

IN THE NEWS

Sharon in N.Y. for U.N. assembly

Ariel Sharon flew to New York for the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, where he will characterize the Gaza withdrawal as a new chance for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Sharon left Tuesday for New York and will address the General Assembly on Thursday as part of the U.N. World Summit.

Aides said the prime minister will describe Israel's withdrawal from Gaza as a major concession for peace that requires the Palestinian Authority to reciprocate by meeting its commitments to crack down on terrorism.

Court rules for survivors in FSU

A U.S. appeals court upheld a ruling that allows part of the money from a Holocaust settlement to be distributed based on need.

The ruling issued last Friday confirmed Judge Edward Korman's ruling that the portion of the \$1.25 billion Swiss banks settlement set aside for individual survivors should be weighted to survivors in the former Soviet Union because they are needier.

Some \$800 million of the settlement was set aside for victims or their families with Holocaust-era bank accounts; the remainder was set aside for other survivors.

Torahs saved from New Orleans

Jewish groups saved Torahs from the New Orleans area that were in danger because of Hurricane Katrina.

Some 25 scrolls were rescued by a makeshift coalition of representatives from the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, national leadership from the Reform movement, rabbis from Baton Rouge and New Orleans and local law-enforcement officials.

Chabad officials rescued at least 15 scrolls.

WORLD REPORT

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As Israel completes withdrawal, sides bicker over end of 'occupation'

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — No more Israeli civilians live in the Gaza Strip, and the last Israeli soldiers have pulled out as well.

But the Palestinians say that Israel's 38-year occupation of the Gaza Strip is not over, arguing that as long as Israel controls border crossings, airspace and territorial waters, it remains an occupying power.

The Jewish state is sidestepping the issue. Rather than get into a legal wrangle, Israel says the pullout means that its responsibility for Gaza — rather than the occupation in a strictly legal sense — is over.

In any event, Israelis note, Gaza's future depends far more on political and economic developments than on abstract legal definitions.

The Israeli position on occupation was determined by the Foreign Ministry, which argued that it would be a mistake to get into a legal dispute with the Palestinians that could have adverse international repercussions. Instead, the ministry suggested shifting the focus from the issue of occupation to the question of responsibility for everyday life, including maintaining law and order.

Senior ministry officials argued that it would be much easier for Israel to convince the international community that the Palestinians are now responsible for what goes on in Gaza than to debate arcane points about whether the occupation is formally over. Moreover, Israel has little to gain from insisting that the occupation of Gaza has ended, given that the occupation of the West Bank clearly has not.

On the other hand, getting the international community to accept the notion of Palestinian responsibility for Gaza will

enable Israel to develop a new security doctrine: holding the Palestinian Authority responsible for all terrorist attacks launched from Gaza and striking back at the P.A. in the event of such attacks, rather than at the particular terrorist organizations involved.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is expected to elaborate on this approach when he addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Thursday. Sharon will declare that Israeli responsibility for Gaza has ended and that the Palestinian Authority is now in charge.

World leaders seem set to accept the Israeli position.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has told Israel that he now considers the Palestinian Authority responsible for Gaza. The European Union doesn't want to be dragged into a legal argument about occupation, but Israeli officials are confident that the Europeans will also accept the notion of Palestinian responsibility for Gaza, with all it implies. The same goes for the United States.

The Palestinians, however, continue to press for an end to any lingering Israeli presence in or around Gaza: With an Israeli presence at border-crossing points, they argue, the occupation is continuing by remote control.

In the Palestinian view, the fact that Gaza has no independent outlets to the world makes it a huge jail.

"Gaza is one large prison, and the Israeli army's departure does not change that," P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas declared on Monday as Israel Defense Forces troops left.

Other Palestinian leaders bluntly warn of a new round of violence. P.A. Minister Sufyan

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NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *The Gaza withdrawal fails to end Israeli-Palestinian bickering*

Continued from page 1

Abu Zaide says Israel is creating a pressure cooker that will eventually explode.

"You can't choke a prisoner in jail and expect him to sit still," he told the Yediot Achronot newspaper.

The immediate problem is the Rafah border-crossing point between Gaza and Egypt. The Palestinian Authority insists that it be controlled by Egyptian and Palestinian border personnel and that it be open to the movement of people in both directions. Israel wants all incoming traffic to Gaza to go through a new crossing point it controls at Kerem Shalom.

■
To break the deadlock, the Egyptians suggested a compromise under which the Rafah crossing would be closed for renovations for six months, during which time all traffic would go through Kerem Shalom. In the interim, sophisticated monitoring devices would be installed at Rafah, enabling Israel to keep an eye on individuals entering Gaza without maintaining any physical presence there.

Israel agreed but the Palestinians did not, and the issue has yet to be resolved.

As for outlets to the rest of the world, Israel has agreed to the construction of a seaport in Gaza to be exclusively under Palestinian control. That doesn't solve immediate problems, however, since construction of the port is expected to take at least two years.

As for the airport at Dahaniya, which could be back up and running in a few months, Israel is still withholding its approval.

The perennial Israeli concern is security. Israel fears the Palestinians may use Dahaniya to fly in weapons, and they'll insist on Israeli or reliable third-party monitoring of air cargo before allowing the airport to open.

In addition, Israel is beefing up the fence around Gaza to keep out suicide bombers and has installed sophisticated monitoring devices that can see into Gaza's teeming refugee camps and other potential terrorist hot spots.

All this adds to the Palestinians' sense of claustrophobia. But until there is a proven change in Palestinian attitudes toward terrorism — such as a commitment to fulfill P.A. promises to disarm terrorist groups — Israel is unlikely to relax its security precautions.

Despite the practical dispute, Israel can make a legal case that the occupation is over.

The international treaty defining occupation is the 1907 "Hague Regulations Respect-

ing the Laws and Customs of War on Land," which states that "Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army." On that basis, Israeli legal experts argue that Israel cannot be considered an occupier after the withdrawal.

Given Israel's past experience in international juridical forums, however,

the Foreign Ministry feels Israel would do better to avoid the dispute entirely. Moreover, they add, it would be more constructive for all parties to focus on Gaza's economic needs and on future political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Whether Gaza becomes a hotbed for terrorism or a model for a future peace agreement, they say, depends on the scale of international investment and the degree of progress in peace talks.

In the Israeli view, whether or not legal definitions of "occupation" apply to Gaza is secondary. ■

'Gaza is one large prison, and the Israeli army's departure does not change that.'

P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas

Arafat's death still a mystery

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The mystery of Yasser Arafat's death lives on.

After months of silence from the Paris hospital where the Palestinian Authority president died of an undisclosed illness last November, two reputable newspapers finally obtained his medical records.

But the retrospective diagnoses offered Sept. 8 by Ha'aretz and The New York Times were remarkably different.

"Doctors: Arafat Died of AIDS or Was Poisoned" the liberal Israeli daily blared in a banner headline.

By contrast, the Times wrote, "Medical Records Say Arafat Died From a Stroke."

Both papers had consulted with eminent medical experts, so their varying views only served to perpetuate the schism between conspiracy theorists — of both pro-Arafat and anti-Arafat camps — and Palestinian Authority, Israeli and French officials who insist there was no evidence of foul play.

After two years in which his health failed in trying conditions at his West Bank compound, Arafat collapsed last October and was airlifted to a hospital outside Paris. He was pronounced dead Nov. 11 following several days in which conflicting reports had him either comatose or experiencing miracle recoveries.

His widow and heir, Suha, kept all doctors' reports strictly under wraps.

To Palestinians embittered with Israel's handling of Arafat and prone to explaining political developments with conspiracy theories, the poisoning theory had appeal.

To those bitter at Arafat's corruption and intrigued by his long-distance marriage to Suha — after decades in which rumors swirled about his sexuality — AIDS seemed equally likely.

Ha'aretz and the Times agree that the Palestinian leader succumbed to massive internal bleeding, and that it is impossible to determine exactly what infection caused it. ■

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Temple shuts shelter, places rabbi on leave

By LISA HOSTEIN

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Baton Rouge, La., synagogue has closed its shelter for victims of Hurricane Katrina and placed its rabbi on administrative leave.

The board of Congregation B'nai Israel asked Rabbi Barry Weinstein last week to take a paid leave of absence for an unspecified period.

Weinstein had led B'nai Israel's effort to house dozens of evacuees who had fled their devastated Gulf Coast homes in the wake of Katrina. The synagogue shelter, in turn, had received an outpouring of donations and supplies from Jewish communities and individuals around the country that had heard of the congregation's efforts.

The degree to which the shelter closing and the rabbi's leave are linked is a matter of disagreement. But the developments suggest another unexpected fallout from a natural disaster that has disrupted so many lives.

The turmoil has divided and confused a small congregation that for nearly two weeks had come together to help displaced victims.

"This has been very painful for everyone," said Victor Sachse, the president of B'nai Israel, a 230-family Reform congregation that traces its roots to 1858.

Synagogue officials say the decision to ask Weinstein to take a leave was related to a personal matter and was not directly connected to the shelter issue.

But some of the rabbi's supporters charge that a few influential members of the community who opposed using the synagogue as a shelter had pressured temple officers to act.

The supporters expressed dismay that the shelter has been closed and Weinstein has been barred from the synagogue.

The last of an estimated 100 evacuees who had found refuge at B'nai Israel left the premises Monday, Sachse said.

He said the synagogue would serve as a base of operations for medical personnel who had come to the area for relief efforts. He also said it would continue facilitating relocation efforts for victims from other shelters and would help fund transportation costs for people needing bus and plane tickets.

Within the B'nai Israel community there are differing opinions on whether it was the shelter itself or the way it was

handled that led to its sudden closing and the rabbi's paid leave.

The shelter was created on Aug. 31 as New Orleans was being submerged under water and beleaguered residents were fleeing their homes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

While walking his dogs in Baton Rouge, Weinstein came across a family of evacuees at a nearby gas station. After consulting with Sachse, who got the approval of the synagogue board, the rabbi brought the family to B'nai Israel and a makeshift shelter was created.

Weinstein and volunteers provided bedding, food and counseling. During the next several days, they arranged for several families to find new homes as far away as Miami and San Diego.

Recognized in the community as a leader in interfaith and humanitarian efforts, Weinstein, 63, used his contacts to arrange transportation, reunite families and bring in relief supplies.

One of the families who took shelter at B'nai Israel expressed profound gratitude to the community.

"I never knew a place like that could make you feel so at home," Delilah Forbes said Monday night from a California hotel room where she had arrived just hours before. Forbes and her extended family plan to make a new home in San Diego.

"They fed us. People came and cooked, and they brought us clothes," she said, still emotional from the ordeal her family had been through. "Anything we asked for, we got. It was just really beautiful."

Sachse said the initial plan had been to provide housing for a few days. He said the synagogue was not equipped to be a shelter — people staying there had to shower across the street at a Catholic school — and the focus was on helping victims resettle elsewhere.

But with the shelter garnering national headlines and Weinstein and volunteers reaching out to the community, more evacuees continued to arrive — as did donations of money, food and clothing from mostly Jewish institutions around the country.

As the effort intensified, cracks within

the synagogue community appeared, according to several people involved.

With few exceptions, the community initially supported the shelter, which housed mostly poor black families, Sachse said. A few Jewish families also found refuge there.

But within days, Sachse said, "we were overwhelmed."

Weinstein "desperately wanted to help everyone we could," Sachse noted, but "his reach exceeded our capabilities."

The situation "frankly created some pretty real tensions," said Sachse, who spent several nights sleeping at the synagogue.

Some of those active in the shelter effort said bigotry may have played a role in the opposition. They cited instances in which a few synagogue members said it was inappropriate for the evacuees to participate in Friday night services. There was also some opposition to tents being set up on the synagogue lawn to house the overflow of evacuees seeking shelter.

But Sachse rejected the bigotry charge.

"There were a few congregants who would have preferred not to shelter people" for reasons such as liability, "but it was never a racial issue," he said.

The conflict with Weinstein came to a head last week when, according to several accounts, he lost his temper with a past president of the congregation.

Weinstein, who declined to speak about the turn of events, has been in counseling for several years, according to sources close to him. By all accounts, at the time of his confrontation with the former synagogue official he had gone nearly a week without sleep and was under tremendous stress.

Sources close to Weinstein say that after serving the congregation for 23 years, he's distraught over what has happened.

Sachse said lay volunteers will lead services for the short term and that they are seeking a rabbi to conduct High Holiday services.

No one knows how Weinstein's situation will play itself out.

"He's still under contract" for three more years, Sachse said. Whether he's out just temporarily or for good "depends on the rabbi."

'This has been very painful for everyone.'

Victor Sachse
President, Congregation
B'nai Israel

**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Study: U.S. Jews of mixed origins

Up to 20 percent of an estimated 6 million U.S. Jews, or 1.2 million people, are African-American, Asian-American, Latino, Sephardi, Middle Eastern or of mixed race.

That's the major finding of research conducted over the past four years by the San Francisco-based Institute for Jewish and Community Research, contained in the book "In Every Tongue" by the institute's president, Gary Tobin, and co-authors Diane Tobin and Scott Rubin.

The figures are substantially higher than the usual estimates of 10 percent to 14 percent, the authors say.

The research and interviews also showed that some of these Jews feel alienated from their ethnic or racial communities and from mainstream American Jewry but they continue to identify strongly with both.

Included in the population count are Latino "hidden" Jews reclaiming their Jewish roots in the American Southwest and long-established communities of African-American Jews in cities such as New York and Chicago.

MIDDLE EAST

P.A.'s Abbas offers olive branch to Israel

Mahmoud Abbas called for renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace talks following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

"We stretch our hand to Israel with an offer of true peace," the Palestinian Authority president said Tuesday.

"I call on the government of Israel to exploit this historic opportunity, to make good on its commitments, to stop the construction of the West Bank barrier and settlements, to release prisoners and allow exiles to return."

U.S. eyes Gaza violence

The U.S. ambassador to Israel said there was no excuse for continued Palestinian terrorism in the Gaza Strip.

"I think, from the perspective of one of the key international players which has supported Israel's right to defend itself, we will defend it even more vigorously," Daniel Kurtzer told the Jerusalem Post on Tuesday, when asked about Israel's security position after it quit Gaza this week.

"There is never an excuse for terrorism. There is not even a hint of an excuse now if terrorism emanates from Gaza or if rockets are launched from Gaza," said Kurtzer, who ends his term Saturday.

But the outgoing U.S. ambassador criticized Israel for reversing a decision to demolish synagogues in evacuated Gaza settlements.

The empty buildings were later vandalized by Palestinians.

Israel warms to Pakistani imports

Israel announced it would temporarily waive the need for a license to import Pakistani goods.

Tuesday's decision was made following talks this month between the Israeli and Pakistani foreign ministers, the first such high-level contacts.

Pakistan's main export is textiles.

Israeli mosques guarded

Police protection of Israeli mosques was boosted for fear of vigilante attacks.

Extra patrols were ordered Monday for Muslim houses of worship in the Jewish state after Israeli police received intelligence reports

that they could be attacked by right-wingers upset at the sacking of Gaza synagogues by Palestinians.

Israel's chief Sephardi rabbi, Shlomo Amar, called for the mosques to be left unharmed and said he might declare any Israeli who vandalizes them to be ostracized from the Jewish community.

Gazans urged to rebuild

The Palestinian Authority urged Gazans to rebuild on the ruins of evacuated Israeli settlements.

"Gaza is now without settlers," P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei said Tuesday while touring areas evacuated by Israel. "Today we begin the work of rebuilding."

Israeli troops completed a month-long pullout from Gaza on Monday, but their exit was followed by scenes of anarchy as Palestinians looted former settlements.

Qurei called for an end to the chaos. "You won't profit by taking a pillar, plastic tubing or pieces of wood," he said.

Knesset urged to stop war-crimes complaints

The Knesset was asked to allow criminal prosecution of Israelis who seek war-crimes lawsuits abroad against members of Israel's security forces.

Under legislation presented Tuesday by the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman, Yuval Steinitz, any citizen who tries to have a serving or retired Israeli soldier prosecuted in another country could be imprisoned for up to three years.

The move follows a British arrest warrant issued against Doron Almog, a former commander of Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, reportedly at the behest of Israeli citizens.

The Israeli group Yesh Gvul has also called for the prosecution of the military chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, and his predecessor, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, over an airstrike that killed a senior Hamas terrorist in Gaza along with 15 civilians.

WORLD

Former S. African chief rabbi dies

The longtime chief rabbi of South Africa, Cyril Harris, died Tuesday of cancer at age 69.

Harris, who was chief rabbi emeritus when he died, led the Jewish community during the historic process of transition in South Africa, guiding it from the days of apartheid to a democratic order.

His body was flown to Jerusalem for burial, following a memorial service at Johannesburg International Airport.

Air Force builds chapels in Europe

The U.S. Air Force is to unveil separate chapels for Jewish and Muslim servicemen and women at its main European base in Germany.

The synagogue and Muslim prayer room in Ramstein were created alongside the base's interfaith South Chapel.

The synagogue is to open with a ceremony on Sept. 20, two weeks before the Jewish New Year. Rabbi David Lapp, the director of the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, and Rabbi Donald Levy, the base's only Jewish chaplain, will officiate at the Jewish ceremony.

According to Rabbi Levy, about 60 worshipers are expected to attend High Holiday services at the base.

The JWB Jewish Chaplains Council operates under the auspices of the JCC Association, the umbrella organization for Jewish community centers in North America.