

IN THE NEWS

Notices served on Gaza eviction

Israeli authorities notified Gaza settlers that they have 48 hours to leave their homes or face eviction by force.

Army and police officers were deployed around Gaza settlements Monday to distribute eviction orders to thousands of residents who have ignored government calls to relocate to Israel.

After late-night consultations, the army decided to defer serving notices to the four most hard-line settlements — Netzarim, Kfar Darom, Katifa and Atzmona.

Elsewhere, however, troops found themselves in face-offs with settlers who had chained shut the gates to their communities.

Under the evacuation timetable, Gaza settlers who do not leave voluntarily by Wednesday will be removed by force and could forfeit some of their government-compensation packages.

Sharon calls pullout new chapter for Israel

Israel is starting a new chapter in its history by withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, Ariel Sharon said.

The Israeli prime minister addressed the nation on television and radio Monday after settlers in Gaza and the northern West Bank received 48-hour evacuation notices.

Describing the move as inevitable given the population growth of the Palestinians and their failure to make peace with Israel, the prime minister said it now would be up to the Palestinians to take the next step.

Israel approves pullout's 2nd stage

The Israeli government approved the second stage of the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

By a vote of 16-4, the Cabinet gave a green light Monday to the evacuation of Gush Katif, the main Gaza settlement bloc.

WORLD REPORT

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For settlers who are leaving Gaza, disorientation and anxiety for future

By GIL SEDAN and DINA KRAFT

NITZAN, Israel (JTA) — Shlomi Tabach was trying to pry the bronze mezuzah off his front doorpost with pliers, but it wouldn't budge.

"Look at that: The mezuzah doesn't want to leave. It wants to stay in Gush Katif," said Tabach's mother-in-law, Yaffa Michaeli, referring to the main Jewish settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip where the family had lived for 16 years — until last week.

With one more yank, the mezuzah finally came off.

The Tabach family left the settlement of Gadid last week, ahead of the Israeli withdrawal. Settlers who hadn't evacuated as of Monday were given 48-hours notice to leave, on threat of eviction.

But the Tabach family left a few days before the evacuation got under way, rising at dawn to pack final boxes with their toddler son's toys, taking down lace curtains and lighting fixtures. Their sand-swept front yard was crammed with furniture, plastic crates and boxes as they waited for the moving van.

Shlomi Tabach, 30, and his wife, Ravit, 26, both accountants, have lived in a small one-story house in Gadid for two years.

Ravit Tabach moved to the settlement at age 10 with her family from the southern Israeli town of Ofakim. Shlomi Tabach, who grew up secular in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Hasharon, met Ravit during their accounting studies and followed her to Gaza.

Shlomi Tabach said he doesn't understand settlers who refused to acknowledge that the end of their time in Gaza was fast approaching.

"I think it's a major mistake, because it's a fact and we need to face up to it," he said. "I have a wife and son, and the most important thing is to be prepared."

He charged that the settlers' leadership "deluded" them into believing that the withdrawal wouldn't take place.

"We ordered the moving trucks for Wednesday, but friends suggested that we postpone the move until Thursday," Shlomi Tabach said. "Someone spread the word last week that a miracle would happen on Thursday, but then came Thursday and there was no miracle."

By Sunday, the Tabachs had moved into a mobile home in Nitzan, a temporary housing project off the highway leading from the Gaza Strip north to Tel Aviv. Nitzan was designed to absorb the bulk of those evacuated from Gush Katif.

With its rows of mobile homes planted on a huge plot, Nitzan looks a bit like one of the ma'abarot, the transit camps erected in the early days of the Israeli state to absorb the massive flow of new immigrants. Unlike the ma'abarot, however, these mobile homes have parking spaces, air conditioning and a bit of space. Reflecting those amenities, they're not called caravans, the Israeli term for mobile homes, but caravillas.

At the Tabachs' new home, one enters a spacious kitchen with a small adjacent living room. A hallway leads to four comfortable bedrooms and two bathrooms. The windows, however, look directly into the rooms of the family next door.

On Sunday, just before the formal evacuation began, Nitzan looked nearly deserted. Most of the expected evacuees hadn't ar-

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THE
DISENGAGEMENT
SUMMER

■ Relocated Gaza settlers are disoriented and wary of the future

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rived yet, staying behind in Gush Katif for the final showdown with soldiers coming to evict them. The Tabachs were among the few families who already had settled in.

On Tisha B'Av, traditionally a solemn day of fasting in remembrance of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the young couple sat in the small living room of their new home and ate.

"We've broken the fast," Ravit Tabach said. "Too much pressure."

"On the face of it, everything is all right," Shlomi Tabach said, "but our entire life is under a question mark. We don't know how many of our friends will join us here, Ravit's parents have moved to Ashdod, and we still don't know whether our one-and-a-half-year-old, Nevo, will have a kindergarten to go to."

It was getting darker, and Shlomi Tabach turned on the sprinklers to water carpets of grass newly planted near the mobile home, a marked change from Gush Katif's greenery.

"We are willing to give up many things, as long as we have peace and quiet," Shlomi Tabach said, "but it doesn't look like we will. I know the Arabs, and I know that their only wish is to see us evaporate away," and Israeli Prime Minister "Ariel Sharon helps them out. And for this he will be doomed to eternal disgrace."

The younger generation's trauma, however, is marginal compared with that of their parents, the people who built Gush Katif a generation ago. Having

finally settled down, with private homes, successful farms and the time to enjoy their children and grandchildren, they were forced to leave.

They find themselves in new neighborhoods, with an unhappy present and an uncertain future. It's not that they don't feel the political reward for the Gaza withdrawal plan isn't worth it; it's that they don't see any political reward whatsoever.

"The whole thing seems unreal to me. I don't believe I'm here," said Ravit Tabach's mother, Yaffa Michaeli, referring to Ashdod. "I feel that in just a little while I'll go back to Gadid."

But the life that the Michaelis enjoyed in Gadid is no more.

"I used to hand the keys of my \$40,000 car to my Palestinian worker to go and have it washed. I trusted him completely," said Yaffa Michaeli's husband, Salim, 55. "It was a different world."

Salim Michaeli spoke of Gadid as if he had just been exiled from the Garden of Eden, ignoring the frequent terrorist attacks that settlers endured during the five-year-old Palestinian intifada. Leaning back on the uncomfortable kitchen chair at his newly-rented home in Ashdod, he stared at the world with weary eyes and sighed deeply.

"It was an empire," he said. "We have left an empire behind."

Their empire included a 2,500-square-foot, five-bedroom house on a half-acre plot, 15 acres of hothouses where the Michaelis grew tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, a 6,500-square-foot packing house, two trucks, the best restaurant in the nearby settlement of Neveh Dekalim and a supply of cheap Palestinian labor.

Before the intifada began in September 2000, the Michaelis employed 33 Palestinians and 11 Thais. Even though that number had dwindled in the past five years, "When we handed out their last salaries on Friday, they cried," Salim Michaeli said.

The Michaelis rented the house in Ashdod for \$1,200 a month, not wanting to cram into one of the narrow caravillas in Nitzan. Their new residence lies on a narrow, crowded street, where a neighbor's music can be heard blaring loudly throughout the area. Gone are the days of isolated homes near Gaza's expansive sand dunes.

One of the Michaelis' sons—Dudu, 22—stayed behind in Gadid for the final confrontation with evacuating forces. Another son, Naor, 17, is staying with the

Tabachs. Only Neriya, the Michaelis' eight-year-old, is currently with them in Ashdod.

Back in Nitzan the Tabachs' next-door neighbor from Gadid, 56-year-old Ya'acov Farkash, was unloading belongings from his pickup truck and moving them into a crowded living room. Farkash had an eight-bedroom home in Gadid; now he was trying to squeeze his family of four into a caravilla.

The Farkash's left behind 2.5 acres of hothouses, some of which he sold to Palestinians. He has no plans and no hopes, he said, except perhaps to build a new home.

"Watch the older people a month from now," said Evyatar Ben-Na'im, a friend who was helping Farkash unload his belongings. "You'll see them sitting by their houses, not knowing what to do next."

Yaffa Michaeli, who operated the family restaurant and catering services in Neveh Dekalim, is thinking of opening a restaurant in Ashdod or its vicinity, though there is a lot of competition. But her husband is less optimistic.

"My entire life project is collapsing, and I only receive \$400,000 in compensation," he said. "I would need at least half of it to build a new home. And what about living expenses? Who will employ me at age 55?"

Like Salim Michaeli, most Gaza settlers will be forced to accept reality the hard way.

"We had an empire," he said again. But the Gush Katif empire has fallen. ■

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Salim Michaeli

Relocated Gaza Strip evacuee

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Israel divestment again an issue in Boston suburb

By PENNY SCHWARTZ

BOSTON (JTA) — A Boston suburb appears to prove the maxim that all politics is local, as the national issue of divestment from Israel edges its way into a local election campaign for a hotly contested state senate seat.

Highly visible among the candidate signs filling Somerville's Davis Square on Wednesday evening were dozens reading "No to Divestment. It's wrong for Somerville."

The signs were held by members of the Somerville Coalition for Middle East Peace, which opposes an initiative by the Somerville Divestment Project to place a nonbinding advisory question on the November city ballot asking voters to divest the city's holdings in Israel Bonds and in companies doing business with the Israeli military.

The divestment group is pushing its cause for the second time in a year, having been rejected by city aldermen last December in a battle that attracted international media attention. The renewed effort comes as the issue is gaining ground on the national level among mainline Protestant churches.

Several Protestant churches have considered divestment over the past year. The most recent move came earlier this month when the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) singled out four companies that supply Israel with military equipment and technology, as well as a financial institution that allegedly has remote ties to Palestinian terrorists.

David Elcott, the director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, who has been at the forefront of the Jewish community's opposition to divestment efforts, says it's important to distinguish among the positions and motivations of the various churches.

"I'm pushing for nuance," Elcott explained. "It's easy to just paint everyone with the same brush. There are those critical of Israel but still committed to its security."

As examples, he cited the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ, which he said are "struggling with how to address violence on all sides, describing their response as almost pacifist, and who are trying to exert economic leverage

against companies who they see as profiting from violence."

Such groups may be naive, he said, "but I can accept that the goal is not the destruction of Israel. It's like disagreeing with Israeli policy."

In contrast, he finds the language used by the Presbyterian Church and the Somerville Divestment Project — which see Israel's presence in land the Palestinians demand for themselves as the root cause of regional violence — as "morally reprehensible, because it makes Israel's self-defense a greater evil than terrorism and in the end would bring on the end of the Jewish homeland."

Karl Gustafson, the pastor at the Clarendon Hill Presbyterian Church in Somerville, considers such reactions overblown.

He faults the media and some in the Jewish community for characterizing the church's position as anti-Israel or anti-Semitic.

Gustafson's congregation has not officially taken a position on either the national or local divestment campaigns.

"I would assume most people would support the divestment strategy," he said.

On the national level, he said, it's an "interesting strategy to try to put some kind of pressure on ending the occupation so some kind of just peace can be worked out." On the local level, however, he cited several reasons for his lack of enthusiasm for the Somerville Divestment Project.

Gustafson said he has had some informal conversations with members of Somerville's Jewish community. He would like to see "some serious and passionate conversation among various religious communities about the occupation and the situation for Israel and Palestine," he said.

At the local level, a legal tussle has developed between the city's election commission and the Somerville Divestment Project over the legality of the petition form the group has been using.

According to the election commissioner, a divestment-project representative

said the group won't use petition forms designed by the city — which are intended to comply with legal requirements — but will continue to use its own form, which includes human-rights accusations against Israel.

But divestment opponents aren't taking the legal glitch as a sign of weakness on the part of the anti-Israel campaign.

"It's too early to tell, and we have to keep our eye on the ball," said Alan Ronkin of the Jewish Community Relations

Council of Greater Boston. "For these people, their goal is to drag Israel's name through the mud and to delegitimize Israel. It will be up to the city's legal department and the elections commission to decide whether their petition meets the criteria for appearing on the city ballot."

Divestment opponents and campaign volunteers mingled ahead of Wednesday's public debate among four Democratic candidates vying for a vacant state senate seat. All four candidates have stated their opposition to the divestment initiative, according to Adam Bovilsky, a member of the anti-divestment coalition, which is working closely with the JCRC.

"I'm here to support the rights of the Israeli people," said Larry LaFlamme, a roofer and union member from Somerville. Holding one side of a large banner from the Jewish Labor Committee supporting Israel and opposing divestment, LaFlamme said that investing union retirement funds in Israel Bonds was good for labor and good for Israel.

A question about divestment was submitted by an audience member during the candidates' debate, Bovilsky said. Under debate rules, only one candidate, Pat Jehlen, was allowed to respond.

Before the debate, Jehlen said she opposes the divestment initiative but supports a communitywide dialogue on the issue, a position she says is backed by members of a local synagogue.

"This initiative is bad and shouldn't be on the ballot," she replied at the debate, according to Bovilsky. ■

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Alan Ronkin

Jewish Community Relations
Council of Greater Boston

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NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

General predicts flare-up of violence

The Israeli general overseeing the Gaza Strip withdrawal said terrorists could fire from Gaza into Israel when the withdrawal is complete.

"Even if we seize the Palestinian areas, that is not to say they will not manage to fire a mortar bomb or rocket into a relatively small area containing thousands of people," Maj. Gen. Dan Harel, the chief of the Israeli military's Southern Command, told the liberal daily Ha'aretz.

"The radius is the radius afforded by the progress in Palestinian technology," Harel said, referring to rockets developed by Hamas and other terrorist groups. "Today it reaches nine kilometers. The day after tomorrow it will be 20 kilometers."

Israel will be prepared to re-invade Gaza if there is a flare-up of Palestinian violence, he added.

Soldiers suspected of looting

Two Israeli soldiers are suspected of looting an abandoned settler home in the Gaza Strip.

Military sources said Monday that two conscripts were under investigation after a Channel 10 television expose revealed that a refrigerator and some decorative fittings had been stolen from a home in the Pe'at Sadeh settlement after its occupants relocated to Israel.

Confrontation in the West Bank

An Israeli army officer was lightly hurt in a confrontation with West Bank settlers.

The officer's hand was smashed in scuffles with residents as he tried to close the eastern gate of the Shavei Shomron settlement Monday night as part of an army closure imposed on the northern West Bank.

As it implements its plan to evacuate four settlements in the northern West Bank, Israel fears that anti-withdrawal activists from other communities will flock to the region to reinforce resistance.

Nasrallah praises Palestinians

Hezbollah congratulated Palestinians on the imminent Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

In a speech broadcast Monday, Hezbollah's chief, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, likened the Gaza pullout to Israel's decision to end its occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000.

"That was the first of many victories," said Nasrallah, whose Shiite militia fought Israeli troops in Lebanon. "We congratulate the Palestinians. We will not have any more defeats."

Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hezbollah bankrolls several Palestinian terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel helps India

Israel sent medical aid to victims of flooding in India.

The \$50,000 airlift dispatched last week to the Maharashtra province, where more than 1,000 people have died from weekend floods, includes medication donated by Israeli charities and pharmaceutical companies.

The response "demonstrates the affinity that Israelis feel toward the citizens of India," said Amos Nadai, deputy director general for Asia and the Pacific at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem.

NORTH AMERICA

Travel warning issued on Gaza

The U.S. State Department warned U.S. citizens to avoid traveling to the Gaza Strip. The advisory, an intensification of prior warnings, calls on U.S. citizens to "avoid crowds, maintain a high level of

vigilance, take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness and exercise caution in public places or while using public transportation" during Israel's withdrawal, which began this week.

It also reiterates prior calls on Americans to avoid travel to Gaza, postpone unnecessary travel to the West Bank and weigh the necessity of travel to Israel.

U.S. Jews rally at U.N.

Several hundred U.S. Jews rallied outside the United Nations in New York on Sunday to pray for settlers in the Gaza Strip who are leaving their homes.

The group said they were there not to protest the withdrawal but to express sadness at the move, The Associated Press reported.

An anti-withdrawal protest is slated for Tuesday near the United Nations.

Park pulls neo-Nazi merchandise

An amusement park near Toronto drew praise from B'nai Brith Canada for recently pulling merchandise with neo-Nazi symbols from its shelves.

Wonderland was "most responsive" once they were alerted to the fact, according to Frank Dimant, the executive vice president of B'nai Brith Canada.

"Wonderland, which projects a wholesome family image, once apprised of the problem, chose not to offer for sale symbols of hate favored by neo-Nazis and other gangs," he said. "We applaud the strong corporate responsibility and good citizenship that the park has shown."

Yiddish theater gets grant

A Yiddish theater in New York City received a \$1.5 million grant from the city.

The money given to the Folksbiene Yiddish Theater will help it find a permanent home, the New York Jewish Week reported.

The theater is in its 90th consecutive season.

WORLD

Polish priest mouths off

A Polish priest criticized laws allegedly imposed on his country by "Jewish bankers" and others.

Henryk Jankowski, who was banned from preaching for a year because of anti-Semitic remarks made in 1997, made the comments Sunday in Gdansk during 25th-anniversary celebrations of the anti-communist strikes that were a precursor to the fall of the Iron Curtain, Reuters reported.

"We are filled with horror when laws are imposed upon us that are thought up by anti-Catholic Masons, Jewish bankers and hell-born atheistic socialists," Jankowski said.

Exhibit highlights Paris Jewish life

A series of photographs at the Jewish Museum in Paris testifies to the diversity of the French Jewish community.

The "Encounters" exhibit consists of colorful portraits of French Jews, taken in locations around Paris by the French Jewish photographer Didier Ben Loulou. Beneath the portraits, captions from conversations with the subjects provide stories and observations on the nature of being Jewish in France.

"Being Jewish is to be responsible for one's history — to inscribe oneself in a genealogy," one man photographed notes.

"To be Jewish is to ask yourself questions," declares Daniela Neumann Lumbroso. The exhibit, which has met with critical acclaim, runs through Aug. 28.