

IN THE NEWS
Rice will spend 'enormous' effort

Condoleezza Rice said she will spend "enormous" effort to bring about Middle East peace, but isn't sure the Bush administration should send a special envoy for now.

"We all believe, and most especially the president, that we have a really good opportunity here, given the election of a new Palestinian leader and given the Israeli Gaza withdrawal plan, which is linked to the West Bank through the four settlements that would be dismantled in the West Bank as well," Rice said at Senate confirmation hearings Tuesday as the next U.S. secretary of state.

"I expect myself to spend an enormous amount of effort on this activity."

Rice said she would demur on whether or not an envoy is needed.

Rice is widely expected to be confirmed by the end of the week.

U.N. agency head steps down

The controversial head of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees is stepping down.

Peter Hansen, the head of UNRWA, announced that he will leave his job at the end of March.

Israel long has alleged that UNRWA and Hansen are biased toward the Palestinians, a charge Hansen denies.

Gaza bombing wounds eight

Eight Israelis were wounded in a suicide bombing in the Gaza Strip.

Tuesday's blast occurred near the Gush Katif junction.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack, the latest episode of violence to shatter the optimism surrounding the election earlier this month of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

WORLD REPORT

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Evolution expose rifts between Orthodox, liberal Jews

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — When a federal judge in Georgia ruled last week that a local school board's decision to put a small sticker on its science textbooks labeling evolution "a theory, not a fact" was unconstitutional, Jeffrey Selman said it was primarily an American issue.

Still, he said, he could not help but view it through the lens of his Jewishness.

"Look what happened in Germany," Selman, one of a group of parents that sued the Cobb County school board to have the stickers removed, told JTA.

"The German Jews said, 'We're Germans. We'll be fine.' The next thing you know, they were opening the oven doors for us."

But not all Jews see things Selman's way.

The Cobb County case, along with another related case now roiling a town in Pennsylvania, is the latest in a series of national issues that expose rifts between some Orthodox Jews and Judaism's more liberal branches.

In 2002, the Cobb County school district decided to place the evolution disclaimers on students' biology texts after parents complained that the book did not present alternate views on the origins of life.

The decision touched a nerve among some in the American Orthodox community who would like to see a greater discussion of God in American classrooms, and those in other movements who believe the stickers are a thinly veiled effort to reintroduce creationism into school science curricula.

"If one teaches that the human being is just an evolved ape, and that our consciences and sense that we have a soul and free will

are just phantasm — that road leads to amorality," said Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox group.

"It leads to it being impossible to say that any particular way of living is right or wrong."

"It's perfectly reasonable to hope that teachers teach students that there is such a thing as a religious approach," Shafran added.

But Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, said the case raises a red flag with regard to the separation of church and state, a barrier he said has allowed religion in the United States to flourish.

"The efforts of others to impose a theological discipline where it doesn't exist is unfortunate," Yoffie said. "It violates church-state separation. It's bad technique and not good for children."

The stickers read, "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered."

On Monday, the Cobb County school board voted to appeal the court's decision, calling it an "unnecessary judicial intrusion into local control of schools." In a statement, the board further denied that its decision to use the disclaimer was an attempt to inject religion into the schools.

But Selman strongly disagreed.

There is "a small group of myopic people who want to gain power in this country by insisting that their religious beliefs are" para-

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

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mount "and want the rest of the country to follow these beliefs," said Selman, a computer programming consultant who had a son in fifth grade.

The Cobb County ruling came as another related legal drama was unfolding.

In October, the Dover, Pa., school board decided that biology teachers must discuss an alternative to evolution known as Intelligent Design with students. Last month, several parents sued the school board. The plaintiffs, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, say that the board's decision imposes a religious viewpoint on their children.

Intelligent Design theory holds that the universe is so complex that its existence cannot be explained simply by an undirected process such as natural selection but must be the product of some superintelligence.

The theory's proponents present it as a scientific alternative to evolution. Opponents, though, insist it is of dubious scientific value and simply is the latest effort by fundamentalist creationists to inject religion into science classes.

"Intelligent Design is just the newest variation of what used to be called creationism," said Steven Freeman, associate director for civil rights at the Anti-Defamation League. It "doesn't specifically mention God, but it's there with a wink and a nod. That's what its proponents are talking about."

In 1968, in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to restrict a teacher's right to teach evolution. In 1987, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the court said that a teacher cannot be compelled to teach creationism alongside evolution.

To creationism's opponents, the latest battles are a contemporary iteration of the infamous 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, with creationists, twice disappointed by the Supreme Court, again struggling to undermine evolution, this time through the back door.

"Efforts by people from the Christian right who have a real agenda, whether they couch it as Intelligent Design or creationism, is not only harmful for Jews, it fundamentally undermines American democracy," said Deborah Lauter, the director of the ADL's southeast region, who sat in on the Atlanta trial.

"Securing religious liberty in this country means preserving church-state separation."

Alan Mittleman, director of the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, says Intelligent Design simply is bad science.

"It doesn't seem to me that Intelligent Design theory really lives up to scientific standards. Having said that, I don't think science is the ultimate explanation of our world," said Mittleman, whose work addresses issues of religion and public affairs.

"Science is an elaborate conceptual game, but it's not the only game."

Still, Mittleman sees some middle ground.

"There are epistemological and methodological problems with the theory of evolution, and they ought to be explored in advanced science classes," he said. "But that's a different matter from presenting Intelligent Design as a full-fledged alternative."

Yoffie, of the Reform Movement, said

that those in the Orthodox community who would support the teaching of Intelligent Design "seem to share the view that is prevalent among those in the Christian right, that somehow in modern society we are banishing God from the public square and this will have a disastrous result."

Yoffie called this notion "totally absurd."

"America is the most religious of the industrial countries," he said. "And that is attributable directly to the church-state separation that is embedded

in the Constitution. Stronger religious life goes hand in hand with church-state separation."

Shafraan, for his part, said, "One can reasonably make a distinction between the establishment of religion and the basic concept that human beings' lives have meaning."

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, said that it was "kind of silly" to put stickers on books warning students. But the focus of his assessment was on the bigger picture. Weinreb said that Jewish observance and evolution are not mutually exclusive.

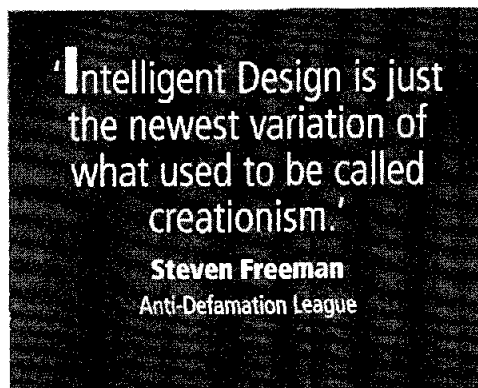
"I don't think it's theologically necessary to debunk evolution," he said.

An observant Jew, for example, can believe that "God's intelligence set in motion some kind of evolutionary process," he said.

This is only the latest in a string of social issues on which the Orthodox and non-Orthodox movements have disagreed. Others include abortion and school vouchers.

Shafraan agrees that science is important, but said that "once science has had its say, there remains a larger question of why are we here and what do our lives mean."

"We'd like to see a stress on the importance of moral values, which Judaism teaches are meant to underlie all of society, not just Jewish society," he said. "Without belief in God, I'm not sure there's much hope that morality will be given its due."



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As Abbas settles in, Sharon presses for action

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ariel Sharon took Palestinians, Israelis and the international community by surprise when he broke off ties with Mahmoud Abbas a day before the new Palestinian Authority president was sworn in — and there are contradictory interpretations as to why he did it.

Aides say the Israeli prime minister was delivering a clear message — that before there can be any peacemaking with the new P.A. government, as is being urged around the world, Palestinian terrorism must stop.

There are signs that Abbas may have been pricked into action by Sharon's move, but critics on the Israeli left are skeptical: They suggest Sharon is preparing the ground to delegitimize Abbas as a potential peace partner.

Then, some say, Sharon will retract his plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank — while other skeptics say he will disengage but use the negative image he has created of Abbas as a pretext for not going further.

The severing of ties came in the wake of a Palestinian attack last week on the Karni crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Israel in which six Israelis civilians were killed. Sharon's anger at the nature of the attack — the complicity of Palestinian Authority security forces, who oversee the Palestinian side of the crossing, was strongly suspected — and the time it took Abbas to condemn it partly explains the sharpness of the prime minister's response.

But he also wanted to make a point. While Abbas has been protesting that he needs time in office to find his feet, Sharon aides suggest the severing of ties was intended as a wake-up call for the Palestinians and the West.

Israel will not tolerate what they call an "Arafat-in-a-suit-syndrome," they say, in which the urbane Abbas says the right things against terrorism, but like his predecessor does nothing to stop it.

In other words, the aides say, Sharon does not want the Palestinians to be lulled into thinking they can get away with anti-terrorist declarations and no action, or that the international community will be taken in again by smooth but empty talk.

The urgency of the matter was under-

scored by another bombing in Gaza on Tuesday that wounded six Israelis.

Israeli officials maintain that Abbas can root out terrorism if he wants to. Amos Gilead, a top Israeli defense adviser, notes that the Palestinians have about 35,000 men under arms in Gaza, where they face fewer than 1,000 Hamas militiamen.

According to Gilead, if Abbas were to unify the P.A. armed forces and threaten military action against Hamas, the radicals would back down and Abbas would be able to

establish law and order without a civil war.

On Sunday, Sharon told the Cabinet that no one was stopping the Palestinians from deploying their forces in Gaza to stop rockets from being fired at the Negev town of Sderot and mortars from being fired at Israeli settlements in the strip.

Sources close to Sharon say that if Abbas presents a security plan outlining how he proposes to end the attacks, Israel will give him the breathing space he needs.

"But if he doesn't, we won't give him even a day's grace," an official told reporters.

The initial results of Sharon's get-tough policy seem to have been positive: The Americans and Europeans also have been pressing Abbas to take action.

Whether as a result of the mounting pressure, or because Abbas genuinely believes terrorism does not serve Palestinian interests, the tone of Palestinian statements against the militiamen has grown decidedly more threatening. For the first time ever, the PLO Executive Committee put out a declaration calling for "an end to all military actions that undermine the national interest."

P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei warned that "anyone who engaged in terror would be punished," and Abbas told P.A. security commanders that he had received a mandate to end the armed intifada. He ordered them to take action to stop the Kasam rockets, and to deploy in the areas from which the rockets were being fired.

In a meeting Monday with Israeli left-wingers, Abbas outlined his plans: He said he would need about a month to reorganize the P.A. armed forces and bring

the terrorists to heel. He would try to do so not by confronting them, but by getting them to sign onto a comprehensive cease-fire, he said.

Most significantly, he said the cease-fire he had in mind would apply not only to attacks inside Israel proper but also in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. On Tuesday, Abbas went to Gaza in an effort to persuade the radicals to accept the cease-fire call.

The big question is what will happen if the terrorist groups don't accede to Abbas' urg-

ings. Will Abbas impose his will?

Israeli media quoted a senior P.A. security official Tuesday as saying that the Palestinian Authority indeed planned to disarm terrorist groups. But so far there is no sign of any movement of Palestinian forces to confront the terrorists on the ground, Israeli officials say.

Israel isn't prepared to wait much longer: If Abbas fails to act within the next few days, the Israel Defense Forces are threatening to mount a wide-scale assault on the terrorists in Gaza.

Though the Palestinians surely would protest loudly, a thorough Israeli military action to destroy Gaza's terrorist infrastructure might be the best present Abbas could receive in his new post, sparing him the dirty work, some analysts said.

But such Israeli posturing, together with the severing of ties with Abbas, worries Israeli critics on the left. Several pundits suspect Sharon's tough talk means he intends to backtrack on his commitment to withdraw from Gaza and part of the West Bank next summer, while others suggest he may try to discredit Abbas to avoid having to negotiate with him.

Yossi Beilin, leader of the dovish Yahad party, maintains that Israel will not find a better partner than Abbas, and that Sharon, aided by his new coalition partner, Labor, may be about to miss an opportunity for historic compromise.

Israeli-Palestinian relations are at a critical juncture with many key questions still unanswered: Will Sharon's tough line help stabilize the situation or lead to a new escalation? Will Abbas fight terrorism? And will Labor's entry into the government prove a force for moderation or a cover for a more hawkish Israeli policy? ■

Israeli officials maintain that Abbas can root out terrorism if he wants to.

NEWS ANALYSIS

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

RJC holds big inaugural bash

The Republican Jewish Coalition is hosting one of the centerpiece receptions this inauguration week.

The RJC reception will take place Wednesday night, on the eve of the inauguration, atop the historic Hay-Adams hotel. Hundreds of activists from across the country will have a rooftop view of the fireworks.

"A lot of people worked very hard across the country," said the RJC's executive director, Matt Brooks. "It's a way to celebrate and be together with friends."

Sam Fox, the RJC's national chairman, is a co-chairman of the inaugural committee, and Jewish donors are paying for about \$1 million of the anticipated \$40 million inaugural price tag.

In his inauguration speech, Bush is likely to cite Israel-Palestinian peace and Palestinian statehood in his outline of what he anticipates for a second term.

Bush: Read Sharansky's book

President Bush urged Americans to read Natan Sharansky's book on democracy.

Bush already has ordered his senior staff to read "The Case for Democracy," and the president has adopted Sharansky's demands for democratic reform as a precondition for Palestinian statehood.

Bush says he had come to many of Sharansky's conclusions about the relationship between democracy and accountability before reading the book and meeting the Israeli Cabinet minister and survivor of the Soviet gulag, but that the book perfectly reflects his outlook.

Man sentenced in Jewish library arson

A man was sentenced to 40 months in jail for an arson that destroyed a Montreal Jewish school's library.

Sleiman Elmerhebi, who said anger over events in the Middle East drove him to burn down the library at the United Talmud Torah school in April 2004, must serve the next two years in prison in addition to time already served.

His mother awaits a court date on charges that she was an accessory after the fact, while another suspect has been freed for lack of evidence.

The library has since reopened.

Ten Commandments case goes to court

A U.S. court will rule on the legality of a Ten Commandments display in a city-owned park.

The land surrounding the display in Memorial Park in Frederick, Md., was sold to a private group after critics complained about the display on public land.

The plaintiffs, led by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, claim the sale was illegal. A similar sale was upheld in Wisconsin earlier this month, and the legality of public displays of the Ten Commandments will be taken up by the U.S. Supreme Court later this year.

Clashes at terror rally

Pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian demonstrators clashed at an anti-terrorism rally in California.

One person was arrested after the clashes at Sunday's rally in Berkeley, organized by the Israeli Action Committee of the East Bay, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The clashes occurred when some of the more than 200 counter-demonstrators carrying Palestinian flags marched into the mostly pro-Israel crowd of about 500.

WORLD

Jews meet, thank pope

Some 150 Jewish officials thanked Pope John Paul II at the Vatican for his outreach efforts to Israel and the Jewish world.

The delegation, which included rabbis, cantors and other Jewish officials from Europe, Israel and North America, came to the Vatican on Tuesday under the auspices of the Pave the Way Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit organization that promotes religious understanding.

The president and founder of Pave the Way, Gary Krupp, told JTA, said the rabbis in the group — representing several streams of Judaism — offered a collective blessing for the 84-year-old pope, and the cantors chanted the Shehecheyanu prayer.

Ukrainian Jewish girls recover

Two Ukrainian Jewish girls are recovering from injuries received in an anti-Semitic attack earlier this month. Natasha Zhvakalyuk, 11, underwent surgery on her nose, and Sveta Abramovich, 16, received medical treatment for a concussion.

Both girls have left the hospital. The two were among a group of Orthodox children attacked earlier this month in southern Ukraine.

Thirteen students from a Chabad Jewish day school in Simferopol, accompanied by two adults, were beaten by two dozen young men, ages 17 to 20 years, as they were coming home from services Jan. 8.

According to witnesses, the attackers shouted "Here are the Jews!"

MIDDLE EAST

Holocaust-era accounts in Israel

The Israeli government and banks owe the survivors of Holocaust victims some \$31.5 million in compensation from dormant accounts, a parliamentary probe found.

After an investigation that lasted more than five years, the Knesset panel on Tuesday criticized the government — which became custodian of many accounts after Israel was established in 1948 — and private banks for not trying to make restitution earlier.

"The banks did not act vigorously to return the funds to their owners," the report said, calling for legislation that would allow the return of the money to account owners or their next of kin.

"Even when Holocaust survivors and/or heirs of the victims approached them, the banks did not act with determination to locate the accounts."

With interest factored in, the government was said to owe \$23 million and Bank Leumi some \$8.1 million.

Israeli group to advise U.N.

An Israeli volunteer group was named an adviser to a United Nations committee.

The decision on Yad Sarah, made last Friday, marks the first time an Israeli Jewish organization has been recognized as an advisory body to the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council.

Yad Sarah, one of Israel's best-known volunteer organizations, gives free short-term loans of medical equipment.

Its services include emergency alarm systems, transportation for the wheelchair-bound and play centers for special needs children.

The recognition will allow the group to participate in U.N. conferences, attend special meetings of the U.N. General Assembly and act as advisers, said Meir Handelsman, who is in charge of international relations for Yad Sarah.