

## IN THE NEWS

## Rabbis against reserves

Fifty Israeli rabbis opposed to the planned Gaza Strip pullout called on army reservists not to turn up for duty.

"The criminal expulsion mission which the Israeli government has imposed on the army makes any service in aid of this crime a serious sin," the rabbis, most of whom are West Bank and Gaza Strip settlers, said in an edict published during the weekend before Shavuot.

## Disarmament demand flouted

A Palestinian Authority minister said terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza will not be disarmed before Israel withdraws.

"The disarming of armed factions is not on the table because weapons are legal as long as the occupation exists," Nasser al-Kidwa said in a Palestinian television interview, according to a transcript released Saturday.

Israel condemned the declaration as flouting a demand in the U.S.-led peace "road map" for terrorist groups to be disarmed and dismantled as a prerequisite for talks on Palestinian statehood.

## Gutow to lead JCPA

Reconstructionist Rabbi Steve Gutow was chosen as executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Gutow has served as executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council and Southwest regional director for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Gutow, who was a pulpit rabbi for the Reconstructionist Minyan of St. Louis, also is an attorney and taught at the Saint Louis University School of Law the past two years.

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**REMINDER: Due to Shavuot, the JTA World Report will not be published on Tuesday, June 14, and Wednesday, June 15.**

# WORLD REPORT

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## Not if, but when: Netanyahu set to challenge Sharon, pundits say

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — Everyone in the Israeli political establishment knows it's only a matter of time before Benjamin Netanyahu challenges Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for leadership of the Likud Party and the country.

But speculation is now rife that the challenge could come sooner than expected.

Though Netanyahu denies rumors that he intends to resign soon as finance minister to protest Israel's upcoming Gaza Strip withdrawal, he has stepped up his criticism of the plan, and some pundits are saying the former prime minister is preparing the ground for a leadership bid in the next few months.

The resignation rumors were triggered by Netanyahu's determination to push through major economic reforms ahead of the withdrawal, scheduled to begin Aug. 15.

Netanyahu's denials haven't dampened the rumors. The speculation is that as soon as the reforms are passed, Netanyahu will resign and devote himself full time to challenging for the party leadership.

He will be able to argue that he left the Treasury only after accomplishing what he set out to do, and that his resignation was over a matter of principle, pundits say.

The looming Likud leadership struggle has exacerbated tensions between Netanyahu and Sharon, as well as between Netanyahu and other leadership hopefuls, including Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

The disquiet at the top comes as the Likud

is under fire for alleged corruption, with even Sharon and his sons under suspicion. Netanyahu, the pundits say, may feel that the next few months could be the best time for him to make his bid.

In early June, Netanyahu announced that he would vote against the withdrawal plan when it comes to the Cabinet for final approval. He cited recent comments by the Israel Defense Forces' outgoing chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, that the pullout likely will be followed by more and worse Palestinian terror.

"It will be interpreted by the Palestinians as Israel fleeing in the face of terror. Their conclusion will be that terror works, and that will encourage more terror," Netanyahu declared.

Comments by influential figures like Netanyahu and Ya'alon seem to be having an effect on public opinion, as surveys taken in recent weeks show a dramatic fall in support for the withdrawal.

The latest poll, published Friday in Yediot Achronot, showed 53 percent in favor and 38 percent against the plan, compared to 69 percent for and 25 percent opposed in February. That trend could encourage Netanyahu to make his leadership bid.

According to Ma'ariv political analyst Ben Caspit, Netanyahu and his close confidants discussed the resignation scenario a few months ago. No decision was taken at the time, but Netanyahu's recent conduct has fueled speculation that he intends to step down soon.

The clue for political observers, including some of Sharon's top advisers, was Netanyahu's insistence that separate pieces

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ANALYSIS

## ■ Netanyahu's Likud leadership challenge may be only a few months away

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of legislation on banking and income tax reform, which normally would require a considerable amount of time, be passed in the next two months, and that next year's budget be passed in the Cabinet by the end of July, a month earlier than usual.

"Many political players have warned Sharon recently that Netanyahu is preparing a political ambush and does not intend to stay in the government much longer," Caspit writes.

Given Sharon's inherent distrust of Netanyahu's motives, relations between the two have been strained for months. An attempt at reconciliation in March at Sharon's ranch failed.

Netanyahu's relations with other prospective Likud leaders — especially Olmert, who often speaks for Sharon — aren't good either. During a public clash in mid-May over the future of public broadcasting in Israel, Olmert accused Netanyahu of deliberately manipulating budget figures and said he was unfit to be prime minister.

Netanyahu aides retorted that Olmert had grown desperate because he was "so unpopular in the Likud that his political career is probably over."

The subtext was plain: Netanyahu, in the view of Sharon and Olmert, is a dangerous rival who might very soon make a leadership move at their expense.

If Sharon, 76, were to retire — pushed, say, by the failure of his withdrawal plan — Netanyahu seems to be well ahead of his potential rivals in the race to inherit the Likud. A recent Ma'ariv poll on possible successors to Sharon shows Netanyahu get-

ting 47 percent support among Likud Party members, with Mofaz a distant second at 33 percent, and both Olmert and Shalom trailing far behind.

When it comes to running against Sharon himself, Netanyahu's polls show him trailing by 10 percent to 12 percent, a gap he thinks can be closed in a good campaign, especially if there is trouble with the withdrawal or in its immediate aftermath.

Growing public criticism of alleged corruption in the Likud also could accelerate Netanyahu's plans. In mid-May, Ma'ariv editor Amnon Dankner and senior analyst Dan Margalit launched a campaign against corruption in public life, especially in the Likud.

In a front page editorial titled "You have gone too far," they wrote, "Enough. How much longer will we feel deeply ashamed of the people we have elected, how much longer will we harbor feelings of nausea and disgust at what the papers are reporting, scandal after scandal? How

much longer will we rub our eyes and not believe what we are seeing?"

The shame and disgust referred mainly to Likud Cabinet ministers who gave dozens of jobs in their ministries to members of the Likud Central Committee, the body which chooses the party's candidates for Knesset.

Netanyahu has emerged from the new campaign unscathed. Sharon has not, both because he is party leader and because of questions over his son Omri's role in the Central Committee and his funding of Sharon's 1999 campaign for Likud leader. Netanyahu may feel that this is another element he can exploit against Sharon if he moves quickly.

Most political observers are predicting that national elections will be held in the first half of 2006, ahead of schedule. Whether the Gaza withdrawal produces more stability or more terrorism probably will determine whether it's Sharon or Netanyahu heading the Likud in that ballot. ■

**The latest poll, showing rising opposition to the pullout, could encourage Netanyahu to make his leadership bid.**

## Pope: Committed to interfaith ties

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Following what they termed a warm and friendly Vatican audience with Pope Benedict XVI, Jewish leaders are expressing conviction that Jewish-Catholic relations will broaden and deepen under his pontificate.

"After this meeting, we are confident that under the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI, the Catholic Church will continue to build upon its growing relations with the Jewish community," World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman said in a statement after the audience Thursday.

The WJC's chairman, Rabbi Israel Singer, added that the church and the Jewish community would cooperate on joint humanitarian initiatives, including "much-needed relief and education aid to Africa, a continent suffering from the plague of AIDS."

The meeting between the pope and a delegation from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations

was Benedict's first official audience with international representatives of another faith community.

Rabbi David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's director of interreligious relations, called the encounter "remarkably warm and the most informal private papal audience I have ever attended."

Participants included representatives from the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements; leaders from Israel, North America, Europe and Latin America; the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith International.

Benedict, who had met many members of the delegation when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, greeted them as old friends and spoke with them individually about a variety of specific issues.

Singer said that he and Bronfman also had a private meeting with the pope in which they briefed him on this week's Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe summit on anti-Semitism and discussed humanitarian projects. ■

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# JCPA taps rabbi as new director

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — The national public affairs arm of the Jewish community has hired a new executive director whose background combines religion, politics and public policy.

Rabbi Steve Gutow, 56, who has worked as a Reconstructionist rabbi, a lawyer and a Jewish communal professional, will take over the helm of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs on Aug. 1.

He succeeds Hannah Rosenthal, who resigned in March to become executive director of the Chicago Foundation for Women.

The JCPA represents 13 national Jewish agencies and 122 local community relations councils and the Jewish federations with which they are affiliated to promote a just American society and protect Jews around the world, according to the group's mission statement.

"It convenes the 'common table' around which member agencies, through an open, representative, inclusive and consensus-driven process, meet to identify issues, articulate positions, and develop strategies, programs and approaches designed to advance the public affairs goals and objectives of the organized Jewish community," according to its mission.

Differing perspectives on those goals and strategies have led to flash points between the JCPA and the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the North American federation system, which significantly funds the JCPA.

Former UJC chairman James Tisch has argued that the group was taking on issues, such as U.S. tax policy and domestic violence against women, that were beyond the purview of Jewish responsibility.

The challenges have never resulted in reduced funding to the JCPA.

But the former UJC chairman's criticism illustrates one of the greatest challenges facing the JCPA and its new director: building consensus.

"There is always a question when we take stands on an issue of what constitutes a consensus, and JCPA doesn't take a stand unless it's a super, super majority, but the people who are on the other side of the issue are always complaining," Rosenthal, the former director, said.

For his part, Gutow says consensus building is one of his critical skills.

He has had practice at the task, working

as an attorney for a decade in Texas before becoming the Southwest regional director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, and then the founding director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, which promotes ties between Jews and the Democratic Party.

"I like hearing what other people think and trying to find that place where they can find a sense of togetherness and wholeness," he said.

Several years ago, Gutow decided to shift his focus and studied to become a Reconstructionist rabbi. After his ordination in 2003, he became the rabbi at the Reconstructionist Minyan of St. Louis. He also taught a course in Jewish law at the Saint Louis University School of Law.

As a rabbi, Gutow said, his deepened "understanding of Jewish tradition and where it takes us and what it means will enable me to understand the fundamental underpinnings of why we take the stands we do."

As the JCPA moves forward, he said, it "has to take into consideration its own feelings as an organization, but part of what its own feelings are is a reflection of a consensus of Jewish organization life."

"There has to be an effective involvement of UJC as well as the other national agencies in the decision-making of the organization."

For his part, Tisch is continuing to press his concerns. He said after Gutow's hire, "I hope that as a result, they will reassess their agenda and stick with issues that are within their mission" such as lobbying for Israel or supporting Jewish social service agencies.

Tisch sent an e-mail to the current UJC chairman, Robert Goldberg, on June 10, the day Gutow's appointment was announced, complaining that JCPA's outspoken position on violence against women, while a commendable stance, falls outside the group's purview.

"I hope the UJC tries to bring this agenda under control," Tisch said, referring to JCPA's agenda as promoting primarily Democratic positions. However,

he conceded that "other people aren't as orthodox" about the JCPA agenda as he is, and as a former chairman he plans to stay in the background, he said.

Goldberg was unable to be reached for comment.

For its part, the JCPA plans to pursue a similar path.

"Hannah was able to raise the platform of JCPA, and Steve will continue to move forward with a similar agenda of advocating for Israel and the United States, of promoting a just society," lobbying for social justice programs in this country

and combating anti-Semitism around the world, said Michael Bohnen, immediate past chairman of the JCPA and chairman of the search committee that selected Gutow.

Gutow is "dynamic, he's passionate, he's knowledgeable," Bohnen said.

Those who know Gutow agree.

"Steve brings a set of unique skills to the organization," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

"First of all he has the understanding and compassion of a rabbi coupled with a strong understanding of politics and the political process, and also a lot of experience in the public policy arena, and I think that's precisely the kind of leadership the organization needs and I think he's going to do a terrific job of really taking the organization to the next level."

Brooks added that Gutow was successful at bridging the partisan gap as an AIPAC regional director.

Rosenthal, who has known Gutow for many years, said he will "build consensus very well," and said his distinction as a rabbi will bode well for his leadership.

"They are getting a rabbi who is learned and understands the prophetic vision of Judaism, and there's not a better place to put that knowledge, those values and your professional energies than JCPA," she said.

Asked about his plans for the organization, Gutow said, "It's not so much that I think we're going to break new ground. I just want to continue doing what it does and doing it well," he said.

He specifically cited the group's mission of pro-Israel advocacy to legislators, the press and other religious groups. ■

**'I like hearing what other people think and trying to find that place where they can find a sense of togetherness and wholeness.'**

**Rabbi Steve Gutow**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Settlers sue soldiers

Anti-pullout activists sued two Israeli army commanders over the evacuation of an illegal West Bank settler outpost.

In an unprecedented move, the activists traveled to the homes of deputy IDF Chief of Staff Maj.-Gen. Moshe Kaplinski and Samaria's commander, Col. Yuval Bazak, last week to serve them with a civil suit demanding \$70,000 in damages.

Israeli media reports on Sunday said that the suit — rejected by the officers — accused them of wantonly destroying the Givat Shalhevet outpost outside Nablus in January.

The incident highlighted fears that Israeli officials could be personally attacked by opponents of the Gaza withdrawal.

### A tree grows after 2,000 years

Using a seed found in the Masada fortress, Israeli scientists have sprouted an ancient date palm tree.

The date palm, which is praised in Jewish and Islamic writing, once grew throughout Israel but disappeared over the centuries.

The date palms in modern Israeli agriculture are descendants of a different line of trees from other parts of the Mideast.

Dr. Elaine Soloway, of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, grew the plant, which a New York Times article says dates back approximately 1,990 years, according to DNA testing.

### Fridman gets medal back

An Israeli Olympic champion retrieved his stolen gold medal. Gal Fridman, a windsurfer who triumphed at the 2004 Athens Games, had his medal stolen from his parents' home last week.

He was told by police Saturday that the medal had been found in a forest in central Israel.

He told Israeli media that the culprit probably decided to abandon the medal after realizing they could not sell it, given the public outcry over its theft.

There was no sign of the rest of the booty from the burglary, including jewelry belonging to Fridman's mother and a handgun belonging to his father.

### Israel may use sound technology

Israeli officials said they are considering using a weapon that emits high-pitched bursts of sound against Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip.

"The Scream," which was used recently against demonstrators protesting Israel's West Bank security fence, targets the inner ear, causing dizziness and nausea.

The weapon may allow Israeli military officials to overcome protesters without using force during Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, planned for August.

## WORLD

### 'Sir Jonathan' leads UK Jewry

Britain's chief rabbi was knighted.

Queen Elizabeth, marking her 79th birthday, bestowed the vaunted "Sir" title on Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Saturday in recognition of his services to the Jewish community and interfaith relations.

Also knighted was Iqbal Sacranie, head of the Muslim Council of Britain.

### Beatification of priest delayed

The beatification of a French priest has been postponed due to concerns over his anti-Semitic writings.

The beatification of Leon Dehon was signed off on by the late

Pope John Paul II, but his successor, Benedict XVI, is having Dehon's file re-examined.

Dehon, who died in 1925, was the founder of the order of priests of Sacre Cur. Among Dehon's anti-Semitic statements: Jews should wear a "special garment" identifying them as Jews and be "consigned to the ghettos."

According to Dehon, "anti-Semitism is a sign of hope." French historian Jean-Dominique Durand alerted the French episcopate to the writings in February.

Halting the process for Dehon at this stage may be unique in Catholic history.

### Ukraine, Jews discuss restitution

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko met with Jewish groups to explore setting up a process for the restitution of Jewish communal properties confiscated during the Soviet era.

A formal process, either via a commission or law, will speed the return of properties more than case-by-case discussions, said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia.

During the meeting last Friday, which included the U.S. ambassador to the Ukraine and Josef Zissels, head of the Va'ad of Ukraine, an umbrella group, Yushchenko reiterated his call for support in getting the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Agreement by the U.S. Congress lifted.

The Jewish groups voiced a willingness to help Ukraine "graduate" from the agreement, which links trade restrictions to Ukraine's treatment of Jews, once progress is made on restitution.

### New Chabad school to open in Berlin

Postwar Jewish life in Germany is to receive a new boost with the opening of a traditional Jewish preschool in Berlin.

The Talmud Torah Or Avner, under the auspices of the Rohr Chabad Center of Berlin, is scheduled to open with 18 pupils in August, Rabbi Yehudah Teichtal of Chabad Berlin told JTA.

The new Talmud Torah "is not an Orthodox school to make people Orthodox, but it works on tradition," said Teichtal.

"We want to show people the beauty" of Judaism.

## NORTH AMERICA

### NCJW speaks out against more judges

For the second day in a row, the National Council of Jewish Women criticized Senate confirmation of a federal judge.

Phyllis Snyder, NCJW's president, said Thursday that the confirmation of William Pryor as justice for the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals would "impact Americans for generations to come."

Snyder said Pryor has been an activist against reproductive rights. The organization came out Wednesday against the confirmation of Justice Janice Rogers Brown to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

### Bill would sanction Saudi Arabia

U.S. lawmakers introduced legislation to sanction Saudi Arabia if it doesn't sever ties with terrorist organizations.

The Saudi Arabia Accountability Act, introduced earlier this week, would restrict exports from Saudi Arabia and the travel of Saudi diplomats unless the government shares intelligence on terrorist groups and their supporters and closes charities, schools and other institutions that fund and incite terror.

The legislation, introduced by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), mirrors legislation that has sanctioned Iran, Lebanon and Syria.