

IN THE NEWS

Israel kills 2 in Gaza Strip

An Israeli airstrike killed two suspected Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

Three members of the Al-Aksa Brigade were wounded in Monday's strike, the latest Israeli attack in Gaza in the last few days.

The attack targeted a yellow minibus traveling in an area used for firing rockets into Israel, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Iranian paper wants Holocaust cartoons

Iran's biggest newspaper requested cartoon submissions that question the Holocaust.

The Hamshahri daily announced the contest Monday, calling it a response to the publication by European newspapers of cartoons satirizing Islam's prophet, Mohammed.

"The Western papers printed these sacrilegious cartoons on the pretext of freedom of expression, so let's see if they mean what they say and also print these Holocaust cartoons," graphics editor Farid Mortazavi said. Hamshahri is offering gold coins to the best 12 entries.

Rice to Olmert: U.S. firm on Hamas

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the United States is maintaining global pressure on Hamas to reform.

Rice, who has led international calls for Hamas to renounce terrorism and recognize the Jewish state since the terrorist group won last month's Palestinian Authority elections, called Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, on Monday.

Rice is scheduled to meet Tuesday with Israel's new foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, in a meeting aimed at reassuring Israel that the "Quartet" would press Hamas to renounce violence and accept Israel's existence.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has recently drawn international censure by calling the Holocaust a myth.

WORLD REPORT

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Israel's eye still on settlements as parties try to exploit violence

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Had Ariel Sharon been able to continue as Israeli prime minister, his main strategic goal would have been establishing a new long-term border between Israel and the West Bank.

That remains the primary aim of his Kadima Party, but last week's violent clashes between settlers and police at the tiny West Bank outpost of Amona show just how difficult achieving it might be.

The intensity of the confrontation highlighted a profound rift between young settler radicals and the State of Israel. Some even go so far as to say they no longer feel any allegiance to secular Israel and want to establish a theocratic "State of Judea" in its stead.

The confrontation also brought to the surface differences inside the settler movement itself: The young radicals advocate uncompromising physical resistance to any further withdrawal plans; the moderates argue that the most rational thing the settlers can do is work with the government in drawing up new lines that take their interests into account.

The issue surfaced again when Israel's acting prime minister said a probe into the clashes is unnecessary. Ehud Olmert said at Sunday's Cabinet meeting that accusations of excessive police force during the Feb. 1 evacuation of Amona should not be investigated because he doesn't want to politicize the event.

On Sunday night, settlers and their supporters showed they wouldn't let the issue die easily either, as tens of thousands filled the streets of Jerusalem to rally against what

they called an excessive use of police force in quelling the riots.

The already-explosive situation is further complicated by the fact that Israel is in the throes of a general election. All the major parties are trying to exploit government-settler tensions.

In the fighting over the demolition of nine illegal permanent homes built at Amona, more than 200 people were injured. The radical settlers wanted to make a point: Further evacuation of the West Bank will encounter much tougher opposition than the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank in the summer did. The police wanted to establish a precedent, too: to show that nothing will deter them from carrying out government policy. Both sides are convinced they got their messages across.

NEWS ANALYSIS

For the young settler radicals, the evacuation of the Gaza and northern West Bank settlements was a traumatic experience. For many it caused a major shift in their attitudes to the State of Israel. From ardent Zionists, they became bitter critics, arguing that settlement is a central Zionist tenet, a step toward the coming of the Messiah, and, therefore, any state that gives up settlements undermines hope for redemption.

"A growing proportion of the National Religious public is becoming post-Zionist," Avihai Boaron, a young lawyer who headed the Amona campaign against the homes' demolition, told JTA. "The State of Israel is no longer seen as the beginning of redemption. On the contrary, it is seen to be impeding the natural development of the Jewish people. Not very wisely, Israel is turning good citi-

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■ Settlements continue to be a hot political issue following last week's violence

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zens from lovers of the country into, dare I say it, enemies of the state."

For the moderates, the lesson learned from the Gaza withdrawal is very different. For them, the state remains supreme, and the challenge is to prevent a schism between the rest of the people and the settlers.

Leading the moderate camp is Otniel Schneller, a former head of the Yeshua council of settlers.

The settlers, he argues, are servants of the majority, as reflected by the elected government. It can expand or curb settlement as it sees fit, and the settlers should go along with whatever decisions it takes. His goal is to avert future confrontation by getting the government to adopt a plan for new borders that most settlers will be able to support.

To this end, he has joined Kadima, and put his plan for settlement relocation on the table. Schneller defines four types of settlement: those inside the separation fence, those close to it, those with strategic or historic value and those far from the fence with neither.

The first three categories would be retained by Israel, the fourth relocated in-

side the fence or in Israel proper to make way for a contiguous Palestinian state alongside Israel. Schneller said he showed

his plan to Sharon the day he suffered his major brain hemorrhage, and to Olmert a few days later. He claims both were impressed and that he has reason to believe the plan will be adopted as official Israeli policy.

The key, though, is how much settler support he gets. Many young radicals are already branding him a traitor. But Schneller claims

most settlers are behind him. "It's hard to believe. I thought there would be an intifada against me. But it's just the opposite. People have not stopped phoning me. They want to help, to take things forward, to see where it leads," he told JTA.

The current settler council is vacillating. Its leaders maintain close ties with radicals, while exploring compromise proposals of their own with the government. A day after doing virtually nothing to curb settler violence on Amona, council leaders Benzi Lieberman and Zeev Hever met with Foreign and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni to discuss their proposed map of settlements.

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The feelers came as all the main political parties are trying to use government-settler tensions in the wake of the Amona clash to score political points. The parties on the right maintain that Olmert deliberately sought the violent confrontation to create a strongman image. On the left, the claim is that under Sharon, things would have been under control, and the level of violence much lower. Olmert's retort to critics on both sides of the political spectrum is the same: He was simply doing what had to be done — carrying out a Supreme Court order to demolish the illegal homes.

The public seems confused. On the one hand, 50 percent think that Olmert wanted a bloody fight; on the other, 57 percent blame the settlers for the level of violence. More importantly, the Amona fracas seems to be having no perceptible effect on the nation's voting patterns. In weekend polls after the violence, Kadima still had more than 40 of the 120 Knesset seats, with Labor at somewhere 16 and 21 and the Likud at between 13 and 17.

The fact that such major developments as the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections and the violent police-settler showdown have failed to dent the polls has led several Israeli pundits to conclude that election has, to all intents and purposes, already been decided.

Although balloting is still eight weeks away and the campaigns have hardly started, it seems that it will take something really extraordinary to alter the anticipated outcome. ■

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Tensions high on Canadian campus

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — A weeklong lecture series on radical Islam sponsored by Jewish groups and others got under way at the University of Toronto.

Campus police prepare for heightened tensions between Jewish and Muslim groups at the school as a result of the program, which began Monday.

Speakers will touch on a range of topics including human rights under radical Islamic regimes, female genital mutilation, slavery in the Sudan, cultural factors that produce suicide bombers and the threat of domestic terror. Lead spon-

sors include Betar-Tagar and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Know Radical Islam Week is a response by Jewish students to the second Israel Apartheid Week, organized by the Arab Student Collective and set to begin on campus on Feb. 12.

Jonathan Jaffit, a student who directs campus activities for Betar-Tagar, said campus police have assured him they will provide heightened security at the various speaking venues.

He acknowledged the free lectures might generate some controversy, but added: "The university is not a place where we could shy away from controversy." ■

New leader in Congress supports Israel

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It was an interest in education that brought U.S. Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) into the sukkah of a Cincinnati family several years ago.

Boehner, elected last week as the majority leader in the U.S. House of Representatives, came to the outdoor tent to listen to Jewish parents with children in day school. There, he expressed his support for a priority issue in the religious community — resources for special education students in private schools.

"He was very interested," said Joyce Garver Keller, executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities, who attended the meeting. "I think his openness to listening is very important."

Boehner's ascension to the House majority leadership could have an important impact — both negative and positive, depending on whom you ask — on the organized Jewish community's priorities.

Boehner replaces Tom DeLay (R-Texas), who resigned from the second-ranking House job last month. He is under indictment for alleged campaign finance abuses in Texas and is reportedly under investigation in Washington for his ties to disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

On one hand, Boehner already appears to be in sync with the Jewish community on an issue of growing importance across the religious and political spectrum — lobbying reform.

But his fiscal conservatism is likely to encounter opposition from some Jewish groups involved in social welfare programs, which rely on spending programs for funding.

Elected to the House in 1991, Boehner has focused most of his efforts on domestic issues. As chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, he has been an advocate for school vouchers, a program that allows federal dollars to go to private and parochial schools.

Numerous Jewish groups oppose the program as a violation of the separation of church and state, also known as school choice. But it is touted by the Orthodox community.

"He's very smart on policy and on politics," said Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public

Affairs. "He's not a member of Congress who, if the staff didn't put talking points in front of him, wouldn't know what he was talking about."

Boehner is also well known to Ohio Jews from his tenure as a state representative. But that does not mean he has been a strong supporter of increased funding to Jewish social service programs in the state. "He's not someone who believes in a

big-spending government," said Keller of the local federation. "We are oftentimes asking for federal support we may not be getting from the congressman."

In recent weeks, Jewish groups in Ohio pressed Boehner to oppose the final congressional budget plan, which included significant cuts to Medicaid and other social welfare programs. Boehner voted for the plan.

Boehner has not taken the lead on Israel issues like his predecessor, DeLay, or his chief competition for the leadership position, Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.). But sources who know him said Boehner has been supportive on Israel, and will likely take on more of a leadership role in his new capacity.

Boehner led a congressional delegation to Israel in 1998 when he served as the Republican conference chair.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, gave him a thumbs up.

"Congressman Boehner has traveled to Israel and has a solid pro-Israel record," said Jennifer Cannata, an AIPAC spokeswoman.

William Daroff, vice president for public policy at United Jewish Communities, was a page for Boehner when he served in the Ohio state legislature.

"He's an unreconstructed Cold Warrior," Daroff said. "He saw supporting Israel as a key component of containing Soviet expansionism."

In his first week in the leadership, Boehner has already ingratiated himself with some Jewish officials for taking a strong stance against restrictions on

congressional travel, as part of lobbying reform packages being proposed in Congress.

Jewish groups are concerned because several proposals, including one offered by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), would restrict or eliminate travel by non-profit and educational groups. Groups such as AIPAC rely on these trips to educate lawmakers on the Middle East and garner support for foreign aid and pro-Israel resolutions.

Boehner told the Washington Post last Friday that a ban on such trips would be "counterproductive" and called instead for more oversight in congressional travel.

"Members need to understand what's happening in the world," he told the Post. "They need to understand what's happening with industry. That won't happen if they're locked up in a cubbyhole here in the Capitol."

Boehner's office did not respond to calls seeking comment.

The National Jewish Democratic Caucus highlighted Boehner's conservative side last week, issuing a top-10 list of his voting record.

On the list were votes against reproductive rights, and support for a charitable organization's right to hire staff of the same faith, even while receiving federal funds.

The Republican Jewish Coalition countered by highlighting his support for an educational advisory board that would oversee appropriate use of federal funds for Middle East programs at colleges and universities.

Several Jewish groups have objected to federally funded college programs that support anti-Semitic and anti-Israel professors and programs.

Keller said Boehner's views on domestic issues has often run counter to Jewish groups, but that she has always found an open door at his office.

"We'll argue, we'll agree, we'll nosh and we'll go forward," she said. "And hopefully go forward with a better relationship with him."

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

Boehner already
appears to be in
sync with the Jewish
community on a range
of issues.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Israel continues P.A. contacts

Israel's acting prime minister said ties to the Palestinian Authority would continue as long as it is not led by Hamas.

Ehud Olmert said the monthly transfers of taxes levied on behalf of the Palestinians by Israel would continue, but on a case-by-case basis, as long as Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas remains independent of Hamas, the Islamic terrorist group that won parliamentary elections last month.

Addressing a Tel Aviv economic conference, Olmert said that withholding the tax transfers, which he had considered, would only "play into the hands of the extremists."

The Palestinians have several weeks to form a new Palestinian Authority government.

Abbas has tried to assuage international concerns by proposing that he keep control of security forces even if Hamas ministers are appointed.

Rally staged against Olmert

Tens of thousands of Israelis rallied against acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Sunday night's demonstration in Jerusalem was called to protest last week's forceful police evacuation of Amona, a West Bank outpost.

"Olmert is bad for the Jews," chanted the demonstrators.

Israeli media said some protesters circulated images of police chief Moshe Karadi in a Nazi uniform, recalling the sort of agitation that stoked opposition to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin prior to his 1995 assassination.

Olmert has resisted calls to investigate the Amona evacuation, in which scores of settlers and police officers were injured. On Monday, he called for reconciliation.

"I am prepared to hold a dialogue with all sides in Israeli society, even with those who I believe are liable to lead us into a dead end," Olmert said in a speech in Tel Aviv.

Gift to Tel Aviv art museum revoked

Israeli businessman Sammy Ofer withdrew a \$20 million pledge to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The oil and real estate billionaire and his wife, Aviva, announced the cancellation in Ha'aretz last week.

They wrote that it was a reaction to what they labeled a smear campaign by Tel Aviv residents, other donors, politicians and the media, who protested the conditions the Offers attached to the donation.

The funds were to have gone toward the construction of a \$45 million wing, and were contingent upon the museum being named after the couple.

The museum, whose agreement to the terms sparked the controversy, said in a statement that a "rare opportunity" had been missed due to "unfounded claims."

Assassin's marriage gets OK

Israel's attorney general recognized the jailhouse wedding of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir.

Menachem Mazuz this week ordered the Interior Ministry to register Amir and his wife, Larissa Trimbobler, as married, after more than a year of deliberations.

Amir, who is serving a life sentence in isolation for assassinating the prime minister in 1995, married Trimbobler by arranging for an intermediary to pass her a ring. Rabbis recognized the union, prompting Mazuz's ruling.

Amir's lawyer said the decision could help their bid to get him conjugal visits with Trimbobler.

NORTH AMERICA

Montreal Jewish school gets bomb threats

A Jewish school in Montreal received its second bomb threat in less than a week.

On Monday, more than 500 students were evacuated from the Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools, one of Montreal's oldest Jewish day schools, after a threatening call was received.

A similar evacuation occurred Feb. 2. In April 2004, the library of another school, the United Talmud Torah, was firebombed.

Reform Jews organize congregations

Reform Jews in the United States formed a new social action group. Just Congregations, established by the Union for Reform Judaism, intends to organize congregations to unite with religious groups of other faiths in order to address local social and economic needs, such as education, health care and living wages.

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, whose Temple Israel in Boston is the model for this project, will create manuals for the congregations and travel to synagogues to train individual congregations.

The project is funded by the Nathan Cummings Foundation and individual donors, and Jewish Funds for Justice, which will also help run it.

New program for Russian students

A new program is aimed at building the Jewish identity of Russian-speaking students in New York.

The Israel School of Leadership Development will rely on informal educational methods and a trip to Israel to train college students as leaders in teaching Jewish identity to younger Jews from the former Soviet Union.

UJA-Federation of New York is funding the project, which is being run by the Jewish Agency for Israel, along with Hillel and other organizations.

WORLD

Polish Jews mark Polish tragedy

Polish Jews held a service to mark a roof collapse that killed nearly 70 Poles.

Last week's service at Warsaw's Nozyk Synagogue commemorated the Jan. 28 collapse in Katowice that killed 67 people. Some 200 people attended the service, as did Israel's ambassador to Poland, David Peleg.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Poland and the Polish Union of Jewish Students sponsored the event.

Chilean neo-Nazis kill teen

A Chilean teenager died after being brutally beaten by a neo-Nazi group.

The death of Jonathan Espinoza, 17, on Feb. 1 in a hospital in Santiago, Chile, 45 days later is the latest in a number of incidents that have authorities, human rights organizations and Jewish groups worried in Chile.

A number of incidents involving neo-Nazis launching night attacks on the street occurred in Chile in 2005, including the death of a teenager at the hands of a neo-Nazi gang in Quillota, 60 miles northwest of Santiago.

Two members of the gang are awaiting trial on murder charges in that case. Other attacks have occurred in the port city of Valparaiso and the southern city of Temuco.

The neo-Nazis frequently wear swastikas on their jackets and sometimes carry around pictures of Hitler.