

IN THE NEWS
Sharon to have surgery on skull

Ariel Sharon is scheduled to undergo surgery Tuesday to restore part of his skull that was removed during previous operations.

The announcement came Monday, as Israeli newspapers reported that the Israeli Cabinet was preparing to vote Sunday to declare the Israeli prime minister "permanently incapacitated." The decision would go into effect April 14 and would give Ehud Olmert, who has been interim prime minister, the title of prime minister.

Expert: Iranian missiles can be tracked

Iranian missiles shown on Iranian state television are not capable of evading radar, an Israeli expert said.

Uzi Rubin, the former director of Israel's Arrow program, told Reuters that the missiles could be tracked on radar, despite claims to the contrary made last Friday on Iranian TV.

"The description does not match the picture," Rubin told Reuters. Rubin said the missiles appeared to be Russian Iskander E-missiles.

Israeli troops kill 2 Palestinians

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian gunman in the West Bank. Raed Abayat, a member of the Tanzim militia, was killed near Bethlehem.

Abayat was wanted for multiple shooting attacks in Israel.

Israeli troops also killed a Palestinian teenager in a refugee camp near Jerusalem. Israeli sources said the death occurred Monday when Mohammed Said, 13, and a few other kids attempted to vandalize Israel's security barrier.

But Palestinian sources said the death of the teen occurred after Israeli troops shot at Palestinians who were attacking an Israeli jeep with rocks.

WORLD REPORT

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As Israeli coalition dance begins, potential partners outline demands

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Coalition building in Israel is never easy, and after his narrow election victory, interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is finding it particularly tough.

On paper, it should have been simple. Olmert's Kadima and the like-minded Labor, Pensioners' and Meretz parties have 60 seats between them, just one short of a majority in the 120-member Knesset. The trouble is that Labor, the second-biggest party with 19 seats to Kadima's 29, is driving a hard bargain.

Indeed, some of the party's top people claim that their leader Amir Peretz and not Olmert might form the next government. In response, Kadima is threatening to form a government without Labor.

Both sides know that in the end, the most likely scenario is a government led by Olmert, with Labor as a senior partner. The standoff seems to be over who gets the Finance Ministry. Labor wants it to carry out its socioeconomic reforms; Kadima wants to keep it to make sure government spending is kept under control.

On Sunday, Labor leaders declared that they hoped to form a national emergency government to deal with socioeconomic issues.

Their off-the-record argument was that the election results should be seen as a massive show of support for a new socioeconomic agenda and only tepid backing for Olmert's plan for unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank.

Labor, they whispered, would set up a government with the right and the fervently

Orthodox, putting withdrawal plans on the back burner and focusing on issues like poverty, health and education.

The Labor-led coalition would include right-wing parties like Likud, the National Union-National Religious Party and possibly even Avigdor Lieberman's hawkish Yisrael Beiteinu, all of whom Peretz had ruled out as prospective coalition partners in the election run-up.

Mathematically, it was just possible. Ideologically, it seemed like a bad April Fool's joke.

Israeli media reaction across the board was scathing. "This is fraud," wrote Sima Kadmon on the front page of Yediot Achronot. "It is a crude violation of an election promise."

In Ma'ariv, Nadav Eyal called it "a disgusting maneuver," and in Ha'aretz, Yossi Verter, in reference to Peretz's thick whiskers, scoffed that "the new right has grown a mustache."

Peretz quickly backed down. He put out a statement saying that he had no intention of building an "unnatural coalition." Reading between the lines, what seems to have happened is that Peretz's attempt to build a social bloc to pressure Olmert for a better coalition deal got out of hand, as right wingers identified an opportunity to form a government with Peretz to block Olmert's withdrawal plan.

For Peretz, this proved a double whammy: It hurt his credibility and enabled the fervently Orthodox Shas Party to squeeze Olmert on conditions for supporting him.

The ball is now in President Moshe Katsav's court. In the Israeli system, the president decides who gets the first chance to form a government and become prime minister. The nominee must be the Knesset member

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NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *Ehud Olmert would have to make difficult concessions to form any coalition*

Continued from page 1

Katsav thinks has the best chance of forming a government.

Normally, it would be the leader of the largest party. But it doesn't have to be. After holding formal consultations with all the parties represented in the Knesset, Katsav could decide that someone from a party other than the largest has most support in the Parliament.

Now that seems unlikely. After the hullabaloo caused by Peretz's flirtation with the right, Meretz and Shas seem set to add their votes to those of Kadima and the Pensioners in support of Olmert; Peretz will probably get the recommendations only of Labor and the National Union-National Religious Party, with all the other parties remaining neutral. And that means Olmert is almost certain to get the presidential nod.

So what are the realistic coalition possibilities? And what are the relative advantages and disadvantages of each?

Olmert has at least four coalition options:

1. Kadima-Labor-Pensioners-Meretz-Shas-United Torah Judaism

Advantages: A potentially stable government, giving Olmert a ruling majority of 78 in the 120-member Knesset. It would have 60 seats without the fervently Orthodox, so they would find it difficult to pressure Olmert by threatening to bolt the coalition. By the same token, Olmert would also have close to a majority in the coalition for withdrawal from the West Bank without the fervently Orthodox.

Disadvantages: Olmert would still have to pay a relatively high price in socioeconomic and religious concessions to the fervently Orthodox to get them to join his coalition. He would also have to give Labor senior ministries, possibly finance. And he may feel that Meretz in the coalition gives the government too dovish an image and the Labor-Meretz axis too much power.

2. Kadima-Labor-Pensioners-Shas-United Torah Judaism

Advantages: Without Meretz, it would have a comfortable majority of 73, and be less dovish looking.

Disadvantages: It would leave Olmert more susceptible to fervently Orthodox pressure. Olmert would need Meretz and Arab support from outside the coalition for a majority for withdrawal.

3. Kadima-Labor-Pensioners-Meretz-Yisrael Beiteinu

Advantages: It would have a potentially stable majority of 66 and need a far smaller payoff than a coalition with the fervently Orthodox.

Disadvantages: Yisrael Beiteinu might not support Olmert's withdrawal plan. More significantly, Labor says it won't sit in the same coalition as Yisrael Beiteinu

because of its advocacy of borders that put tens of thousands of Israeli Arabs on the Palestinian side. If Labor sticks to this, this coalition will not be possible.

4. Kadima-Yisrael Beiteinu-Pensioners-Meretz-Shas-Torah Judaism

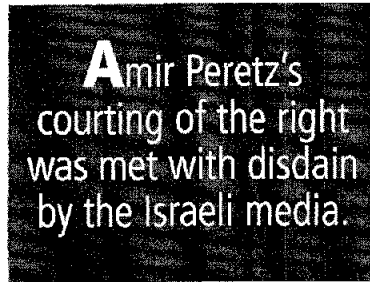
Advantages: Without Labor, there would be no major socioeconomic payoff, and Kadima would retain all the major portfolios.

Disadvantages: Olmert would not be able to pursue his unilateral withdrawal policy. The coalition make-up would hurt Israel's international standing. The coalition would have a majority of 65, but any one party could withdraw or threaten to

withdraw and bring the government down.

For Peretz to form a coalition without Kadima he would need the support of the Pensioners, Meretz, Shas, United Torah Judaism and Likud, for a majority of just 61. This, if it ever was a serious possibility, has now been taken firmly off the table.

At this point, Olmert seems most likely to form the next government with Labor, Pensioners and the fervently Orthodox. The open questions are whether Meretz will be invited to join, and how the Cabinet ministries will be divided.



Irish census might miss Jews

DUBLIN (JTA) — Irish Jewish leaders have expressed concerns that the upcoming Irish census on April 23 may not accurately record the growing number of Jews living in the Republic of Ireland.

While there has been a noticeable influx of Jews into the country since the last census in 2002, they say, the lack of a separate "Jewish" box under the census form's religion question could mean that some of the newcomers remain statistically invisible. Jews — and anyone who is not Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian or Muslim — will have to write in their religion under "other," raising the possibility that many Jews, particularly the unaffiliated, could go unrecorded.

"It's a pity and unhelpful" that the Central Statistics Office didn't include a category, said Carl Nelkin, vice chairman

of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland. "We're hoping they'll write 'Jewish,' but we just don't know."

"Last time the numbers were encouraging, but if there were a specific category it would help," he added.

The last time the census form included "Jewish" as a category was 1996, when numbers were at a reported low of just over 1,500.

The 2002 census recorded a small increase in the Jewish population — of 1.1 percent to 1,790 — for the first time since 1946, when there were 3,907 Jews in the new republic. In the last decade, Ireland has experienced a boom in immigration, with some 400,000 foreign-born living among the country's 4 million people. And Jews have arrived among them — from Israel, South Africa, North America, Australia and Eastern Europe.

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Anxiety ongoing for Jewish soldiers' families

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — A blue-and-white flag soars proudly above Temple B'nai Sholom, a Reform congregation in Huntsville, Ala.

It doesn't bear the familiar Star of David and thick blue stripes of the Israeli flag. Instead, it serves to honor the dozen or so synagogue members currently stationed in places like Fallujah, Baghdad and Tikrit.

For Jewish residents in Huntsville, a town that oozes Southern military culture, the Blue Star Service Banner is a particularly loaded symbol.

"I would have as much trouble taking that down right now as removing the flag of Israel or the flag of the United States," declared Jeffrey Ballon, B'nai Sholom's rabbi. "That's our kids over there."

As the war in Iraq enters its fourth year, Jewish families with loved ones in the line of fire continue to look to the community for support.

The JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, a group run by the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America that serves Jewish military chaplains, says some 600 Jewish men and women are serving in the Middle East.

Some of the soldiers' families turn inward to cope, seeking solace from their immediate surroundings.

Sharon Kunitz, a second-year cantorial student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, said she was flooded with support from classmates when her son, Brian Parker, 20, left for Iraq.

"People often ask me how he's doing and what can be done," said Kunitz, whose son is due back in April. "If I'm feeling a little weepy, they give me hugs."

When built-in safety nets aren't available, Jewish military families often create their own support networks.

The night before Debbie Astor's son Ethan deployed to Iraq, she made an unlikely discovery: Another marine in her son's unit was Jewish. What's more, his father was a rabbi in Los Angeles.

"It became very clear to me the need to have someone to talk to, to understand the very unique situation families encounter," said Astor, who serves as executive director of her congregation, Temple Israel in Sha-

ron, Mass. "There needed to be some way for us to get together and communicate."

Out of this grew The Brave, a listserv that acts as a shoulder for Jewish military families to lean on. In the three years since its founding, the listserv has grown to roughly 250 members, including active-duty chaplains, retired war veterans and anxious parents, siblings, friends and spouses across the

country.

All military families face similar hardships and are prone to the same stresses, but Jewish families face additional concerns about how their loved ones will fare in the armed forces, Astor said.

Lynne Bergman of Tucson, whose husband has been stationed twice in the Middle East, agreed that there are "additional fears I carried having a Jewish husband in the Middle East."

"Beyond the expected fears about injury and capture, those with Jewish loved ones overseas have an additional set of nightmares," she said. "Will our loved ones be singled out for more harsh punishment if they are captured because they're Jewish? Will they be made an example? Will they serve a political purpose to someone?"

Ballon, who serves as a reserve military chaplain, said there's also a fish-out-of-water phenomenon.

"Because of the current evangelical atmosphere of the military itself, Jewish soldiers are often put under duress from overzealous commanders who want to rally the troops around their particular faith," he said.

"If you're not white-bread, red-white-and-blue evangelical, you're something other than regular," he continued. "It's very difficult for non-Christians to succeed in an environment like that."

On the ground, Jewish servicemen face logistical hurdles to religious observance, such as isolation and the distance from religious services.

Joe Kashnow, who served in Iraq in 2003-2004, said he used to wake up early to pray and would cram in study sessions before Shabbat. Still, the barriers proved formidable.

On Passover, "we were involved in straight combat, there was no time for anything at all," he recalled. "But that's the way the war went: No one had any time to themselves. It was simply, move all day and half the night, three hours sleep, and do it again the next day."

Kashnow was sent home after being injured by an explosive device in September 2003, and he now runs the Jewish Soldiers Foundation, which provides kosher beef jerky, prayer books and Hebrew Bibles for Jewish servicemen and women overseas.

Such resources make it a bit easier for soldiers to practice their Judaism, but many still describe their religious experience as self-directed.

"Military work schedules do not lend themselves to individual flexibility," said Jason Rubin, a first lieutenant in the Marine Corps. "This can make Shabbos and holiday observance more difficult, especially during initial training like boot camp."

"This is not to say that we are unable to practice as we need to, just that it can be challenging at times," continued Rubin, who directs an online community for Jewish soldiers called Jews in Green. "It usually takes some extra effort on the service member's part to make things work out."

Rabbi Mitchell Ackerson, a Baltimore-based chaplain who served more than a year in Iraq, agreed.

"Jewish life in a combat zone in many ways is what you make of it," he said. "You've got to step up to the plate and say, 'I want to be a lay leader, I want to run services.'"

Helping their loved ones take this step may console the family members waiting back home.

One Passover, while her son celebrated a seder in the Middle East, Astor tested out a new recipe for Iraqi-style charoset.

Somehow, making the syrupy date charoset eased her anxieties.

"Being gone is the subject everyday. The fear is everyday," Astor said. "But knowing that he was either going to find his way to a small or large Jewish gathering, or that he would create one for his battalion, I knew he was acting like a responsible Jewish adult."

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

Celebrating Shabbat
and holidays can be
especially difficult
during boot camp.

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

'Quartet' meets on Palestinian aid

Representatives of the "Quartet" for Middle East peace met to discuss funding for the Palestinians. Details of Sunday's meeting involving envoys from the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia were not discussed.

The United States and the European Union have said they will not give any direct aid to a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority unless Hamas renounces terrorism and recognizes the State of Israel.

Jewish students see Rwandan genocide sites

A group of Jewish and Rwandan student leaders are touring Rwanda to learn about the 1994 genocide there.

The students arrived Monday for a 10-day program to learn about the 1 million people killed when tribal tensions erupted in the African country. The World Jewish Congress, the European Union of Jewish Students and the French Foundation for the Memory of the Holocaust organized the program.

Pope's house to turn into Holocaust memorial

Part of Pope John Paul II's childhood home is being turned into a Holocaust memorial.

Ron Balamuth, who inherited the property from his grandparents who were killed in a Nazi death camp, sold the house in Wadowice, Poland, on the condition that part of it be used for a memorial to the Jews killed during World War II.

The parents of the future pope, then known as Karol Wojtyla, rented two rooms of the house's top floor from Balamuth's grandparents.

Passover party in Buenos Aires

The first Urban Passover party was celebrated on the streets of Buenos Aires. An estimated 10,000 people gathered Sunday as gefilte-fish eating contests, klezmer concerts and arts-and-crafts exhibitions were held. The independent Jewish professionals group YOK, which promotes Jewish life and pluralism, organized the celebration.

Chirac invites Olmert

French President Jacques Chirac invited the interim prime minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, to visit Paris. Chirac called Olmert last week after the Israeli elections to congratulate him on the success of Olmert's Kadima Party in the March 28 elections. He underscored the importance of the French-Israeli friendship and expressed hope that these relations, which have improved since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to Paris last July, would continue.

NORTH AMERICA

Senator condemns Hamas

U.S. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) called on Hamas to renounce terrorism and acknowledge Israel's right to exist. Frist, the Senate majority leader who may be considering a run for the presidency, made his comments Sunday at the Orthodox Union's national dinner. "Then, and only then, will negotiation and peace be available," he said. Frist heralded the U.S.-Israel alliance as "one of the most important pillars of our foreign policy." He also called Ehud Olmert, the interim prime minister of Israel, "an old friend."

Europe group pressed on invite to Palestinians

Members of the U.S. Congress sent a letter to the Council of Europe asking it to rescind an invitation to Hamas members to attend a Parliamentary Assembly meeting.

The members of the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee said the delegation from the Palestinian Legislative Council should not be allowed to attend the assembly's Middle East subcommittee meeting in Strasbourg, France, scheduled for April 10-13.

These types of invitations "undermine the collaborative efforts made by the U.S. and the E.U. to isolate Hamas," the letter said.

Palestinian: Hamas unlikely to block talks

Hamas is unlikely to block the PLO from negotiating peace with Israel, Saeb Erekat said.

"I don't think the government will stop us," the former chief Palestinian negotiator said Sunday in an address to Jewish leaders and philanthropists at the Jewish Funders Network annual conference in Denver.

Even after Hamas' sweep of Palestinian legislative elections in January, peace talks remain under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, Erekat said.

"We stand fully ready to engage the Israeli government," he said. "We can do it by 2007."

Kentucky lawmakers pressed on religion

Jewish officials in Kentucky said state lawmakers spent too much time on religion in the current session.

A letter signed by leaders of the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Community Federation of Louisville mentioned bills authorizing the posting of the Ten Commandments and the motto "In God We Trust" at the state capitol; a governor's prayer breakfast at which only Christians spoke; and a church group's survey asking legislators whether they had professed faith in Jesus.

Jewish preschool teachers protest wages

Almost two dozen preschool teachers and parents protested low wages outside a JCC near San Francisco. The protest took place last Friday outside the Osher Marin Jewish Community Center. Teachers at the JCC's Early Childhood Education Center have been working without a contract since December. Their union rejected a contract proposal last week, calling it insufficient.

Teachers at the center are paid an average of \$14 to \$16 an hour, which the union says makes them among the lowest-paid preschool teachers in Marin, an affluent region north of San Francisco. The Osher Marin preschool is one of 12 pilot schools nationwide chosen by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative for its focus on family outreach.

MIDDLE EAST

Labor Party loses seat

Israel's Labor Party lost a seat in the next Knesset to an Arab party.

Labor was left with 19 and the United Arab List four in the 120-member body after an Israeli judge accepted the Arab party's claim that mistakes were found in tallying Arab votes during the March 28 election.

The Labor Party is expected to appeal the decision.

Israeli chief rabbi pressed to resign

Israel's attorney general called on one of Israel's chief rabbis to resign.

But Menachem Mazuz said there is not enough evidence to prosecute Yona Metzger, Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi. The announcement came Monday after Metzger was probed for staying at hotels at a discount rate during Jewish holidays.