative heft.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, many eyes will be on Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), the incumbent chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. That post is expected to put Sensenbrenner in the middle of several strong debates in Congress this session, including disputes over gay marriage and the separation of church and state.

Jewish groups also oppose Sensenbrenner's views on immigration reform, where he wants local law enforcement officials to have a greater role in policing borders.

Several other changes are being eyed by Jewish leaders:

• Social Security reform is expected to be at the top of the Republican domestic agenda, but the Democrats lost one of the strongest advocates for re-

form Saturday when Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) died.

Two Jewish lawmakers — Rep. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.) — are considered possible replacements for Matsui as the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee's Social Security subcommittee.

• Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) has left the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but is expected to be named the next chairman of

the Helsinki Commission. The committee, which includes both House and Senate members, fights anti-Semitism in Russia and the Ukraine.

• Israel advocates are looking at several new pro-Israel lawmakers on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, including freshmen Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), who advocated strong U.S. engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Illinois state senate, and Sen. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.).

• Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) will take over the Senate Appropriations Committee. He formerly chaired the Homeland Security Subcommittee, and signed off on federal funds to secure Jewish sites and other high-risk nonprofit institutions. It's not clear who will chair the House Appropriations Committee.

Congress' agenda is expected to address several policy priorities of the Jewish community.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES



Robert A. Cumins/United Jewish Communities

Sen. Arlen Specter addresses a United Jewish Communities conference in September 2003 in Washington.

# Cossacks, still on horses, are revived

By SUE FISHKOFF

NOVOCHERKASSK, Russia (JTA) — Nikolai Kozitsyn, chief of the Great Host of Don Cossacks, comes rushing into his second-story office in downtown Novochoerkassk, apologizing for the informality of his navy blue sweat pants and flip-flops.

"I've been taking care of my horses," he explains.

Of course. What else would a Cossack leader be doing on a Thursday afternoon?

Kozitsyn's military greatcoat, festooned with rows of medals from the various campaigns he's taken part in, hangs to the right of his desk. He's a major general, a knight of the Order of Malta, a veteran of a clandestine Russian mission in Chechnya.

On the wall behind him hang ceremonial swords and pistols — gifts from other Cossack leaders — a Cossack banner, a portrait of 19th-century Cossack hero Matvei Platov and photos of himself with various world leaders. On his desk sit a Russian flag and a gilt-framed icon of Mary.

Since his 1991 election as ataman, or leader, of the Don Cossacks, the largest of Russia's 12 recognized Cossack groups, Kozitsyn has been interviewed by many foreign and domestic media outlets, and has become a well-known proponent of Cossack nationalism and restored militarism.

Cossacks are an ethnic nationality, like Armenians, Georgians, and — in the former Soviet Union — Jews. One is born a Cossack, but one can also marry into the group. It's relatively easy to claim Cossack identity; one need only dig up a Cossack ancestor.

And although a minority of the Don Region's population is technically Cossack, Kozitsyn says, affection for the swashbuckling, leather-booted, horse-riding warrior caste is on the rise nationwide.

"Everyone in Russia wants to be a Cossack," he declares. "It's become fashionable."

"Nikolai Ivanovich is a great friend of the Jews," says Anatoly Iasenik, chair of the Jewish community of Novochoerkassk, who has arranged this meeting with a hasty cell phone call. He uses Kozitsyn's patronymic.

It's a surreal scene: a Jewish reporter being introduced to the head of the Don Cossacks by the chairman of the local Jewish community. My grandmother, a survivor of the Kiev pogroms, would have plotted.

Cossacks are first mentioned in the 15th century as freedom-loving ex-serfs, Tatars and descendants of Scythian warriors living on the open plains of southern Ukraine and Russia's Don River basin.

The Don Cossacks had their own independent republic for most of the 17th century, and in 1835 reached an agreement with the Russian czar, according to which they would provide him with highly trained soldiers in return for land and special privileges.

By the beginning of the 20th century, half the Don Basin population was Cossack. Considered mercenaries for the czarist regime, Cossacks fought the

Bolsheviks in Russia's Civil War, and were officially suppressed in 1919 by the new Soviet state. Those who could, fled abroad; many of those who remained behind were killed, their property confiscated by Soviets.

It was only with the fall of the USSR in 1991 that Cossacks were officially "revived," permitted to re-open their schools, wear their uniforms and practice their traditions of horsemanship, sword fighting and going to church.

Kozitsyn says the Don Cossacks "understand" Russian Jews, because both groups suffered the same oppression under Soviet rule. He neglects to mention the historic animosity between Cossack and Jew in the Russian Pale of Settlement, nor does he bring up the Cossacks who welcomed the Nazi invaders in 1941 as "liberators" from their Communist overlords.

The museum's senior curator, Margarita Sokolova, says foreign Jews mistakenly lump all Cossacks together, when in fact it was the Ukrainian Cossacks, not those along the Don River, who persecuted Jews.

"No more than 100 Don Cossacks took part in the

1905 pogroms," she insists. "They were ordered to by their officers."

Jews and Don Cossacks had historically fine relations, Sokolova adds. She is herself the product of such relations: Her father is Cossack and her mother is Jewish. "Many Cossack mothers preferred that their children marry Jews" rather than ethnic Ukrainians," she notes.

Sokolova is putting a more pleasant spin on Cossack-Jewish relations than that chronicled elsewhere. FSU Monitor, for example, documents dozens of instances of Cossack violence against Jews and other immigrants, who have poured across Russia's southern bor-

ders to escape ethnic violence in Chechnya, Georgia and Dagestan since 1992.

That reaction is generally understood as basic xenophobia, or an anti-Muslim sentiment that is at least as strong as the group's anti-Semitism.

As far as relations with the Jews are concerned, he says, "These questions have to be discussed between our communities, together. National questions should depend on people, not governments."

Noting that he "had a lot of Jewish teachers" growing up, the Don Cossack ataman nods sagely and intones, "There are no bad people, only bad leaders." ■

**'Everyone in Russia wants to be a Cossack. It's become fashionable.'**  
**Nikolai Kozitsyn**  
 Chief of the Great Host of Don Cossacks

**TALES FROM THE PALE**



Sue Fishkoff

Nikolai Kozitsyn, chief of the Great Host of the Don Cossacks, in his office in Novochoerkassk in May 2004.

# In old Cossack capital, anti-Semitism rises

By SUE FISHKOFF

NOVOCHERKASSK, Russia (JTA) — Olga Korniyenko, secretary of the Jewish community of Novocherkassk, runs her finger along the outlines of a red swastika-like symbol painted on a telephone pole next to the city's Russian Orthodox cathedral.

It is the logo of a Russian fascist group.

"It's clear this was done with official permission, so close to the main cathedral," she says. "There are skinheads all over the city. We see swastikas, graffiti saying 'Jews out,' most of it since March of this year."

Does Korniyenko take it seriously?

"Of course. Three years ago, there was no such graffiti. This is all new," she says.

A February 2001 study put the number of skinheads in Rostov at just under 1,000; they are believed to be behind the recent graffiti in Novocherkassk, Korniyenko says, but local Jews are more concerned that the authorities don't have the offending wall daubings removed.

Novocherkassk, a city of 200,000 people about 30 miles southwest of Rostov-on-Don, was founded in 1805 as the capital of the Don Cossacks. It is in a region of Russia considered the power base of the fascist Russian National Unity group and its youthful skinhead followers.

"What can we do?" asks Lena Malyetskaya, director of Novocherkassk's Hesed welfare organization. She notes that there are just 230 Jews in the city, most of them elderly Hesed clients. "We have very difficult relations with the city administration."

Novocherkassk's first post-Soviet mayor was very friendly toward the Jews. In fact, says Jewish community chairman Anatoly Iasenik, it was the mayor's suggestion in 1996 to organize a formal Jewish community. "He wanted us to vote for Yeltsin," Iasenik explains.

For the first three years, Iasenik says, that's what the Jewish community leadership focused on. "We told Jews not to vote for the Communist Party."

Soon, they organized a local program affiliated with Hesed, with funding and advice from Rostov's then newly created Hesed. In 1999, Iasenik registered the Jewish community as a state-recognized

religious organization, affiliated with the Chabad-sponsored Federation of Jewish Communities.

Chabad's Moscow office sends them books and equipment, and pays their bills. A huge portrait of the Lubavitcher rebbe hangs on the wall.

Everything changed for Novocherkassk's Jews with the election of a new mayor in 2000, one who local Jewish leaders say is not friendly to the Jewish community.

One of his first actions was to shut down Iasenik's newspaper, which had supported the opposition candidate. The newspaper office, which the previous mayor had given the community for free, and which also housed the Hesed and religious community, was locked up.

In April 2001, Iasenik's home was bombed. Local Jews insist it was because he'd criticized the new mayor in print. The crime was never investigated, and Iasenik has since given up journalism.

Official indifference to anti-Semitism continues, Iasenik says. He describes how he found signs posted around town reading "Buy a gun and kill a Jew." He collected some and took them to meetings with the mayor, police chief and head of the Internal Security Service. "They wrote letters saying they couldn't find the perpetrators," he comments drily.

For six months in 2003, the Hesed was homeless. "I would go from place to place for meetings, carrying a huge suitcase filled with all our documents," Malyetskaya says. "It was very difficult to store the food packages."

Today, Hesed and the Jewish commu-

nity share cramped offices in a pre-fab building in a dusty factory courtyard. There is no phone line, no Internet connection, and no sign at the street-level entryway to indicate that these are Jewish organizations. Community fears run high.

"My grandmother says I should never tell anyone where I work," Malyetskaya says.

When the new office opened in March 2004, some local Jews were upset that their photos appeared in a related newspaper

article. "They were very frightened," Malyetskaya says. "There are other Jews we want to help in town, but they'll never visit the Hesed office. They are afraid of their neighbors."

The past two years, she says, Jews were followed home after High Holiday services by crowds yelling "Jew" at them.

Most of Novocherkassk's younger Jews have left for Israel or Germany, and a few have gone to the United States. Iasenik says about 20 Jewish children remain in the community.

Iasenik puts on a brave face for visitors, dreaming out loud of the day when Novocherkassk will have its own synagogue. That seems an entirely fanciful vision. Not only is the community getting smaller every year, very few of its members are halachically Jewish. The previous educational director, for example, recently immigrated to Israel after converting to Judaism.

The few wealthier Jews in town don't want to affiliate, or donate, to the Jewish community. "Nobody wants to make trouble with the mayor," Malyetskaya notes. "It could hurt their business." ■

One resident recalls signs posted around town reading, 'Buy a gun and kill a Jew.'

## TALES FROM THE PALE

## Reactor news hits TV screens

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli television station obtained the first-ever footage of the Dimona nuclear reactor.

Channel Ten said Monday that the footage did not show military facilities at the top-secret desert installation, only technicians at leisure and a high school at the site.

But the tape, which was to be broadcast

Friday, was unprecedented because it was cleared by military censors who previously had barred any sort of press access to the reactor.

The Defense Ministry denied that the move marked a change in the government's policy of neither confirming nor denying that Israel has nuclear weapons. ■

# Israeli Olympic appointment angers Aussie Jews

By HENRY BENJAMIN

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — A man found criminally negligent in the 1997 Maccabiah Games disaster has been elected to represent Maccabi Israel on Israel's Olympic committee, roiling the Australian Jewish community, which suffered most in the tragedy.

Yoram Eyal, chairman of the organizing committee for the 1997 Games, was found criminally negligent for the role he played in commissioning a footbridge over the polluted waters of the Yarkon River to carry athletes to the Ramat Gan stadium for the opening ceremony.

The bridge collapsed as the Australian team was crossing it, plunging more than 150 members into the poisoned river and killing four.

Eyal was sentenced to six months' community service but did not lose his \$120,000-a-year job as head of Kfar Maccabiah, a major complex in Ramat Gan housing a sports center, a 138-room hotel and a convention and events center. It is also the home of Maccabi Israel and Maccabi World Union.

Eyal later was appointed to head the Maccabi World Union's prestigious North American desk.

Colin Elterman, who represents the interests of the families of those killed in the disaster, told JTA, "Even after all compensation had been settled and paid, I was committed not to rest until Eyal had been removed from any significant Maccabi post. We believe it was highly insensitive of Maccabi to allow him to retain his position as Australia sends a huge team to the Maccabiah, and the last thing they need to see is Eyal taking an official position in the Games.

"But now they have added a huge insult to what is an irreparable injury by appointing him to the Olympic committee," continued Elterman, whose daughter suffered massive injuries following the bridge collapse. "What next — will they make him prime minister?"

A Kfar Maccabiah spokesperson said Eyal "is not interested in talking to journalists."

However, Zvi Warshawiak, chairman of Maccabi Israel and the Israel Olympic Committee, defended the move.

"There are over 1,000 members of Maccabi representing over 250 clubs," Warshawiak told JTA. "They voted for Yoram Eyal to represent them on the Olympic Committee. It's a democratic process and this is their choice."

Warshawiak will retire as Maccabi Israel chairman following the 17th Games in July. Eyal has been nominated as a candidate to take control of Maccabi Israel following Warshawiak's retirement, according to Rami Hypsh, a sports reporter at Ha'aretz.

Elterman has been leading a campaign to ensure that Eyal doesn't take part in organizing the Games, but his latest appointment would give Eyal a place of honor at all major events, including the opening ceremony.

"Can you imagine that the members of the massive Australian team may well be expected to march past and salute him?" Elterman said.

Elterman called on World Jewry to boycott the Maccabiah "unless this outrage is reversed."

Following a meeting of Australian Jewish leaders, Ron Weiser, president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, wrote to Limor Livnat, Israel's minister of education, culture and sports, in November. The letter urged Livnat to ensure that Eyal would not be involved in any way with the Maccabiah.

Six weeks later, he said, he is still waiting for Livnat's reply.

"I'm outraged by these latest decisions. His appointment to the Israel Olympic Committee will tarnish the reputation of the entire Olympic movement," Weiser said. "We're hoping for some reaction from the Israeli government, as they provide significant funding for the Israeli Olympic team. I will pursue Minister Livnat for

whatever help we can possibly get."

Several phone calls to Livnat's office seeking comment were unsuccessful.

Graham Leonard, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, called the appointment "a tough blow for the families

of the victims and the for the survivors of the 1997 tragedy."

"The Australian Jewish community's support for Israel has never been stronger, but it seems that Maccabi is a rogue organization within its structure," Leonard said.

In 2002, Eyal was appointed head of Maccabi Israel's

organizing committee. In the face of severe opposition he told Israeli media, "I expected negative responses, but they did not give me the death sentence. I have nothing to say to the people of Australia."

He has told Israeli media that after the 1997 disaster, "I took upon myself total responsibility and resigned from all roles related to the incident."

However, time has passed, he said, and after being approached by Maccabi Israel members asking him to serve as organizing committee chairman, and to consider joining the country's Olympic committee, he accepted.

"I am prepared for the establishment of a public committee to examine my appointment to the committee and I will abide by any decision they make," Eyal said.

Weiser and Leonard said Eyal's appointment to the Olympic Committee will be high on their agendas when Israeli President Moshe Katsav visits Australia next month. ■

Can you imagine that the members of the massive Australian team may well be expected to march past and salute him?

Colin Elterman

Representative of Australian Victims' Families

## Getting in Gere

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Hollywood actor Richard Gere urged Palestinians to vote for a new leader.

Gere, who has made several private peacemaking visits to Israel and the West Bank, appears in a public service announcement distributed among Palestinians this week by the grass-roots group One Voice.

"Hi, I'm Richard Gere and I'm speaking for the entire world. We're with you

during this election time. It's really important: Get out and vote," he says, adding in Arabic, "Take part in the elections."

Fellow participants in the 80-second spot, which is to be broadcast on Palestinian television, include a chief Islamic justice and a member of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Palestinians are to choose a new Palestinian Authority president on Sunday to replace the late Yasser Arafat. ■

## COMMUNITY

### TRANSITIONS

■ Ellen Heller was elected the 14th president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The longtime Baltimore judge replaces Eugene Ribakoff, who has been named chairman of the board.

■ David Sarnat retired as North American director of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

■ The United Jewish Communities' Partnership 2000 department, part of the Israel and Overseas Pillar, was renamed the Department of Israel Initiatives.

■ Sam Fox, national chairman of the Republican Jewish Coalition, was named to the Presidential Inaugural Committee's finance committee.

■ Victoria Dolburd was elected to head the World Union of Jewish Students. Dolburd, born in Moscow and raised in Germany, made aliyah recently.

■ The Anti-Defamation League appointed Alessandro Ruben to be chairman of the group in Italy.

### HONORS

■ The Argentine Jewish organization AMIA gave its first annual award to economist Bernardo Kliksberg for his efforts to fight poverty in Latin America.

■ The Institute of Virology honored American Jewish leader Stewart Greenebaum for his long-term commitment to the fight against AIDS.

■ Jews for Racial and Economic Justice gave Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Risk-Taker Awards to Art Spiegelman, Tami Gold, Amy Goodman and Naomi Klein, among others.

■ The America-Israel Cultural Foundation gave Aviv Awards to Jim Dine and Chaim Topol, a Life Achievement Award to Meira Geyra and an Art of Teaching Certificate to Avi Abramovich.

■ The America-Israel Friendship League honored Mortimer Zuckerman, Harvey Krueger, Galia Maor and Shlomo Nehama.

■ Anti-Defamation League national director Abraham Foxman was awarded one of Italy's highest honors, the Commendatore of the Italian Republic.

■ The president of the Latin American Jewish Congress, Jack Terpins, received the Shem Tov Award award from Keren Kayemet LeIsrael, in Brazil.

■ The Israel Cancer Research Fund honored Nobel Prize laureate Elie Wiesel and playwright Tony Kushner. Wiesel was honored for focusing the world's attention on the Holocaust and Kushner was honored for highlighting the plight of AIDS victims.

■ Hillel International honored the Edward and Rose Berman Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh Hillel received the 2004 Joseph Meyerhoff Prize for Excellence in Jewish Education.

# New study lauds Auschwitz trip

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — A decade after taking part in the March of the Living, Bradley Laye still credits his experience with launching him along the path to a career in Jewish communal service.

"The march was the thing that started it," said Laye, now the CEO of Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach, Fla. "It was the seed for my Jewish involvement and love of Israel."

The program's long-lasting effect on Laye is not unique, according to William Helmreich, the author of a newly released study on the annual program, which brings Jewish teenagers from across the globe to Auschwitz and then on to Israel.

Indeed, said Helmreich, a sociology professor at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, "people who went to the march long ago report that even 12 years later, the march had a very, very powerful impact on them."

"The point of the program is to affect people's lives, but many programs succeed and many fail," he said. "What's most impressive is the length of time of the effect."

Jewish educators concerned with the long-term effects of their programs use tools like the new march survey to gauge the effectiveness of their offerings.

The new study, Long-Range Effects of the March of the Living on Participants, found that 94 percent of those who've gone on the program believe it is important that they marry a Jew.

This is significant, the study notes, at a time when intermarriage is prevalent.

The new march study also found that 94 percent of respondents plan to provide their children with Jewish education; nearly 25 percent said that, like Laye, the march had affected their career choice; nearly two-thirds said the march had made them more tolerant toward other groups; and 85 percent said the program made them more likely to donate to Jewish causes — with 66 percent saying they had already done so.

The March of the Living, which has been running its trips since 1988, brings Jewish teenagers to Poland on Holocaust Remembrance Day to march from Auschwitz to nearby Birkenau, where the prisoners were

actually gassed, followed quickly by a trip to Israel to mark the Jewish state's Memorial Day and Independence Day.

Samra Vogel, who met her husband on the March of the Living trip in 1994, says she grew up going to public schools but, after the program, decided she wanted her children to go to Jewish day school.

"It was a very intense and emotional experience," said Vogel, who has a 4-month-old baby girl. "It created such a strong conviction for me to lead an identifiable Jewish life."

David Machlis, March of the Living's vice chairman, said he was pleased "but not surprised" at the study's findings.

"For a short-term program to have such a dramatic impact on people's way of thinking and being, we're very proud of that," he said.

Helmreich acknowledged that those who choose to take part in such a program are, to some degree, a self-selecting group, probably more likely than others to be involved in Jewish concerns. Because of this, he said, the study focused on the increase in Jewish belief, identification and behavior that resulted from their experience.

Eighty-four percent of march participants, for example, said the program influenced their "thinking as a Jew." Some 58 percent said it has affected their "behavior as a Jew."

The study also found that 45 percent of those who have taken part in the program have visited Israel since the trip.

"When you're coupling the tremendous tragedy with the rebirth of Israel back to back, the impact becomes long-lasting," Machlis said. "It's very, very powerful. You're going from death and destruction to renaissance and rebirth."

The study was based on telephone interviews with 300 randomly selected past participants during the spring of 2004. Participants from 1992, 1999 and 2003 answered the 49-question survey.

In 1993, the program undertook a similar study, interviewing 300 people who took part in 1988, 1990 and 1992. The findings of that survey were consistent with those in the more recent one, which offers a longer-term view of participants' reactions to the program.

**Ninety-four percent of March of the Living participants said marrying a Jew is important.**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### 'Under God' under attack

A man who sued because he didn't want his daughter to say "under God" as part of the Pledge of Allegiance has filed a second lawsuit.

Michael Newdow has been joined by eight co-plaintiffs in his second lawsuit.

Two years ago, a U.S. appeals court ruled in favor of Newdow, but the Supreme Court later dismissed his claim on a technicality, saying he did not have custody of his elementary-school-age daughter.

### What a way to wake up

A radio DJ is refusing to apologize for using the term "thieving Jews" on the air.

"Go after people who are actually doing something wrong," Don Imus told listeners on his morning show this week regarding a complaint from the Anti-Defamation League after he made the comment regarding the publishers of the holiday thriller "The Christmas Thief."

Imus told listeners on his show, which emanates from WFAN in New York and is simulcast on MSNBC, that he wrote a two-word note on the letter he received from the ADL, but refused to elaborate.

### ADL to Vatican paper: Oops

An Anti-Defamation League complaint regarding a Vatican newspaper falsely claiming Israel had denied tsunami relief to Sri Lanka was based on faulty translation.

The ADL has apologized to L'Osservatore Romano after learning that the Catholic World News had issued a correction on its Web site.

## MIDDLE EAST

### U.S. citizens warned to stay out of Gaza

The U.S. State Department called on U.S. citizens to leave the Gaza Strip because of Sunday's Palestinian presidential elections.

The advisory also called on Americans to defer travel to Israel and the West Bank because of possible terrorist acts over the weekend as Palestinians head to the polls.

More information is available at <http://travel.state.gov>.

### Gaza attack foiled

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian gunman who tried to storm a settlement in the Gaza Strip.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Thursday morning's attempted attack on Ganei Tal, the latest round of escalation by Gazan terrorists who have defied cease-fire calls by Palestinian Authority presidential hopeful Mahmoud Abbas.

But Abbas, a shoo-in for this Sunday's election in the West Bank and Gaza, had reassuring words for Israel.

"Be calm, we'll make sure there is quiet in the strip," he told Ma'ariv in an interview.

Abbas' Fatah faction on Wednesday accused the Islamic terrorist group Hamas of jeopardizing the election by mounting rocket attacks out of Gaza on Israeli targets.

### Eyes on settlers

Two Israeli settler leaders are suspected of inciting violence against troops.

The Justice Ministry on Thursday opened probes against Daniella Weiss and Noam Livnat, who have described Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank this year as illegal and urged that it be resisted.

Weiss, the mayor of the Kedumim settlement, was defiant, accusing Attorney General Menachem Mazuz of being Sharon's stoolie.

Livnat, the brother of Education Minister Limor Livnat, denied wrongdoing.

After an army attempt to evacuate an illegal West Bank outpost erupted into scuffles with settlers this week, Sharon ordered the Justice Ministry to throw the book at those who incite violence or urge troops to refuse evacuation orders.

### Mofaz gets tough

Israel's defense minister said army commanders who refuse to carry out withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and West Bank will lose their rank.

Shaul Mofaz issued the standing order Thursday after 34 reserve officers wrote him a letter saying they would disobey orders to remove Jewish settlements under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan.

The letter came as thousands of right-wing Israeli soldiers, conscripts and reservists have signed petitions against the disengagement plan.

To counter this, Peace Now and a group of pro-Sharon reserve officers on Thursday began signing up soldiers who said they would replace any personnel that shirked evacuation orders.

### Terror exacts fewer casualties

Israeli countermeasures have cut down deaths from Palestinian terror, the Shin Bet said.

According to data released by the security agency Thursday, there were 45 percent fewer Israeli deaths from Palestinian attacks in 2004 compared to a year earlier.

Credit was given to military sweeps and the West Bank security fence, which ensured that there were only 15 suicide bombings in 2004, down from 26 the year before.

But the report noted that long-range Palestinian attacks have mounted in the Gaza Strip — rocket salvos against Israeli targets are up by almost 200 percent, and mortar barrages by 74 percent.

### No polls for prisoners

Palestinian security prisoners in Israel failed to win permission to vote in the West Bank and Gaza Strip elections.

Israel's High Court of Justice on Thursday rejected a petition filed on behalf of some 7,000 Palestinians held for terrorist and criminal offenses.

The High Court justices found in favor of the government's stand that there was not enough time to organize ballot boxes behind bars for Sunday's election for a Palestinian Authority president.

The state also pointed out that under regulations established during the last Palestinian vote, in 1996, prisoners do not have the right to participate.

## WORLD

### Aufbau to survive

A German Jewish newspaper begun in New York by immigrants from Nazi Germany will survive as a monthly magazine.

The Zurich-based Jewish Media assumed the rights to Aufbau in 2004 and will publish it from Berlin as a monthly magazine beginning this month along with its current publications, the French-language Revue Juive and the weekly Tachles.

The paper will no longer have English-language content.

### Peruvian community gets rabbi

An "emerging Jewish" community in Peru now has a rabbi and Jewish educator.

The Jewish professionals serving the community in Trujillo are courtesy of the Israel-based Shavei Israel group.

The community dates back to the mid-1960s, when several hundred Peruvian Catholics decided to live as Jews.

Some 300 members of the community have already moved to Israel.