



## IN THE NEWS

## Compensation bill passed in Parliament

Israel's Parliament passed legislation for relocating settlers who are to be evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

The Evacuation and Compensation Bill passed Wednesday by a 59-40 vote, reflecting divisions over Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza and four West Bank settlements this summer.

Seventeen members of Sharon's ruling Likud Party were among lawmakers who abstained.

The bill earmarks \$870 million to relocate settlers inside Israel.

## Terrorists to join P.A.'s security force

Mahmoud Abbas reportedly plans to draft 350 terrorists into Palestinian Authority security forces.

Officials in Ramallah did not immediately comment on this week's report in the Palestinian newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, which said the roster of police recruits formerly on Israel's wanted list would include members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Brigade.

Israel reluctantly agreed to suspend its hunt for the fugitives in a bid to bolster Abbas' truce talks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but still insists that the P.A. president keep his commitment under the "road map" peace plan to dismantle terrorist groups.

## FBI: Hamas 'strong' in U.S.

Palestinian terrorist groups aren't likely to target the United States but maintain a strong infrastructure here, the FBI chief said.

"It is the FBI's assessment at this time that there is a limited threat of a coordinated terrorist attack in the United States from Palestinian terrorist organizations such as Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigade," Robert Mueller said Wednesday in Senate testimony.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Jewish Agency shifts focus as aliyah to Israel declines

By RACHEL POMERANCE

**N**EW YORK (JTA)—With immigration to Israel down, the Jewish Agency for Israel is shifting its priorities in an attempt to maintain its relevance — and its funding from North American Jewry.

Long focused primarily on aliyah and absorption, the agency is poised to put into action a strategic plan that lists strengthening the Jewish identity of young Jews around the world as one of its top priorities.

To that end, it plans to devote more resources to Zionist education and youth programming in Israel.

Positioning itself as something of a rescue operation in the fight for Jewish continuity, the agency said in its plan, which was approved last fall: "Without focused and dramatic intervention, further decline is certain. Jewish-Zionist education is a front-line response in a battle we simply cannot afford to lose."

That battle cry fits neatly with a top concern of many Jewish communities worldwide, particularly in the highly intermarried Jewish communities of North America, which provide more than half of the Jewish Agency's \$290 million budget.

The contours of the strategic plan — and budget decisions to match it — are expected to be mapped out when the group's board of governors meets in Jerusalem on Feb. 20.

Agency officials declined to detail the budget proposals until the board of governors thrashes out the numbers at next week's three-day gathering.

In addition to strengthening Jewish identity, the plan calls for continued focus on immigration and absorption as well as fostering

the involvement of Diaspora Jews in Israel.

Last year, 22,000 immigrants arrived in Israel. While Jewish Agency officials point out that that number represents a considerable increase from aliyah rates in the 1980s, it is a major slide from the 1990s, when after the fall of the Iron Curtain, 80,000 to 90,000 emigrants from the former Soviet Union arrived in Israel each year. But agency officials say that despite the decrease in aliyah, absorption costs have risen due to the immense needs of new Ethiopian immigrants.

Now, the Jewish Agency is preparing to manage the expedited aliyah of some 20,000 Falash Mura — Ethiopian Jews whose ancestors converted to Christianity but who have returned to Jewish practice.

After a meeting with Jewish Agency officials Jan. 31, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced that Israel would double the rate of Ethiopian immigration to 600 per month, which would complete the group's aliyah by 2007.

It will cost \$10 million per year for the next three years to run the compounds housing the Falash Mura in Ethiopia, agency officials said.

Absorption of the Falash Mura in Israel will cost the agency some \$800 million, most of which will be shouldered by Israeli taxpayers, Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency's executive, told JTA. And about \$20 million of the Jewish Agency's budget is spent on the 7,000 Falash Mura still living in absorption centers in Israel.

New money must be raised in partnership with the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for North American Jewish federations, and others, he said.

The new demands and shifting priorities

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FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES

## ■ *As aliyah declines, Jewish Agency focus shifts*

*Continued from page 1*

of the Jewish Agency come as the UJC is reviewing its system for allocating overseas funds.

The UJC's current process, run by ONAD — the Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee — has been criticized by both federations and their overseas partners, the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which operates relief and welfare programs for Jews abroad.

The ONAD process was an attempt to respond to new developments, including lower levels of aliyah and increasing needs elsewhere in the world. It was also an effort to encourage federations to increase their support of overseas needs at a time when allocations to local projects have increased.

To the Jewish Agency's dismay, federations considered changing the longtime 75-25 overseas allocations split that favored the Jewish Agency over the JDC.

But after a laborious, expensive process, the split was unchanged and overseas funds were not increased meaningfully. They are still trying to figure out a new approach, say UJC officials.

The Jewish Agency, which narrowly avoided losing sizable funds from the federation system, hopes its strategic plan will make it more relevant.

Despite the continuing costs associated with aliyah and absorption, the absolute decline in the number of people coming to Israel made the agency's case less compelling for many in the federation system.

Jewish Agency officials say their new

strategy provides a tool for the federations as they struggle both to increase overseas dollars and to connect with Jewish youth, their own future donors.

"What the agency is going to provide is a platform for reinvigorating the Israel and overseas agenda in partnership with UJC, making it a far more accessible and relevant platform," said Jay Sarver of St. Louis, the budget and finance chairman of the Jewish Agency.

"The focus on the next generation is the critical issue that every community is facing," said Sarver, a past president of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis. By paying attention to that age group, "we're going to sow the seeds of federation involvement," he said.

Grounded in the philosophy that an Israel experience roots a Jew in his or her Zionist identity — and may lead to aliyah — over the next five years the Jewish Agency aims to bring 50,000 Diaspora youth to Israel on a short-term program and another 20,000 on a yearlong one.

To that end, the group partnered last year with the Israeli government to fund such long-term programs to the tune of \$10 million each year for the next five years.

Many North American federation leaders were closely involved in mapping out the Jewish Agency's strategic plan, ensuring that the goals of both partners align, Sarver said.

"I think the report has broad support," said John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of UJA-Federation of New York.

Still, Richard Wexler of Chicago, chairman of the Jewish Agency's North American council, said the Jewish Agency suffers from an image problem.

Many see it as a "politicized, bloated" group, when it is "an organization that is lean and mean and structured to work not only on its own priorities but the priorities of the federations in Israel."

"Our job as American Jews and federation leaders" is "to help open those minds up if we can," he said. While the first three months of this year's budget have been set,

officials are scheduled to approve the final \$290 million budget for 2005 at the closing plenary of the meetings in Jerusalem next week.

This represents a \$20 million reduction in administrative and programming costs from the previous year, Sarver said.

Meanwhile, the agency is continuing to place a high premium on aliyah, albeit with a new emphasis. In addition, the agency is linking its new strategies to its continuing goal of increased aliyah. "Aliyah is like drinking water for the very existence of the State

of Israel," Meridor told JTA. Israel needs an influx of Jewish immigrants to secure its Jewish, democratic character, he said.

Despite the drop in aliyah, Jewish Agency officials say there is plenty of potential for recruiting new immigrants in such places as France, where many Jews feel intimidated by anti-Israel sentiment, and in North America, by convincing Jews to choose to live in Israel.

The Jewish Agency is spending \$3 million to \$4 million a year in recruiting North Americans for aliyah. In addition, the agency will give \$1,000 to each North American immigrant to ease the cost of the move, Meridor said. "We are moving to the example of immigration by choice. There are few countries from which Jews have to flee and for that we are glad, and so immigration is becoming more and more a matter of choice."

That is why the Jewish Agency is emphasizing its Zionist education and Israel programming.

Not only will that bolster the identity and activism of Diaspora Jews, officials said, but it may well create the next generation of immigrants.

Indeed, most Israeli immigrants have spent several weeks in the Jewish state before moving there, said Michael Landsberg, executive director of the Jewish Agency's North American aliyah delegation.

That's why the Jewish Agency refers to its range of Zionist education programs as "aliyah in stages," Landsberg said. ■

(JTA correspondent Dina Kraft in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

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**Jay Sarver**

Jewish Agency budget and finance chairman

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# In Central Europe, delegation meets local Jews

By RUTH E. GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — American Jewish leaders who held substantive, wide-ranging talks with senior government officials in Bulgaria and Romania this week have been impressed by the revival of Jewish life in those countries.

"The political agenda was a priority, and our meetings were very serious," Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told JTA by phone from Bucharest.

But it also was important for the delegation of more than 50 people to come face to face with the Jewish communities emerging now, 60 years after the Shoah and 15 years since the fall of communism. The group met hundreds of local Jews and attended a Bar Mitzvah in Sofia.

"There is no way that you can understand what is happening here until you see it," Hoenlein said.

Officials in both countries expressed a desire for enhanced relations with the United States, Israel and the Jewish world, he said.

The five-day trip came in conjunction with the Conference of Presidents' annual leadership mission to Israel, which began Wednesday.

A conference statement said the visit provided an opportunity for American

Jewry to show appreciation for Bulgarian and Romanian support for the United States and for those countries' friendly relations with Israel. It also provides an opportunity to help strengthen those ties.

Bulgaria and Romania recently joined NATO and have sent soldiers to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led coalition. Both hope to join the European Union in 2007.

"We chose to come to this area because we hope that the 'New Old Europe' will help balance the policies of the 'Old Europe,' and that their voices will not be diluted," Hoenlein said.

In Bucharest, the group was the first large foreign delegation to meet with top officials of the centrist government that came to power in December pledging to implement reforms and make a new democratic beginning in a country plagued by poverty and corruption. Many members of the new Cabinet are Western-educated academics.

At a meeting Tuesday, Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu said he placed great importance on teaching "exact

knowledge" of the Holocaust. He praised the work of an international panel of experts that issued a 400-page report in November, which concluded that Romanian authorities were responsible for the deaths of 280,000 to 380,000 Jews and more than 11,000 Roma, or Gypsies, during World War II.

Tariceanu also assured the Jewish delegation that he would encourage the implementation of legislation to enable restitution of Jewish communal property.

"When we raised the issue, he responded, 'I will,'" Hoenlein said. "That's a direct quote."

In addition to Tariceanu, the group met with other senior Romanian officials, including the president and foreign minister, who impressed them with their commitment to change.

The deputy speaker of Parliament told them that Romania — which has extensive links with Israel on many levels — would be "among the first" to move its embassy to Jerusalem when conditions permitted, Hoenlein said. ■

'There is no way that you can understand what is happening here until you see it.'

**Malcolm Hoenlein**

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

## Knesset passes bill to prepare Gaza withdrawal

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Putting its money where its mouth is, the Israeli government has won key parliamentary approval for relocating settlers evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

The Evacuation and Compensation Bill passed second and final readings Wednesday in the Knesset by a narrow vote of 59-40, reflecting just how torn Israelis are over looming withdrawals from Gaza and four West Bank settlements.

While the ratification of the \$870 million relocation package boosts Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to "disengage" from the Palestinians, the fact that 17 lawmakers from his own party abstained presaged the infighting Sharon faces in implementing it.

But Sharon enjoys a broad coalition with the Labor Party and guarantees of support from left-wing opposition factions.

"It simply is inconceivable that Gaza could ever be part of the Jewish state," Vice Prime Minister and Labor Chairman Shimon Peres said during a Knesset debate that lasted two days.

Those opposed to the plan were no less impassioned — and backed by right-wing protesters who blocked traffic junctions throughout Israel and scuffled with police during the vote.

"This is a black day for the State of Israel," said Yehiel Hazan, one of the Likud rebels. "All those who vote for the disengagement plan should beg forgiveness of the terror victims."

The government is expected to issue its first eviction notices soon, with settlers who resist the move warned that they could forfeit some of their compensation perks.

But a more serious hurdle for Sharon is the 2005 budget, which was blocked in the Knesset last year. If he doesn't get Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's belt-tightening package passed by March 31, the government falls.

In another development, Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz announced that Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, the military chief of staff, would step down in July, just weeks before the disengagement plan gets under way.

Some Israelis are concerned about how Ya'alon's departure will affect the Gaza withdrawal, coming as it will shortly after the scheduled retirement of Shin Bet security service chief Avi Dichter in May.

"At a time of such immense challenges, with the risk of our troops scuffling with settlers and being fired at by the Palestinians, can we really afford to be breaking in new chiefs?" a security source said. ■

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Prisoner names published

Israel published the names of 500 Palestinian prisoners scheduled to be freed.

The Prisons Service's Web site on Wednesday ran the release roster — 382 Palestinians convicted on terrorism charges and another 118 held in administrative detention — to allow Israeli terror victims to lodge 11th-hour appeals.

The 500 are expected to go free Monday in a bid to boost the stature of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

None is being held for deadly attacks on Israelis, in keeping with a vow by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

But the final roster of another 400 prisoners to be released in the near future has yet to be issued, and officials on both sides have hinted that it could include at least a couple of terrorists involved in deadly attacks.

#### Jordan to return envoy

Jordan said it would return its ambassador to Israel on Sunday. Reuters quoted Jordan's foreign minister Tuesday as saying Jordan would send an envoy to Tel Aviv after more than four years without one.

Both Egypt and Jordan promised to return envoys to Israel in the wake of recent Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement.

The countries withdrew their envoys to protest Israel's measures against Palestinian terrorism when the intifada began.

#### Barghouti warns more to come

Jailed Palestinian militia leader Marwan Barghouti warned Israel that Palestinian violence will continue.

"There is a consensus that not a single bullet will be fired," Barghouti told Ma'ariv on Wednesday, referring to a cease-fire declared by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

But the Fatah militia leader, who is serving five life sentences in an Israeli jail for terrorist attacks, demanded that Israel withdraw from the entire West Bank or face more attacks.

"The uprising will continue in the West Bank, which you will continue to hold onto," Barghouti said.

He also warned that Abbas' days could be numbered. "At this rate, in another six months he will no longer be around and you will miss him," he said.

#### Israel denies Iran blast involvement

Israel denied involvement in an explosion near a nuclear power plant in Iran.

Iranian sources said the explosion near the Bushehr facility may have been caused by a fuel tank dropped by an Iranian plane or by debris from the plane.

Israel warned this week that Iran may be as little as six months away from producing a nuclear bomb.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### NYC punishes controversial professor

New York City's Education Department dismissed an anti-Israel professor from a public school course.

The department removed Rashid Khalidi, a Columbia University professor of Middle East studies who has been accused of harassing students who hold pro-Israel views, from a professional development course for public school teachers, the New York Sun reported.

"Considering his past statements, Rashid Khalidi should not have been included in a program that provided professional development

for DOE teachers, and he won't be participating in the future," said Jerry Russo, Chancellor Joel Klein's press secretary, in a statement to the Sun.

#### Canadian gets life in jail

The man who fatally stabbed an Orthodox Jew in Toronto was sentenced to life in prison.

Christopher Steven McBride, who pleaded guilty Feb. 7 to second-degree murder, is not eligible for parole for 15 years.

McBride killed David Rosenzweig, a father of six, on a Toronto street in July 2002.

The judge found that Rosenzweig's ethnicity may have played a role in the murder but that ethnic hatred was not a motivating factor in the crime.

Canadian Jewish Congress officials expressed relief at the speedy resolution of the case.

#### Hotline for harassed students

The Israel on Campus Coalition will launch a free hotline for students who feel intimidated because of their pro-Israel views.

In response to the ongoing controversy at Columbia University surrounding pro-Israel students who claim they were harassed by faculty for holding pro-Israel views, the coalition of some 26 Jewish organizations will launch a complaint line, 1-866-241-8303, at the three-day Charlotte B. and Jack J. Spitzer B'nai B'rith Hillel Forum on Public Policy, which begins Feb. 27 in Washington.

#### Not so funny?

The editors of a Princeton University humor publication will apologize for publishing a list titled "Top 10 Holocaust movies I've never seen but would like to."

The list, featured in the Nassau Weekly, was written by two Jewish students, Jacob Savage and Rob Buerki, and placed under the heading "And now for something completely offensive."

Invented films included "Feivel Goes to Auschwitz," and "Jew on a Hot Tin Oven."

Savage has said that the pair showed the list to other Jewish students, who were "not offended by it."

The decision to apologize came after a disciplinary meeting with the dean of undergraduate students, Savage said.

### WORLD

#### Prison time for cemetery defiler

British Jewish officials welcomed a jail sentence in the case of a man who smashed Jewish gravestones.

Officials said the six-year jail sentence given Wednesday to Simon Johnston for damaging the graves last summer at a cemetery in Birmingham was appropriate.

#### Chirac urged to reconsider

The American Jewish Congress urged the French government to reconsider its decision to exclude Hezbollah from the E.U.'s terrorist list.

The AJCongress' chairman, Jack Rosen, said in a statement that French President Jacques Chirac's explanation for the decision — that naming Hezbollah a terrorist group might interfere with Lebanese elections — "doesn't hold up."

Hezbollah is a threat to Lebanese sovereignty and democracy as well as to Israel, and it serves as a surrogate for the Syrian occupiers."

The E.U. still will discuss Israel's request to place Hezbollah on the list, but France's position is considered crucial to any E.U. decision.