

IN THE NEWS

Bolton named as U.N. ambassador

President Bush named John Bolton as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations via a recess appointment, which does not require Senate confirmation. It will last until the end of the current congressional session in January 2007.

Bolton has been an advocate for Israel during his diplomatic career, and is credited with the 1991 repeal of an infamous 1975 United Nations resolution denigrating Zionism as racism.

The White House had urged Jewish organizations to back Bolton in recent months, as the nominee received criticism from Senate Democrats for his past statements and work style, but few were willing to advocate on his behalf.

Israeli official: no real cease-fire

Israel's internal security service said the cease-fire declared by Palestinian terrorists has been flouted regularly.

According to a Shin Bet report published Monday, 33 Israelis have died in Palestinian attacks in the first half of the year, most after the accord was declared Jan. 22.

Another 286 Israelis were wounded in the period.

The Shin Bet said it had foiled several Palestinian plots to carry out suicide bombings and kidnap Israeli soldiers.

Islamic Jihad, which was not part of the agreement, has carried out most attacks in recent months, prompting Israel to resume its policy of "targeted killings" of the group's leaders.

Israel: Iran slower on nukes

Israel said Iran could produce nuclear weapons by 2008, a year later than previously predicted.

A senior Israeli military commander said in remarks published Monday that Iran no longer was believed to have a separate military program for producing nuclear arms, meaning that it would have to rely on the civilian track to acquire the bomb.

WORLD REPORT

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

Tensions rise with the temperature as Israelis creep toward the unknown

By DINA KRAFT

KIBBUTZ MABAROT, Israel (JTA) — Opinions on Israel's planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip pile up even higher than the helpings of Dorit Daniel's stuffed zucchinis at a family dinner.

"I feel terrible things are about to happen," says Daniel, 57, who is adamantly in favor of the withdrawal scheduled to begin in mid-August but fears the internal fallout could be disastrous.

"I'm most fearful about someone from one side or another getting shot — that could lead to civil war," she says, cradling her head in her hands as she sits at the table of her home in Kibbutz Mabarot, located in the center of the country, near Netanya.

Her 24-year-old son, who asked not to be identified because he recently completed his army service in an elite unit, argues that the unilateral pullout of forces from Gaza and part of the northern West Bank is a mistake. He says evacuating the approximately 9,000 Jewish settlers who live there and the soldiers who protect them could lead to a security vacuum and greater instability.

Across Israel, tensions are rising along with the soaring summer heat as the country barrels towards the unknown.

Israelis — young and old, religious and secular, left and right — anxiously wait to see where the withdrawal will lead. The debate over possible scenarios rages everywhere from Shabbat dinners to cafes to supermarket checkout lines.

Will Israel, they wonder, see a traumatic face-off between fellow citizens, increased Palestinian mortar attacks, or other forms

of terrorism? Or will they see a relatively smooth return of settlers to homes inside Israel's 1967 borders and a Palestinian-ruled Gaza that develops and grows into a positive test case for statehood?

On a busy intersection near Tel Aviv's main train station, young and old pass out colored ribbons: Those in favor of the pullout hand out blue ribbons, representing the color of Israel's flag; the ribbons distributed by those opposed are bright orange, the official color of their struggle.

On a metal traffic sign, two opposing posters hang one on top of the other: "The Majority Decides — We Are Leaving Gaza," reads one; the other says: "Disengagement Will Lead to Terror."

Israel's religious Zionist community is becoming increasingly distraught over the planned withdrawal. Most adherents view the events of this summer as both defining and potentially disastrous. For many, the very core of their beliefs — that the biblical Land of Israel is their birthright, promised to them by God — has come under assault by the secular establishment.

"I pray with all my heart that everything will end peacefully. It will be very difficult" if the withdrawal happens, says Esther Reznikov, a 19-year-old religious graphics student from Tel Aviv, while passing out orange ribbons to people in cars at a busy intersection.

"If I did not have faith in the land and in God, I'm not sure I would even be able to continue living in a place that could betray you in such a way," she says.

At the same intersection, Amiram Raber,
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THE
DISENGAGEMENT
SUMMER

■ Israelis on edge as withdrawal deadline approaches

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At the same intersection, Amiram Raber, 37, passes out blue ribbons.

"It's crazy to think we can stay there and deny the existence of one million Arabs," says Raber, who works with computers.

The national mood swung into heightened tension and uncertainty at the end of July when thousands of anti-withdrawal activists poured into the sleepy, southern village of Kfar Maimon in an effort to have their message of dissent heard by both the Israeli government and the country's citizens.

The police quickly deemed the large gathering illegal, citing the group's plans to march to Gaza — now declared a closed military zone ahead of the August withdrawal.

■
In a difficult three-day face-off among protesters, police and soldiers that eventually ended peacefully, the anti-withdrawal activists, many of them Orthodox Jewish settlers from the West Bank, showed their determination not to let the Gaza and northern West Bank withdrawal pass without a serious struggle.

Sarah Kronish, 36, her hair covered with an orange head scarf, went to Kfar Maimon from the West Bank settlement of Alon Shvut along with her husband and five children, ranging in age from 9 months to 10 years old.

"We cannot sit at home and continue our normal lives," says Kronish, her hands resting on a baby stroller full of provisions. "Today it is Gush Katif. Tomorrow it could be Gush Etzion, where I

live," she says, referring to a major West Bank settlement bloc near Jerusalem.

On television, Israelis saw close-up the psychological battle of attrition being waged by the anti-withdrawal activists against the security forces. The video images became routine but distressing for many Israelis to watch — protesters swathed in orange approaching individual soldiers and police, asking them if they were ashamed to be carrying out the government's orders. "A Jew does not expel a Jew," they said, repeating the dramatic words of 19-year-old Cpl. Avi Bieber that became the slogan of the pro-settler movement.

A soldier in Kfar Maimon, angered by the constant repetition of the anti-withdrawal mantra, reportedly said, "A Jew doesn't make another Jew stay over in the army on Shabbat, either."

In another sign of discontent with the same settler slogan, a new bumper sticker was recently distributed: "A Jew does not expel a Jew, he just moves him a little bit."

Michael Feige, a sociologist at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute who studies Israeli identity, says the country's population can be divided into three distinct groups on the withdrawal issue: the national religious community, their supporters, and the majority of Israelis, whose politics are to the center or left.

■
For the national religious, "this is a great tragedy and a dramatic event in Israeli history," Feige says. Their supporters — mostly people who live in development towns and other religious Israelis — are more passive in their protests, even though they agree that the Gaza pullout is a major event that should be halted, he says.

"The rest of Israeli society sees it as a dramatic reality show occurring in front of them," he says.

In her home in Givatayim, a leafy Tel Aviv suburb, Anita Noam, 79, says she has sympathy for the settlers who will have to leave their homes but is alarmed by some of the verbal and physical violence that has accompanied their protests.

"I fear this could lead to civil war," she says.

"I think of how many times I had to

leave my home without a choice," says Noam, who was born in Trieste, Italy, and was forced to flee the approaching German army during World War II. During Israel's War of Independence, she was again forced to flee Jerusalem because of fighting there.

She says she wishes the settlers "just understood that there is no choice but to go if we are ever to have peace."

In the streets of Jerusalem, meanwhile, many Israelis are staunchly

opposed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plans for the withdrawal.

"I think it's unthinkable to give even a small portion of the Land of Israel away; only God has the right to do that," says an immigrant from Kyrgyzstan, in Central Asia, who would only give her first name, Marina. "Giving it away will not even help the situation. The Arabs will only ask for more."

At a sidewalk restaurant, two friends who work as taxi drivers argue over the issue.

"You know things are bad when you see Jews being forced to leave their homes. I want to see someone even try to evacuate an Arab from Jaffa," says Avitan Bota, 29.

Not only is the situation leading to division in the country, he adds, but it is giving the Arabs "a gift for free" that will enable them to "strike us from even closer."

His friend Gabriel Hadad, 44, counters: "I'm for disengagement if it means soldiers will stop being killed there. I hope the move will lead to better times and the tensions will dissipate as they did after we left Lebanon."

Up north, in Haifa, a retired teacher, Nurit Goldberg, 65, says it is impossible to avoid the feeling of tension in the country.

"I think we should not disengage without anything in return. I think the withdrawal will lead to more terror and a much worse situation," she says.

In contrast, Berta Hinden, 89, a Holocaust survivor from Latvia, sitting in her art-filled Tel Aviv apartment, says she sees hope in Israel's leaving Gaza.

"As Jews we just want to live in peace and quiet already," she says. ■

'I feel terrible things are about to happen.'

Dorit Daniel, 57

Pro-withdrawal Israeli

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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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Jews in Zimbabwe persevere

By MOIRA SCHNEIDER

CAPE TOWN (JTA)—Hylton Solomon, a Zimbabwean Jewish leader, says that he has never felt threatened by the turbulent goings-on in the country, though he did admit to feeling “a little bit uneasy” during the government’s recent Operation Restore Order, which saw hundreds of thousands of street vendors and others being driven out of urban areas and rendered homeless in midwinter.

“It was like Kristallnacht. You can’t describe it in any other way,” says Solomon, the president of the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation.

Zimbabwe’s mostly elderly Jewish community has dwindled through emigration to around 300 individuals from a high of 7,500 in the early 1970s. Despite its much diminished size and the rapidly deteriorating political and economic situation in the country, Jewish life, though curtailed, carries on.

Despite Solomon’s wariness, he says he hasn’t yet reached his “trigger point.” “Maybe I’m an idiot for staying here. In Germany, all the pessimists survived and all the optimists died,” he adds.

But his three children are all studying in South Africa.

“And I don’t have to tell you what that costs. This is where I earn my bread,” he says.

Solomon also refuses to criticize the country, taking a swipe at those who do. “This place has been good to us, and I get upset when people leave here and live in mansions in Clifton or Fresnaye and condemn this place. Whatever they’ve got there came from here,” he says angrily, referring to affluent areas of neighboring South Africa.

“Maybe things did turn sour. But this country’s been fantastic to Jews over the years. Apart from the fact that the shul burnt down and we’re not quite sure what happened there,” Solomon says, in reference to the fire that destroyed the Bulawayo synagogue on Yom Kippur Eve in 2003, “the cemetery’s never been desecrated. There’s never been any anti-Semitism and swastikas painted on walls.”

Despite food shortages, he says they don’t skimp on anything for the 35 residents of Savyon Lodge, the only Jewish

home for the aged in the country, situated in Bulawayo. Because there are so few people who earn a salary sufficient to enable them to contribute to its upkeep, Solomon says the community tries to solicit donations, including from former Zimbabweans.

Daily synagogue services, as well as Jewish lessons, are held in the city, and the Jewish holidays are celebrated “even though we sometimes battle for a minyan,” he says.

Shelley Lasker, a teacher at Bulawayo’s Carmel School, a Jewish day school, agrees that the Jewish community does not “in any way” feel physically threatened but says that with the rapidly devaluing currency, economic security is a problem.

“When a country is in a state of economic collapse and people’s pensions have been directly affected by the situation here, then, yes, they do feel insecure,” Lasker says. “People who thought that they’d provided well for their old age find that that is no longer the case.”

Though a mere five of the school’s 200 children are Jewish, they still celebrate Shabbat every Friday. “We light candles and have kike when we can get it,” she said, using the term used in southern Africa for challah.

One result of the emigration that has taken place from Zimbabwe over the years is that the Jewish community is older.

“One of the saddest things is that these old people are not part of a greater community anymore by virtue of the fact that there isn’t a greater community,” says Lasker.

“They don’t have access to children. They rarely see their families because their children and grandchildren have left the country. So it’s very lonely for them. Of course Jewish life is affected. You try and have a Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration,” she said, referring to Israeli Independence Day, “and you’ve got to try and pole-vault

them into the bus when they can barely walk, never mind do the hora.”

Lasker describes the country’s only rabbi, Rabbi Nathan Asmoucha of the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation, as an “incredible man.”

“He’s come to a tiny community of mainly old people — I think his most active role has been in holding funerals — yet he remains positive, loving and giving.”

Solomon adds that the rabbi has made an appeal to the community to assist those displaced by Operation Restore Order, saying that they cannot as Jews just stand by. “So we are going to raise some money, buy some blankets and distribute them.”

The two synagogues — Ashkenazi and Sephardi in the capital city, Harare, have combined forces for Shabbat and holiday services in order to ensure a minyan. While the oil crisis affects synagogue attendance, Peter Sternberg, the president of the Zimbabwe Jewish Board of Deputies, says the main problem is that “there are fewer and fewer left to attend.”

A shochet, or ritual slaughterer, comes to Zimbabwe from South Africa twice a year, but with so few animals available — a result of the disruption of farm production caused by government-sponsored farm invasions — there is rationing of red meat.

Sternberg expresses gratitude for the tangible, as well as moral, support that Zimbabwe’s Jews receive from the African Jewish Congress, an initiative of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, which sees to the needs of the small and far-flung Jewish communities of sub-Saharan Africa. He said that Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the spiritual leader of the AJC, arranges for someone to officiate on the High Holy Days, in addition to providing special prayer books.

“They also send up the South African Jewish Report on Friday,” Sternberg said, referring to the newspaper. “Without them, we would really be stuck,” he says.

You try and have a Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration and you’ve got to try and pole-vault them into the bus.’

Shelley Lasker

Teacher, Carmel School in Bulawayo

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Gaza march ban

Israel partially banned a right-wing march on the Gaza Strip. Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Yesha settler council Monday that it could not hold a rally against the Gaza withdrawal plan in the Israeli border town of Sderot, as it would bring marchers within range of Palestinian rocket fire.

Yesha accused the government of gagging opposition two weeks before the withdrawal is scheduled to begin.

Right-wingers are expected to defy the ban and flock to Sderot on Tuesday.

From there, they are to continue to the nearby town of Ofakim, where police have permitted a rally to take place.

On Wednesday or Thursday, the Yesha council said, thousands of activists will try to march past an army blockade and into the main Gaza settlement bloc of Gush Katif.

Police pledged to be out in force to bar entry.

Deal close on corridor

Israel reportedly agreed that Egypt will post 750 troops along its border with the Gaza Strip.

The new deployment, which effectively would overturn a clause in the 1979 Camp David peace accord demilitarizing the Sinai, will begin Sept. 1 along the Philadelphia Corridor, Israel Radio said Monday.

Under the reported deal, Egypt will be responsible for preventing arms smuggling from Sinai to Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza.

'Peacemaker prince' takes Saudi throne

The successor to the late Saudi King Fahd has previously proposed a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Crown Prince Abdullah, who was pronounced monarch within hours of Fahd's death of a long illness Monday, authored a Middle East peace plan endorsed by the Arab League.

Under the proposal, Israel would relinquish all territories captured in the 1967 Six-Day War in return for full normalization with the Arab world.

Israel was cool on Abdullah's overtures.

Leftists help soldiers

Israeli left-wing groups launched an initiative to raise funds for Israeli soldiers and police taking part in the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Peace Now, the Labor Party and the kibbutz movement are among the groups that have come together in the initiative, which will distribute care packages during the withdrawal, slated to begin Aug. 15.

Sand beats rubber

The Israeli army is replacing its rubber bullets with sand bullets for controlling riots.

The sand bullets are considered less dangerous than rubber bullets, because the sand bullets don't penetrate the skin.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem praised the move, but questioned why it has taken the army so long to make the change, Ha'aretz reported.

WORLD

British Jewish numbers stable

The decline in the birthrate of British Jews has stopped.

According to the annual survey of the Board of Deputies, a community umbrella group, the same number of births — 2,665 — were recorded in 2002 and 2003, the latest year for which figures are available.

Although births have dropped 9 percent since 1993, "the downward trend in births recorded by the community for more than a decade appears to have ended," the report noted.

The number of Jewish marriages rose by 2.5 percent, with a 9 percent fall in deaths.

Average life expectancy in the community is 80 for men and 84 for women.

French tourism to Israel up

French tourism to Israel is at an all-time high. Israeli officials announced Monday that 134,200 people entered the country from French airports between January and June 2005, an increase of 28 percent over the same time last year.

Seventy percent of French tourists head for Tel Aviv, officials said, with Netanya and Eilat in second and third place.

But the French Jewish community has not felt fairly treated by the Israeli tourism industry. In June, the French Jewish newsweekly Actualite Juive claimed French tourists were treated like "milk cows," to be drained of all their money.

"They don't speak French to us until it's time to pay the bills," the editor of Actualite Juive, Serge Benattar, told JTA.

The Israeli minister of tourism, Avraham Herschson, responded by ordering a boycott of the newsweekly.

However, Herschson said last week that "We are aware of the problem and we are studying several solutions," and announced that several new airlines will soon be authorized to fly between France and Israel.

Anti-Semitism in Argentine city

Argentine Jews are concerned about anti-Semitic incidents in the city of Mendoza.

On Saturday, a small group of men were painting a swastika in front of the Israeli Cultural Center when guards showed up and the men ran away.

A month ago, other anti-Semitic episodes occurred in Mendoza: Anti-Semitic graffiti were painted at the Israeli Welfare Society, the central Jewish institution in Mendoza; the Sephardic cemetery was damaged, and the Max Nordau Jewish School received a bomb threat.

"We are alert, attentive and worried," Enrique Seltzer, local president of the community's DAIA political organization, told JTA.

Seltzer said he is in contact with local officials, who don't see a link between the various incidents.

NORTH AMERICA

Israel Policy Forum head leaving

Jonathan Jacoby, executive director of the Israel Policy Forum, is leaving the group.

Jacoby, who was one of the founders of the group, which promotes Israel-Palestinian peace initiatives, will leave his post after October.

The Israel Policy Forum was founded in 1993.

New Holocaust program for high schools

Jewish groups joined to form a Holocaust-study program for U.S. high-school students.

Ha'aretz reported Monday that the "Echoes and Reflections" program, introduced over the weekend at Universal Studios in Los Angeles, was conceived by Yad Vashem, the Anti-Defamation League and Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

"Echoes and Reflections" will include testimonies from Holocaust survivors, documents, diaries and literature.