

IN THE NEWS

Demonstrators vow to march to Gaza Strip

Tens of thousands of protesters against Israel's upcoming Gaza withdrawal vowed to march into the coastal strip after a rally in southern Israel.

Many of the protesters planned to spend the night at Ofakim in southern Israel before trying to march to the Gush Katif settlement bloc Wednesday.

Some activists attempted to assault Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra when he arrived at the demonstration, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Israeli authorities have vowed that protesters will not be allowed to reach Gush Katif.

Academy general denied promotion

An official at the center of accusations of religious intolerance at the U.S. Air Force Academy was denied a promotion.

Brig. Gen. Johnny Weida, the academy's commandant of cadets, was taken off a list of Air Force generals slated to receive Senate confirmation for a second star last week, the Colorado Springs Gazette reported, but no explanation was given.

Three Israelis linked to bombing

A Jewish Israeli is suspected of complicity in last month's Netanya suicide bombing.

The Shin Bet security service revealed Tuesday that two Israeli Arabs also were arrested on suspicion of smuggling the Islamic Jihad terrorist from the West Bank on July 12.

Five Israelis were killed in the attack.

Kfir Levy said he did not know he was transporting a bomber, and may have thought the man was an illegal worker, but he and the two Israeli Arabs are to be charged with manslaughter.

A Palestinian, believed to be the terrorist's handler, also was arrested.

WORLD REPORT

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Observant Jews pray time change won't harm their morning worship

By AVI MAYER

SILVER SPRING, Md. (JTA) — It's 6:45 a.m. and the carpeted study room of the Kemp Mill Synagogue in suburban Washington is already abuzz with the clicking of tefillin and the murmur of worship.

Twenty men and women stand as the prayer leader recites the opening blessings of Shacharit, the morning prayer service, leading the Silver Spring, Md., congregation in the thrice-daily ritual that is an integral part of the lives of observant Jews.

But some worry that year-round communal prayer may soon become impossible for many Jewish professionals.

By March 2007, the 40-minute commute that many of the Kemp Mill supplicants take to get to their jobs in Washington may present them with a Hobson's choice: morning services or getting to work on time.

On July 21, Congress approved an amendment to the Energy Policy Act that will extend daylight-savings time by four weeks starting in spring 2007 — three in March and one in November. The amendment, introduced by Reps. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) and Fred Upton (R-Mich.) in April, originally called for a two-month extension, but was scaled back due to heavy opposition.

"The beauty of daylight saving time is that it just makes everyone feel sunnier," Markey said in explaining his support for the measure. "In addition to the benefits of energy saving, less crime, fewer traffic fatalities, more recreation time and increased economic activity, day light saving just brings a smile to everybody's faces."

Jewish groups aren't smiling.

On July 19, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism urged members of Congress to oppose the provision.

"The proposed change in daylight-savings time from April through October to March through November would result in a later sunrise that will produce an undue hardship on religious Jews," wrote the USCJ's public policy director, Mark Waldman. "Our prayers that cannot occur until after sunrise last about 30-40 minutes. The later sunrise will place a hardship on observant Jews that are required to recite their morning prayers and then must commute to the workplace by 9:00 a.m."

Waldman also cited child safety concerns in opposing the measure.

"The extension of daylight-savings time will force children to walk to school in pitch black streets during the time of year when inclement weather is more likely," he wrote. "The last time daylight-savings time was extended, in the early 1970s, there were numerous reports of children being injured in the streets as they walked to school in the dark. It is not unreasonable to think that this will happen again."

The following day, the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs called on its members to oppose the proposal.

"Pushing sunrise back to 8:00 a.m. or later would make it impossible for those in certain parts of the United States to pray Shacharis (morning prayers) before work," the O.U. said.

The organization urged members to write to their elected officials and emphasize that, although they support measures aimed at freeing the United States from its dependence

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on foreign oil and creating a cleaner and healthier environment, this was not the way to achieve those goals. "Each of us will support efforts to lessen our dependence on foreign oil, just not this one," it said.

Markey's chief of staff, David Moulton, told JTA that the concerns voiced by Rabbi Abba Cohen, the director of Agudath Israel of America's Washington office, played a significant part in the congressman's decision to slash one month from the amendment.

"Our primary concern had to do with the safety of children," Cohen told JTA. "The other issue, pertaining to prayer times, wasn't a prayer issue per se, but an employment issue," placing observant Jews in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between their jobs and their religious observances.

Cohen told JTA that the compromise resolution goes a long way toward addressing his organization's concerns. "March was never the major concern," he said. "The more serious of the two periods was the November time period," he said, which, with the change, will largely remain in standard time.

"I can't say that it won't cause problems for some people," Cohen said. "But it goes a long way towards alleviating our concerns and we are gratified by the degree of concern and cooperation shown by Upton and Markey in addressing those concerns."

The United States Conference of Bishops joined parents' groups opposed to the

bill because of the dangers it poses to children. The Air Transport Association said that scheduling disruptions caused by the proposed changes could cost U.S. airlines \$147 million annually and wreak havoc on American travelers.

Citing various reasons, private utilities, groups representing such computing giants as Oracle and Yahoo and dairy farmers have all opposed the amendment.

The extension comes to a head with over two millennia of Jewish tradition.

Jewish prayer times correspond to the daily Tamid sacrifices that were offered in the First and Second Temples between 950 BCE and 70 CE.

However, though the morning Tamid was offered at dawn, the Talmud, citing a verse in Psalms, asserts that the morning prayer should only be recited from sunrise and on. Rabbinic tradition maintains that a prayer quorum — or minyan — of 10 individuals is required for some parts of the service, including the prayer leader's repetition and the Kaddish prayer recited by mourners.

Rabbi Zev Leff of Moshav Matityahu, Israel, explains that, while a sunrise prayer time is indeed ideal, in "times of need," an individual is allowed to recite the principal part of the service as early as dawn, which occurs 72 minutes prior to sunrise.

The issue made its way to the Jewish blogosphere.

On July 20, The Town Crier questioned on his blog the wisdom of tackling this particular issue. "I just don't [sic] see how that can be more important to law makers than the issue at hand, and [it] makes us seem a little grubby," he said.

On her blog, OrthoMom disagreed.

"The Airline Industry is opposing it for financial reasons, parents' groups are opposing it for child safety reasons, there is no reason that a segment of our population cannot oppose it on religious grounds," she said. "A change in status quo that makes it impossible for many to observe some rituals that are required by their religion is a perfectly good reason to oppose it."

In an interview, Jonah Mainzer agreed that the provision would make morning prayers more difficult, but felt that the change would be workable.

The 22-year-old Chicago native, who works for an Alexandria, Va., lobbying firm, cited the same Jewish legal view as Leff, which permits individual prayer 72 minutes prior to sunrise, explaining that he could easily pray on his own and still make it to work on time.

"You can daven (pray) before sunrise, but it would still be very hard," he said. ■

Some worry that year-round communal prayer may soon become impossible for many Jewish professionals.

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Rep. Lantos criticizes pope

By MATTHEW BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) wrote to Pope Benedict XVI that he is concerned the pontiff excluded Israel from a list of countries recently hit by terrorist attacks.

Lantos, a Holocaust survivor, sent a letter to the pope Monday, expressing disappointment at the omission of Israel from a list of countries the pope recently identified as being affected by terrorism, which included Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Britain.

"As the only Holocaust survivor ever

to serve in the United States Congress, I know from personal experience the dangerous consequences when the world selectively ignores atrocities done under the guidance of a murderous ideology," Lantos wrote in the letter.

"I had hoped that those days were behind us."

A Palestinian suicide bomber killed five civilians in Netanya on July 12, and Israelis were killed and wounded in rocket and mortar attacks a week later.

The pope's pronouncement has sparked a war of words between Israel and the Vatican. ■

Syrian official tries to press case in D.C.

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Beleaguered by its U.S.-led isolation, Syria wants its recent pullout from Lebanon to exempt it from responsibility for Hezbollah, the terrorist group that continues to attack Israel's border.

That's not likely, say U.S. and Israeli officials, charging that the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad left behind in Lebanon an intelligence network propping up Hezbollah's powerful militia, which has intensified its attacks on Israel in recent weeks.

"Syria used to have a military presence in Lebanon, I can't deny this," Imad Moustapha, Syria's ambassador to Washington, told JTA in a late-July interview. "We used to have political leverage in Lebanon. We don't have either anymore in Lebanon, so it's absolutely unfair to come and talk today to Syria about what is happening today in Lebanon."

U.S. and Israeli officials welcome Syria's pullout from Lebanon but are profoundly skeptical of claims that it has entirely abandoned its influence there.

"The links continue; it's quite open," an Israeli official said. "Syria is playing roles behind the scenes through its proxies."

While refusing to meet all of Washington's conditions for removing sanctions imposed since last year, Syria is still trying to force its way out of the Bush administration's doghouse. Moustapha said Syria is chafing under the sanctions and is concerned that they may even broaden at a time when Assad has launched a program to open his country's economy, which Syrian officials say eventually will lead to the political reforms sought by the West.

"President Assad has repeatedly declared in the past two or three months publicly that his paramount concern is the amelioration of the living conditions of the Syrian people, so of course any sanctions will have a negative effect on us, particularly at this time when we are trying to open up as much as possible to the rest of the world," Moustapha said.

Current U.S. law bans the trade of all but essentials with Syria, and the Bush administration recently froze the U.S. assets of top individuals in the Assad regime.

Additionally, members of Congress who enabled the sanctions through the 2003 pas-

sage of the Syria Accountability Act are considering broadening its provisions to target foreign companies that deal with Syria. That could have a much deeper impact, as the bulk of Syria's trade is with companies in Europe that have strong trade ties with the United States.

Moustapha sounded a defiant note.

"It will not harm the Syrian government. It will only harm the Syrian people," he said. "Just as the case was with Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi people suffered a lot; Saddam was living in his palaces. We will never be pressured to change our policies because of U.S. sanctions."

But that defiance is belied by substantial, even dramatic, changes since the Bush administration intensified its isolation of Syria last year: Syria withdrew troops from Lebanon in April, ending an occupation of almost three decades, a step toward fulfilling one of the four conditions of the Syria Accountability Act.

The country has also beefed up its presence on the Iraqi border, clamping down on foreigners seeking to join the anti-American insurgency, a step toward fulfilling another condition.

Israeli and U.S. officials say there has been no apparent movement on the other two conditions: shutting down Palestinian terrorist offices and allowing inspectors to assess Syria's weapons-of-mass-destruction capabilities.

Moustapha claims Syria is playing a positive role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, brokering conciliation meetings recently between Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and terrorist groups based in Damascus.

"We used to have bad relations with Yasser Arafat," the P.A. president who died in November, "but we wanted to start a new phase with Mahmoud Abbas," Moustapha said.

The Bush administration agrees with Israel that it's not possible to accommodate terrorist groups who deny Israel's right to exist, arguing that they must be shut down instead.

"Syria needs to shut down terrorist orga-

nizations in its territory — terrorist organizations that are trying to derail efforts to move forward on peace in the Middle East, trying to derail efforts to move forward on the two-state vision of Israel and Palestine

living side-by-side in peace and security," the White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, said in late July.

U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), the chairwoman of the House of Representatives' Middle East Subcommittee, said Wednesday that Syria continues to maintain

a toxic presence in Lebanon, affecting the country's parliamentary elections in May.

Ros-Lehtinen cited reports of Syrian intelligence forces "threatening voters and engaging in mass naturalizations of Syrian nationals as Lebanese citizens in order to tilt the outcome of the elections toward a scenario favorable to Syria and its terrorist ally, Iran."

David Welch, the top State Department envoy to the Middle East, said in congressional testimony last week that the administration "disagrees" with Assad's claim that his forces have left. While military units "appear to have withdrawn, we believe there remains a covert intelligence present on the part of Syria inside Lebanon," Welch said.

Hezbollah stepped up its attacks on Israeli border personnel in recent weeks — most recently on July 12 — when gunmen fired on an Israeli outpost. Israel ended its own occupation of a security zone in southern Lebanon in 2000, withdrawing to U.N.-certified lines.

Israeli officials believe that Hezbollah, which opposes Israel's existence, wants to scuttle Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip next month and the chance of renewed talks with the Palestinians.

Hezbollah continues to attack Israel on the pretext that the Jewish state maintains a presence in the tiny Shebaa Farms area of the Golan Heights, which Hezbollah says is Lebanese territory. The United Nations has ruled that the area belongs to Syria and that Lebanon has no claim to the land.

State Department spokesman Adam Ereli scoffed at Syrian claims last week that disbanding Hezbollah — as the U.N. Security Council has demanded — would destabilize the region.

'We will never be pressured to change our policies because of U.S. sanctions.'

Imad Moustapha

Syria's ambassador to the United States

**BEHIND
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NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Tie a blue ribbon to e-mails

Americans for Peace Now is asking supporters of Israel's Gaza withdrawal to include a blue-ribbon image in their e-mails.

The image, which includes the words "Get out of Gaza, Get back to negotiations!" parallels the Israeli Peace Now campaign of distributing blue ribbons around the country.

"The APN blue-ribbon campaign is an easy and effective way to support Israel's pullout from Gaza and the northern West Bank," said Debra DeLee, APN's president and CEO.

A similar e-mail campaign has been launched in France.

The image is available on APN's Web site, www.peacenow.org.

Home and away

Israel plans to post young female volunteers in Ethiopia to help Falash Mura prepare to immigrate to the Jewish state.

Under the plan, a dozen religious 18-year-old women who opt for volunteer community service over mandatory military service will be sent for three-month stints in transit camps for Ethiopian Jews, preparing camp residents for life in Israel.

"The girls' job will be to teach about Jewish identity and deepen it among the Falash Mura," Yitzhak Langa told Ma'ariv on Tuesday. The Falash Mura are descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity.

"We will visit the camps before operations get under way, to make sure that the girls will be able to preserve their religious way of life in terms of modesty and kashrut, and that they will receive spiritual, as well as physical, oversight," he said.

The main candidates for the new volunteer positions are believed to be daughters of Ethiopian immigrants already in Israel.

Less time in the Israeli army?

Benjamin Netanyahu proposed cutting mandatory Israeli military service by six months.

Male conscripts currently spend three years in Israel's armed forces, and women two, but the Israeli finance minister said he would reduce the standard term by six months as part of the 2006 national budget.

Such cuts have been proposed in the past but shot down by the Defense Ministry, which points out that it takes more than a year to train soldiers for combat duty, and that the additional time is needed for active duties.

Cops cop out

Four Israeli police officers refused to take part in the upcoming Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Quoting security sources, Israel Radio said Tuesday that two police officers were discharged after they failed to take part in a drill for evacuating Gaza settlers.

Another officer plans to resign his commission to protest the planned pullout, while a border police conscript also has been discharged for voicing opposition.

At least 40 military personnel face disciplinary hearings for saying they would refuse to evacuate settlers.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. reassesses Iranian capabilities

The United States reportedly believes Iran is at least 10 years from building a nuclear bomb.

The Washington Post quoted three U.S. sources Tuesday as saying that a new analysis, known as the National Intelligence Estimate,

voiced uncertainty over whether Iran definitely seeks nuclear arms.

Should Iran decide to go nuclear, according to the report, it would take it about 10 years to attain independent nuclear capabilities.

On Monday, a senior Israeli military officer told the Jerusalem Post that Iran would have the means to produce its own nuclear weapons at some point between 2008 and 2012.

GOP House members to Israel

A large group of Republican members of the U.S. Congress will tour Israel during its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), the majority whip in the House of Representatives, will lead the tour of 15-20 members at the end of August. He said he hoped the group would tour the Gaza Strip during the evacuation of Jewish settlers there.

Blunt said the congressmen would closely assess Palestinian requests for U.S. assistance.

"It's very important that whatever money goes to the Palestinians really goes to stability and peace," Blunt told JTA on Tuesday.

Blunt's Democratic counterpart, Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), is leading a similar tour just prior to the pullout.

Kerry brother considers run

Cameron Kerry, the Jewish brother of the U.S. senator, is considering a run for Massachusetts secretary of state.

Cameron Kerry, who served as a liaison to the Jewish community when Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) ran for president last year, has met with advisers to seek the secretary of state position if incumbent William Galvin runs for governor.

He told the Boston Globe that he would rely on his brother's fund-raisers, including several prominent Boston Jewish donors.

The Kerrys have Jewish roots on their father's side, and the younger Kerry converted from Catholicism to Judaism when he married Kathy Weinman in 1983.

During the 2004 presidential campaign, Cameron spoke to numerous Jewish audiences, and has continued to raise money for Jewish candidates and issues.

WORLD

Jewish sites dated earlier than thought

Jewish catacombs under the ancient city of Rome thought to be copies of Christian sites actually predate them by at least a century, scientists say.

Carbon dating shows that the Jewish sites were begun in the second century, according to an article by Dutch scientists in the journal *Nature*.

The finding suggests that early Christian burial practices may have been modeled after Jewish practice.

Aliyah from Antwerp?

Israel is intensifying efforts to encourage Belgian Jews to immigrate.

Israeli Immigration and Absorption Ministry officials met with representatives of Belgium's 40,000 Jews last week to propose incentives that would draw the community to Israel.

"We believe that thought must be given not just to the big countries like France and the United States but to smaller ones as well, to try to persuade their Jews to immigrate," the ministry's director general, Mirela Gal, told the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv on Sunday. "We will soon ask our natural partner, the Jewish Agency, to expand its operations in Belgium."