



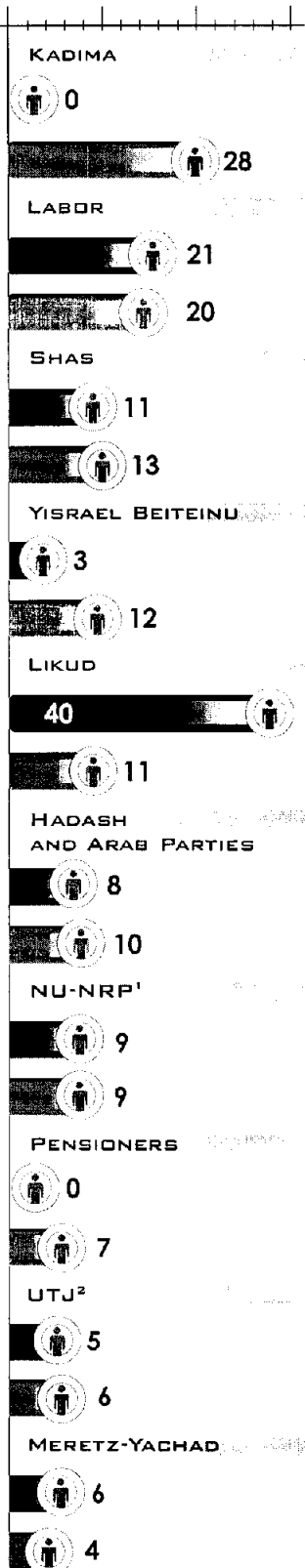
WORLD REPORT

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Seat Distribution in 17th Knesset*

*Based on more than 99% of the vote counted

■ Seats in 16th Knesset
 ■ Seats in 17th Knesset
 15 30 45



¹ National Union-National Religious Party
² United Torah Judaism

For settlers, disappointment with government, public is widespread

By DINA KRAFT

AVNE HEFETZ, West Bank (JTA) — Devorah Meitlis walks up a wind-swept hill leading to the small clubhouse-turned-polling station in this West Bank settlement, hoping her home here will still exist by the time of Israel's next election.

Tuesday's vote, seen as a referendum on Israel's future presence in the West Bank, shows that the public has forsaken its settler population, Meitlis said.

"Everyone is against us," the 38-year-old social worker said bitterly.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza last summer, and Prime Minister-elect Ehud Olmert's pledge to withdraw from isolated settlements like Avne Hefetz by 2010, haunts the settler community. The disappointment — not just with politicians but with the public itself, for supporting future withdrawals — is pervasive.

"There is the feeling that what happened before could happen again. People will have to rethink what will be," she said.

According to Olmert's plan, Israel's West Bank security fence would become the country's final border. Tens of thousands of settlers who live on the eastern side of the fence would be evacuated.

Though the settlers represent only about 3.5 percent of the Israeli population, they traditionally have commanded political influence beyond their numbers. The relatively smooth withdrawal from Gaza led by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon changed their status in a society increasingly convinced that continued control of the West Bank endangers the Jewish state's demographic future.

Avne Hefez, a community of about 1,000 people perched in the rocky hills west of the Palestinian town of Tulkarm and its surrounding villages, could be one of the settlements removed.

Residents said they hope any plans for future withdrawal will be foiled. In the meantime, several admitted they had postponed plans to renovate or expand their homes.

Bright orange banners of the right-wing coalition formed by the National Union-National Religious Party were wrapped around the green metal gate leading into the settlement, and were strung across basketball court fences and walls.

Most settlers said they were voting for the coalition and other right-leaning parties. But they were doing it with resignation, not enthusiasm, realizing that their political voices had been muted since losing the battle to keep the Gaza settlements.

Further isolating the settlement community was the demonstration at Amona, an illegal West Bank outpost where settlers and Israeli security forces clashed violently in February, leaving 200 people injured.

Settlers say they were "fooled" by Sharon, who reneged on previous statements that settlement areas would always remain in Israeli hands. In past elections they voted for him, campaigned for him and in the end felt betrayed both by him and by a country that seems committed to his path. Sharon has been in a coma since an early January stroke, and the mantle of leadership has passed to his deputy, Olmert.

Bumper stickers and T-shirts with the slogan "We Won't Forgive and We Won't Forget"

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

■ Settlers voted for right-leaning parties, some vowing to fight withdrawal to the end

Continued from page 1

could be seen throughout the settlement.

Some vowed to battle not only with words but with fists if the army is sent to evacuate the settlement.

"We'll fight," said Yanai, 35, a security guard at the settlement who offered only his first name.

"It will be a much more serious struggle. I will not be hugging any soldiers," he said, referring to the Gaza withdrawal. "We will fight to the end."

The settler movement appears to be at a crossroads. Its older generation still hopes for some sort of understanding with the government, but the younger generation — politicized by the struggle to save the Gaza settlements — is impatient and has lost faith in the political system.

Neria Damti, 18, a yeshiva student, said he voted for Baruch Marzel, a radical right-wing activist from Hebron. Marzel was a member of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane's Kach party, which was banned from the Knesset in 1988.

Damti is baffled by the Israeli public's support for Kadima, the centrist party founded by Sharon and now headed by Olmert.

"They're blind," he said.

He boasts that he and his friends will be among the first to defend West Bank settlements.

"It could become violent," he said.

Ahuva Sheelo, spokeswoman for the Samaria Regional Council, said Israelis' exhaustion with politics explained their readiness to give up large portions of the

West Bank.

"This is not the country it used to be when people were prepared to die for their beliefs, their ideology and their party," she said. "Today people are looking for a golden calf that will make life easier."

Lior Gelber, 41, who was shot and injured

by Palestinian terrorists while driving with his wife in 2002, said that if the government chose withdrawal in a democratic way, he and his family would have no option but to leave.

"Even if it's painful, we'll need to accept it," he said. ■

Treasury curtails Hezbollah TV station

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON, (JTA) — Activists scrambling to keep Hezbollah's TV station off the air liken it to a game of whack-a-mole: Get al-Manar off one satellite provider and it pops up on another. But the U.S. Treasury Department handed them a hefty hammer on March 23: Any U.S. business doing business with the Lebanese terrorist group's TV affiliate now faces sanctions and possible prosecution.

"Any entity maintained by a terrorist group — whether masquerading as a charity, a business, or a media outlet — is as culpable as the terrorist group itself," Stuart Levey, the Treasury undersecretary for terrorism, said in the statement naming al-Manar and its radio affiliate al-Nour "specially designated global terrorist entities."

That gives the groups striving to keep al-Manar off the air substantial leverage in their talks with satellite providers, said Mark Dubowitz, chief operating officer at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a Washington-based think-tank and advocacy group.

"This gives the Treasury Department the ability to seize the assets or impose penalties against any organization in the United States doing business for al-Manar, and to go after any of the funding sources of al-Manar," said Dubowitz. The foundation funds the Coalition Against Terrorist Media, which has spearheaded the fight to suppress al-Manar.

The television station is notorious for broadcasting virulent anti-Semitism, including a miniseries based on the "Pro-

ocols of the Elders of Zion," the notorious forgery describing a cabal of Jews who control the world.

A more substantial concern was al-Manar's fund-raising drives, which broadcast bank account numbers where donors could deposit money. Terrorism experts say that because the broadcaster is virtually indistinguishable from Hezbollah, funding al-Manar amounts to raising money for a terrorist group that continues to attack Israel's northern border six years after Israel withdrew to U.N.-certified lines.

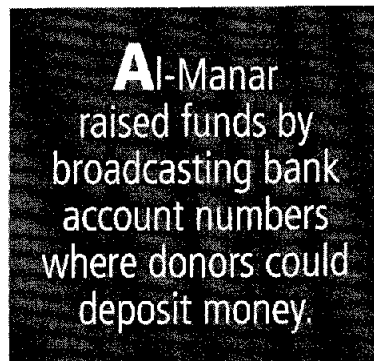
Jewish groups such as AIPAC, which have been pressing for the removal of al-Manar, note that Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, was responsible for bombing the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut in 1983, killing 241 servicemen.

AIPAC lobbying led 51 U.S. senators to sign a letter last August urging President Bush to name al-Manar a specially designated terrorist entity. The American Jewish Committee joined with a coalition of moderate Muslim and Christian groups to press for the designation.

The coalition maintains that al-Manar is currently broadcast only on Arabsat, majority-owned by the Saudi Arabian government; and NileSat, which is owned in part by the Egyptian government.

In recent months, seven corporations that have asked to remain unnamed have removed ads from the station, which the coalition estimates cost al-Manar \$2 million in revenue.

The 2004 designation also helped nudge The Associated Press, which had provided al-Manar's U.S. correspondent with feeds for broadcasts, to sever ties with the station. ■



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Lieberman, the new face of the Israeli right

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) – Avigdor Lieberman, a stern-mannered immigrant from Moldova, has become the new face of the Israeli right.

Lieberman's party, Yisrael Beiteinu, became the fourth-largest party in Israeli politics Tuesday, winning seats in the next Knesset from a strong base of Russian-speaking voters as well as tens of thousands of veteran Israelis.

"The party's values are becoming Israel's values, and this is just the beginning. I'm sure that next time we will be the governing party," Lieberman declared Tuesday night, celebrating at the Jerusalem hotel where his supporters had gathered.

Those values Lieberman refers to include one of the pillars of his campaign: a snap answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the form of redrawing Israel's map so that many Israeli Arab towns and villages become part of the West Bank and large Jewish settlements can be annexed to Israel.

The plan has been condemned, among others, by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon when it was first suggested two years ago.

Lieberman, whose party holds three seats in the current Knesset, also campaigned on a social agenda that appealed to many in the Russian-speaking community, speaking of jobs and welfare and highlighting plans to fight crime.

When Lieberman launched his campaign with the help of American political consultant Arthur Finklestein, he looked for ways to distinguish himself from other parties — specifically Kadima and Likud — and the land swap concept was put on the platform, his advisers said.

Before the elections, Ehud Olmert, then interim prime minister, said he would not include Lieberman's party in a coalition. But with Kadima's win of only 28 seats, the door could be open for a possible deal.

Lieberman, however, is firmly against any further unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank. He says Israel should not leave territory without getting something in return.

Lieberman himself lives in the West Bank settlement of Nokdim, a settlement that is in danger of being evacuated should Prime Minister-elect Ehud Olmert

carry out his plan for future withdrawals from the West Bank.

Lieberman, 48, immigrated to Israel in 1978 and became active in politics as a student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There he worked not only as a bouncer at a campus pub but also as a Likud activist.

He rose to prominence as Benjamin Netanyahu's

top aide during his term as prime minister.

After infighting with what are commonly called the "Likud princes" — the sons and daughters of the party's ruling elite — he left the party in 1999 to form Yisrael Beiteinu, Hebrew for "Israel is our Home," aimed at the Russian electorate.

Vengeance is now his. Likud won only 11 seats in Tuesday's election.

"The blistering defeat that Benjamin Netanyahu suffered yesterday probably hurts even more because it was his protege, Avigdor Lieberman, who, more than anyone else, was the one who caused his strength to dwindle," wrote Avirama Golan, a commentator in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz on Wednesday.

Yuri Stern, a member of Yisrael Beiteinu, was pleased to see his party overtake Likud.

"This means that the old politics and the old elites have failed. The new elite is the immigrants we represent, and the technocratic public who became fed up with the failed running of the country," he told reporters.

Analysts say voters were drawn to Lieberman for different reasons. The Russian-speaking supporters, which polls said accounted for roughly eight of his 12 seats, in part see him as their advocate — a success story in Israeli politics and a man they see as one of their own.

They also see in him the image of a strong, security-focused leader similar to the mold of Sharon. Many Russian voters who had planned to vote for Kadima because they admired Sharon jumped to Lieberman's party after the prime minister fell into a coma in early January, according to analysts.

The veteran Israelis who voted for him

were drawn in part from the pool of disillusioned right-wing voters who formerly supported Likud.

Shai Fux, 28, an Israeli-born high-tech worker from Haifa, said he decided to vote for Lieberman's party not just for his security positions but his civic ones.

"His plan to fight crime suited me.

Also because he is an immigrant from Russia he is aware of their issues, such as civil marriage," he said, referring to concern of many immigrants and other Israelis that the country only recognizes marriages in Israel performed by Orthodox authorities.

Fux does not think Lieberman will have the power to carry out his plan to redraw Israel's boundaries.

The plan, dismissed as untenable and even racist by some Israelis, resonated among supporters weary of the conflict and eager for what his campaign billed as a "logical solution" to Israel's demographic future.

Lieberman argues that Israel's large Arab population, which accounts for about 20 percent of the country, makes maintaining a Jewish majority impossible.

Sharon had harsh words for the plan as introduced first by Lieberman in 2004. "We regard Israeli Arabs as part of the state of Israel," he said in response.

Under the plan, only Arabs who take an oath of allegiance to Israel and perform national service would be allowed to stay in Israel.

"I am enraged that he is still advocating these ideas," Arab Knesset Member Azmi Bishara said, reflecting the anger of Israeli Arabs at Lieberman's plan.

Ze'ev Khanin, a political science lecturer at Bar-Ilan University, thinks that Lieberman might soften his political tone when it comes to trying to maintain political influence.

He said he appears to be more of an opportunist than an ideologue, noting his renewed focus on the Russian community when it became politically opportune.

"He became Russian when he understood that is the way to come back to power," Khanin said. "In my mind, his program is to go back to Likud and become prime minister."

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

Russian-speaking
voters accounted
for eight of
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seats.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Security Council presses Iran on nukes

The U.N. Security Council called on Iran to stop enriching uranium. Wednesday's nonbinding letter gave Iran, which is believed to be working on a nuclear weapons program, 30 days to halt its activities.

After that time, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, is to verify Iran's actions.

The statement is the strongest step the international community has taken regarding Iran's nuclear program. In recent weeks, the United States and Israel have been more emphatic in not ruling out a military option against Iran's nuclear facilities.

U.S. Consulate to review P.A. encounters

American consular officials in Jerusalem must review any request for a meeting between U.S. and Palestinian Authority officials.

The new directive, which applies to U.S. officials worldwide, comes as Hamas assumes control of the Palestinian Authority this week.

Hamas is listed in the United States as a terrorist group, and any meeting with its officials is banned by U.S. law.

Additionally, it's Bush administration policy not to deal with the group until it renounces violence and recognizes Israel.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the department had not decided yet whether to ban contact with non-Hamas Palestinians who are Cabinet members or employed by Hamas-run ministries.

Canada also announced Wednesday that it would cut funding to the Palestinian Authority and end contacts with its Cabinet.

Olmert to Abbas: Let's talk statehood

Ehud Olmert asked Mahmoud Abbas to start negotiations toward Palestinian statehood.

"Because of reality and the circumstances, we are willing to compromise to give up parts of the Land of Israel," Olmert said in remarks addressed to the Palestinian Authority president Tuesday after Israeli election results suggested Olmert would be Israel's next prime minister.

Olmert did not address Hamas, the terrorist group that rejects Israel's existence and refuses to renounce violence, and which took the reins of the Palestinian Authority on Tuesday.

Gaza rocket fired at Israel

For the first time, Palestinian terrorists fired a Katyusha rocket at Israel from the Gaza Strip.

The factory-made rocket, described in Israeli media as a Russian-made Katyusha, landed near Ashkelon on Tuesday but caused no casualties. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the launch but declined to elaborate on how the rocket got to the Gaza Strip.

According to Israeli security sources, the rocket, which has a maximum range of 15 miles, fell short due to a faulty launcher.

More bird flu in Israel?

Israel tackled a new suspected outbreak of bird flu.

Agriculture Ministry workers culled close to 30,000 chickens at a farm outside Jerusalem on Wednesday after receiving indications that they had been exposed to the deadly H5N1 virus.

The Jewish state's first outbreak of the flu, earlier this month, cost some \$5.1 million to contain.

Agriculture Minister Ze'ev Boim declared that contagion over on Sunday.

NORTH AMERICA

Bush invites Olmert

President Bush invited Ehud Olmert to Washington.

Bush called Olmert on Wednesday, a day after the interim prime minister and Kadima Party leader emerged as the winner in Israel's elections.

"The president invited Prime Minister Olmert to visit Washington at his convenience after he gets the government formed," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said.

Olmert said he wants to renew peace talks with Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president, and the United States is eager to facilitate a return to negotiations.

David Welch, the U.S. State Department's top envoy to the region, and Elliott Abrams, the White House national security adviser, will be in Israel on Thursday to meet with officials.

AIPAC trial delayed

The judge in the classified-information case against two former AIPAC staffers delayed the trial for a month.

Judge T.S. Ellis III did not explain his order Monday postponing the trial from April 25 to May 23.

However, he also postponed his ruling on whether to dismiss the charges, which had been due Friday, until April 25.

In hearing arguments for dismissal last Friday, Ellis said the constitutional implications of the government's charges against Steve Rosen, the former foreign policy director for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and Keith Weissman, AIPAC's former Iran analyst, were weighty enough to merit serious consideration of the dismissal motion.

Abramoff gets jail time

Jack Abramoff was sentenced to nearly six years in prison in a fraud case.

The former lobbyist at the fulcrum of a Washington scandal had pleaded guilty in a Florida case in which he is accused with a partner of faking capital in order to secure loans to purchase a casino ship.

Abramoff has yet to be sentenced on three federal charges in a corruption case targeting leading members of Congress, most from the Republican Party.

Abramoff's 62-month sentence was the lowest under sentencing guidelines, and was handed down after 260 people wrote the judge asking for leniency.

Many of those supporting Abramoff came from the Orthodox Jewish community in Maryland, where he lives.

WORLD

Iranian Jewish women visit Russia

A group of Iranian Jewish women is spending a week in Moscow.

The 15-member women's amateur folk group was invited to take part in Light a Candle, a Jewish children's arts festival in Moscow this week.

The women, aged 14 to 30, came to Russia on the invitation of Arkady Gaidamak, a Jewish leader and business tycoon, and with a special permit from Iranian authorities.

Members of the group will perform Iranian and Kurdish folk music at the festival.

All members of the group also are active participants in the cultural activities of the Tehran Jewish community, the group's leader told JTA.