



IN THE NEWS

Pro-Israel official named to U.N. post

President Bush nominated a tough U.N. critic with a strong pro-Israel record as U.S. ambassador to the international organization.

John Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security since 2001, has called on the United Nations to take tougher stances against Iranian and North Korean nuclear proliferation. [Story, Pg. 3]

Syria to redeploy troops in Lebanon

Syria will begin a partial redeployment of some of its troops within Lebanon.

Lebanese and Syrian officials announced Monday, as expected, that Syria will redeploy some of its troops to the Bekaa Valley by the end of the month.

Israeli and U.S. officials have said the redeployment would not be sufficient.

Jews press Bush to keep supporting peace

Nearly two dozen American Jewish leaders signed a letter to President Bush asking his continued support of Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

"We urge you to continue to publicly and forcefully offer your personal support of Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas as they embark on the difficult journey toward a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," states the letter, signed by 22 American Jewish leaders, including Stuart Eizenstat, President Clinton's point man on Holocaust restitution; Rabbi David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion; and Marvin Lender, chairman of the Israel Policy Forum.

The letter asks Bush to focus on the success of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and call on the Arab world to support peace.

The signatories say they will ask Congress to respond favorably to Bush's request for Palestinian aid to prop up its social-service network.

WORLD REPORT

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

Sharon faces budget hurdle in final push toward withdrawal

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As plans for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank intensify, opponents are banking on one last throw of the parliamentary dice: Knesset rejection of the state budget for 2005.

If the budget is not passed by March 31, the government will fall, there will be new elections and disengagement will be deferred — perhaps even shelved.

With the vote only a few weeks away, a major battle between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the rebels in his own Likud Party is shaping up. Thirteen of the rebels say they will nix the budget. Without their support, Sharon will not have a majority.

To make up the shortfall, Sharon will have to cut a deal with one or more of the opposition parties.

Over the past few weeks, he has been wooing a motley crew of disparate candidates: the fervently Orthodox Shas Party, the secular Shinui, the left-wing Yahad and the United Arab List.

The smart money says he will pull through at the last minute. But the disengagement opponents will make it as tough as they can, and any support he gets from the opposition will come at a price.

Moreover, the rebel persistence in trying to thwart the prime minister and even topple his government could split the Likud. Before gearing up for the budget battle, the rebels made one last effort to foist a national disengagement referendum on Sharon, getting the Likud Central Committee to pass a resolution last week urging the party's Knesset caucus to promote the appropriate legislation.

Although there is little chance of this — Sharon remains adamantly opposed and there is a solid majority in the Knesset against the referendum idea — the rebels again succeeded in humiliating the prime minister. The sight of Sharon being booed and heckled by activists in his own party on March 3 fueled new speculation over an imminent rift in the Likud, with Sharon leading a moderate wing into an electoral alliance with Labor and Shinui.

Some pundits believe that the battle over the budget could accelerate such a shake-up in Israeli politics.

To get the budget through convincingly, Sharon needs the support of Shas or Shinui.

Shas is demanding the immediate restoration of child allowances, which were cut in Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's austere budget proposal. In a meeting with Shas leader Eli Yishai, Sharon aides offered to restore the allowances, but only for people below a certain income level.

Yishai wavered for just a minute, but then rejected the offer on the grounds that it would take two years to implement. So far there has been no comeback from Sharon. His people believe Shas doesn't really want a deal, and prefers a new election in which it hopes to win more seats and a place in a new government.

And Shinui leader Tommy Lapid is playing hard to get. In a late February meeting on Sharon's farm, Lapid told the prime minister that he was prepared to support the budget on one condition: That Sharon agree to take Shinui back into the government.

But Shinui left Sharon's coalition in December over the transfer of \$66 million to the charedi, or fervently Orthodox, educational

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ANALYSIS

■ Budget vote is last Knesset roadblock on path to withdrawal

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system. Shinui's return would probably lead the charedi party, United Torah Judaism, to leave the coalition in protest, as well as to a new rumpus in the Likud Central Committee, which opposes a government that includes both Labor and Shinui.

The chances of Sharon taking Shinui back into government, therefore, are not high. The question is whether Lapid, in opposition, will be able to stick to his guns and vote against the budget, even though that means putting the disengagement plan he and his party support at risk. Lapid will be under tremendous pressure to back down.

Recent polls show that 81 percent to 90 percent of Shinui voters back the disengagement plan, and 69 percent of party supporters say it should vote for the budget, if its voting against or abstaining leads to the fall of the government.

Indeed, according to the polls, if Shinui votes against the budget and stops disengagement, it could lose about half its electorate. Just over 50 percent of its voters say they won't vote for Shinui if it precipitates an early election over the budget.

If neither Shas nor Shinui support the budget, Sharon could still squeeze through with the support of the left-wing Yahad, the United Arab list, three independent Knesset members and a couple of Shinui Knesset members who conveniently might fail to show up for the vote.

Yahad is certain to back the budget, if it has to, for the sake of the disengagement plan; the two Arab Knesset members are already negotiating over housing, development and local council budgets in the Arab

sector in exchange for support; and the three independents have all indicated they will vote in favor.

But if he goes this route, Sharon's victory would be by the slimmest of margins. The trouble is that because this year's budget and the future of the disengagement plan are so intimately connected, Sharon would prefer a much more comprehensive victory. He'd like not to lay himself open to right-wing charges that ultimately the disengagement went through on the votes of the left and one of the Arab parties.

The fact that the budget battle is really a battle over disengagement has led to a dearth of public debate over the real budget issues.

Labor's Yuli Tamir was something of a lone voice when she criticized Netanyahu's budget priorities in a scathing article in the daily newspaper Ha'aretz.

Even left-wingers like Tamir concede

that Netanyahu's tight fiscal policy has led to economic growth, a lowering of unemployment and international plaudits for Israel's economic performance. But, she says, success has come at a price — the winding down of the Israeli welfare state.

"In Netanyahu's vision, private investors will run our lives and derive profit not only from running economic organizations, but also from giving inoculations to infants, helping children in need and

caring for the disabled and the elderly," she wrote. "Anyone who believes it is possible to provide egalitarian and qualitative social services and make a profit should speak up now."

Like everything else, though, the budget this year is taking a backseat to the grand disengagement scheme, which Sharon — and many on the left — believe will lead to a strategic change that goes well beyond budgetary concerns. ■

Ariel Sharon must find a delicate balance on the budget or the government — and with it the planned withdrawal — will fall.

Calling all reservists

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel plans sweeping call-ups of military reservists for its withdrawals from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank.

"This year, 97 percent of reservists from all units will be enlisted, compared to the 60 percent call-up last year," Brig. Gen. Ariel Heiman, reserves chief in the Israeli military, told Ma'ariv on Monday.

He said reserve troops would mostly take over border patrols while conscripts

carry out evacuations of Jewish settlements slated to begin July 20.

To avoid undue inconvenience to reservists, who will have to take time off from work and family, the call-up would be issued 60 days in advance, Heiman said.

At the height of Israeli crackdowns on Palestinian terrorism in 2002, many reservists received emergency call-ups that required deployment within 24 hours. ■

No wedding night for Amir

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yitzhak Rabin's assassin lost a final appeal to enjoy conjugal visits in jail.

The Israeli Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling Monday that Yigal Amir, who is serving a life sentence in solitary confinement for shooting the Israeli prime minister in 1995, should not be allowed to consummate his proxy wedding to Larissa Trimbobler.

Amir outraged the Prisons Service by announcing last year that he had "married" Trimbobler by telephone, using

intermediaries to pass her a wedding ring.

In opposing conjugal rights for Amir, authorities said they did not want to turn off surveillance cameras in his cell for fear he could pass Trimbobler political propaganda intended for his far-right fans on the outside.

But civil liberties groups sided with the assassin, noting that other jailed felons — including Arab terrorists — had been allowed to marry and consummate their weddings in Israeli jails. ■

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.
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Bush's U.N. choice has strong pro-Israel record

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In John Bolton, the Bush administration thinks it has found someone with a track record of taking on the United Nations and rogue states.

And that is welcome news to Jewish groups and pro-Israel advocates.

Bolton, 56, was nominated Monday as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Now the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, Bolton has gained a reputation as a tough fighter against Iran and other countries that have sought nuclear weapons.

He also won the admiration of the American Jewish community in 1991, when as assistant secretary of state for international organizations he was the principal architect behind an initiative to repeal a U.N. resolution that equated Zionism with racism. "He's really a hero of that effort," said Jess Hordes, Washington director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Bolton's appointment to the United Nations comes at a time of growing anti-American and anti-Semitic sentiment around the world. Jewish leaders said they hoped Bolton would be able to take on efforts in the international forum to demonize Jews and the Jewish state.

"He's articulate, but more importantly, he's tough," said Tom Neumann, executive director of the Jewish Institute for Nation-

al Security Affairs, who received a call from Bolton on Monday. "He's no-nonsense."

The international body is expected to deal with several major Middle East issues in the coming months, including the burgeoning Israeli-Palestinian peace track, Syria's potential withdrawal from Lebanon and the nuclear threats in Iran.

In announcing the nomination, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Bolton was a "tough-minded diplomat" who is an effective multilateralist.

But he also has a reputation for minimizing the importance of the international body, suggesting in 1998 that the United States should not pay its U.N. dues. He could face a tough fight in the Senate, where he must be confirmed.

U.S. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said Monday that Bolton's appointment was "inexplicable."

"If the President is serious about reaching out to the world, why would he choose someone who has expressed such disdain for working with our allies?" Kerry said.

Bolton has gained fans in the pro-Israel community for his tough talk against Iran

and other countries that could threaten Israel with weapons of mass destruction. He

has suggested that all options are on the table to combat the Iranian threat. At the same time, he has been critical of rumors that Israel would attack Iran's nuclear sites, the way it bombed Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981.

In 2002, Bolton suggested that several countries beyond Bush's "axis of evil" abetted terrorism, including Libya and Syria.

"John Bolton understands the important role the United Nations plays in world affairs today and will be a superb representative of American interests at the U.N.," said Bernice Manocherian, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

Bolton has occasionally been confused with Josh Bolten, the Bush administration's director of the Office of Management and Budget, who was the first Jew to hold Cabinet rank in the White House.

Bolton, the U.N. ambassador nominee, is not Jewish.

If confirmed, Bolton would replace John Danforth, who retired earlier this year. ■

'He's articulate, but more importantly, he's tough. He's no-nonsense.'

Tom Neumann

Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs

Council of Europe asks Turkey to fight homegrown anti-Semitism

By YIGAL SCHLEIFER

ISTANBUL (JTA) — A European report on racism and intolerance in Turkey is calling for greater efforts to combat anti-Semitism in the country.

The report was issued by the Council of Europe, a body that focuses on democratization and human rights issues. Based in Strasbourg, France, the organization, which has 46 countries as members, is distinct from the more influential European Union.

Prepared by the council's European Commission on Racism and Intolerance, the report covers a number of human rights and religious freedom issues in Turkey. While praising some of the reforms the Turkish government has made in recent years as part of its bid to become a member of the European Union, the report suggests that anti-Semitism is an area about which there still is cause for concern.

While noting that Turkey's 25,000-member Jewish community has enjoyed a generally peaceful existence, the document says, "In the opinion of representatives of the Jewish community, the climate has suddenly changed, mainly in the wake of international

terrorist attacks in November 2003, targets of which included two synagogues in Istanbul.

"There is now a feeling of insecurity in the Jewish community because of these and other incidents, such as physical assaults on individuals purely because they are Jewish, at least one of which proved fatal. Antisemitic propaganda continues to appear in certain sections of the media and it is apparently not unusual to come across sweeping statements in the press in which Turkey's Jewish community is equated with the policies of the state of Israel."

While noting that the Turkish authorities have been working closely with the Jewish community to improve security at its facilities, the report criticized the government for not using legal measures consistently to prosecute those inciting anti-Semitism and those making public anti-Semitic comments.

In its official response to the report, the Turkish government said the document creates a "false impression" that there is public animosity against the Jewish community, citing the public and official support that the Jewish community received after the 2003 synagogue bombings. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Two hurt in Hebron attack

Palestinian gunfire wounded two Israelis at a Jewish shrine in the West Bank.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Monday's shooting attack at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, which came as Israel seeks to restart talks on handing over five other West Bank cities to the Palestinian Authority.

Witnesses said the shots came from Hebron's old city, and searches were under way for an unknown number of assailants. One of the victims was moderately hurt, while the other was in good condition.

Gaza tunnel destroyed

Palestinian Authority police destroyed an arms-smuggling tunnel in the Gaza Strip.

The 30-foot tunnel, uncovered and demolished Monday, was being dug from Rafah in southern Gaza to nearby Egypt, Palestinian security sources said.

The Palestinian Authority has stepped up actions to cut off supplies to Gaza terrorist groups in recent weeks as part of a cease-fire pledge with Israel.

Israeli Arab suspected of terror

An Israeli Arab is suspected of planning to bomb Israel's Parliament building.

Israeli officials arrested the 20-year-old man, who also allegedly planned to steal a soldier's weapon and attack a military base in northern Israel.

The man was arrested a few weeks ago, but details of the investigation were only released Monday.

Envoy linked to bank scam

Israel's ambassador to Britain was linked to a money-laundering scandal. Ambassador Zvi Heifetz, a former aide to Israeli Russian tycoon Vladimir Goussinsky, faces questioning by police, Israel Radio said Monday.

Goussinsky is suspected of links to a Tel Aviv branch of Bank Hapoalim whose staff are suspected of laundering hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign money.

The Israeli Embassy in London did not return calls for comment immediately. Goussinsky is among 45 international businessmen whose names were raised in connection with the bank.

Police are also questioning more than 200 of the branch's clients in Israel.

National service behind bars

Israel drafted 150 youths to serve as prison guards.

Under a new initiative to diversify mandatory military service, the 150 conscripts joined the Prisons Service this week to work as guards.

A similar program in the police department allows male draftees to spend their three years of national service as civilian patrolmen, rather than as soldiers.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said this week that he saw national service requirements being scaled back if current peace efforts with the Palestinians bear fruit.

Israelis laud Begin

Menachem Begin is the most popular leader in Israel's history by a hair, a poll found.

According to the Channel Two television survey published last week, 32.8 percent of Israelis consider Begin the greatest prime minister that the country has ever had, with David Ben-Gurion coming in a close second at 32 percent.

Just 7 percent of respondents voted for Ariel Sharon, compared to 14 percent for the late Yitzhak Rabin.

Despite two terms as premier, Shimon Peres enjoyed only 3 percent of the vote, but narrowly beat Benjamin Netanyahu's 2 percent.

The poll was taken as a run-up to the launch of a new Channel Two reality show, "Leader Sought."

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Austrian party in decline

An Austrian political party with xenophobic views suffered defeat in a regional election.

The Freedom Party, headed by Jorg Haider, garnered only 3 percent of the vote in Sunday's election in Lower Austria province, its latest poor showing.

Support for the party has declined in the last few years.

The party reached its peak in 1999, when it joined Austria's governing coalition after earning 27 percent of the vote in national elections.

Prague Jews scrap

A physical fight broke out among members of Prague's Jewish community last week.

Tomas Jelinek, who claims he was unfairly dismissed from his post as the community chairman in December, tried to enter a meeting of the Federation of Jewish Communities on March 2 but was blocked by Peter Hodal, the meeting's organizer.

Hodal says Jelinek assaulted him and he had to go to the hospital. Jelinek said he was attacked for trying to attend the meeting.

Observers hope community tensions will dissipate after community elections next month.

French professor suspended for hate speech

A French university suspended a professor for statements questioning the Holocaust.

The University of Lyon-III announced last Friday that it is suspending Professor Bruno Gollnisch from its faculty for five years in reaction to comments he made at a news conference last October about how the Nazi used the gas chambers.

The actual number of deaths in the gas chambers, he is quoted as saying, "remains for historians to determine."

Gollnisch, a professor of law and Japanese civilization, is second in command of the National Front.

That extreme right-wing political party, headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, made significant gains in the last French presidential election.

NORTH AMERICA

Donation to help seniors, kids

A \$15 million gift from a Jewish couple will help support a multi-generational community near Boston.

The gift from Dr. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson will help build the campus in Dedham, Mass., which will include independent housing for seniors and care facilities. It will also house the Rashi School, which now is located elsewhere in suburban Boston.

The gift was made to Hebrew SeniorLife of Boston.

'Fiddler' on the charts

A song that uses rhythms from "Fiddler on the Roof" is a top-10 hit.

Gwen Stefani's "Rich Girl," which uses strains from "If I Were a Rich Man," hit No. 3 on the Billboard Pop chart for the week of March 12.

Stefani, who told VH1 that she was nudged to use this unusual beat by legendary rapper/producer Dr. Dre, saw the Broadway revival of "Fiddler" while creating her new song, which she collaborated on with the rapper Eve.