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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Soldier, 10 Palestinians die

An Israeli soldier and at least 10 armed Palestinians were killed Thursday in clashes in two West Bank refugee camps.

Israeli troops entered refugee camps near Jenin and Nablus late Wednesday night in what the army said was an action against terrorists and the terrorist infrastructures operating in the camps.

Jerusalem area under fire

Palestinian gunmen opened fire Thursday on Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood. A 19-year-old Israeli sustained minor wounds when hit by the ricochet of a bullet, according to the Jerusalem Post.

In retaliation for Thursday's attack on Gilo, Israeli helicopters opened fire later that day on Bethlehem. At least one Palestinian was wounded, Israel Radio reported.

Israel faces tirade at U.N.

The Saudi ambassador to the United Nations launched a tirade against Israel. Barely mentioning a land-for-peace plan made by the Saudi crown prince that has gained international attention, Fawzi bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday that "Israel despises and flaunts all international regulations and resolutions and also defies the most fundamental humanitarian rights." Israel's deputy U.N. ambassador, Aaron Jacob, said his government is "very disappointed" by the speech.

Arab nations had called for the special Security Council meeting in an effort to devise a Middle East resolution that the United States would not veto.

But U.S. officials said Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat had instructed his supporters at the United Nations to put off introducing a measure.

Federations offer Argentina help

The North American federation system pledged \$35 million to help Argentine Jews immigrate to Israel. The funds, which the United Jewish Communities plans to raise and distribute through the Jewish Agency for Israel, come as an increasing number of Argentine Jews are seeking to flee a deepening economic crisis. The UJC has already pledged \$5 million to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to help ease the economic plight of those Jews remaining in Argentina. [Page 1]

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Argentine Jewish crisis reaches doorstep of Miami's community

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As communities across the United States look to help Jews in Argentina harmed by the ongoing economic and social crisis, Miami need look no farther than its own backyard.

Miami's Jews has been helping Argentine Jews acclimate to the United States for years, but the community will be broadening its assistance.

The Greater Miami Jewish Federation voted last week to launch a special campaign to raise at least \$1 million to help the 200,000-strong Jewish community in Argentina, help the hundreds of Argentine Jewish families already in Miami and promote Argentine immigration to Israel.

The Miami community realizes it has to work on such a three-way approach because "there is no one answer for what to do," said Michael Winograd, the federation's assistant director of community planning.

Although the Israeli government is offering incentives to Argentine Jews to make aliyah, there are many who have roots in the Miami community.

"It's not like everybody is going to hop on a plane to Israel," Winograd said.

"You have Jewish people in need in your community," he explained. "You're not going to turn your back on them."

The organized American Jewish community has been scrambling over the past few months, trying to assess the best strategy and devise fund-raising plans to help Argentine Jews in need as well as those who plan to immigrate to Israel.

The United Jewish Communities — the umbrella of the federation system — set up a task force and has pledged \$5 million for emergency services for Jews in Argentina through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Miami, meanwhile, is trying to work all fronts.

While no one knows for sure how many Argentine Jews currently reside in the area, at least 400 families have arrived over the last two years, when the Argentine economy began to unravel, local Jewish officials say. Even more have arrived since the political and economic situation collapsed a few months ago. The federation just sent \$250,000 to the JDC to help with immediate welfare needs in Argentina, particularly for the more than 20,000 Argentine Jews living below the poverty line.

It is also helping to promote immigration to Israel, especially for Argentine Jews living in Miami illegally, said Jacob Solomon, the federation's executive vice president.

But for those Jews already in Miami, the issue is "tricky" because while the Jewish community wants to be welcoming and help families take care of basic needs, it does not want to encourage additional illegal immigration, Solomon said.

"We want to create a climate that we as a community are here for you," he said. "If you are slipping through the safety net, we will catch you."

The community comes to the current crisis with experience.

The Jewish community's Latin American Migration Program has helped Jews from Argentina and other Latin American countries move to Miami-Dade County in the past three years. Together with the Jewish Community Services of South Florida, the program assists with affordable housing, emergency funds for food and clothing, Hebrew schools and health services.

The situation just got more complicated as the Justice Department last week ended the program that allowed Argentines to travel to the United States without a visa.

U.S. officials, noting an increase in the number of Argentines traveling to the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Feb. attack claims another victim

An Israeli teen-ager died Wednesday of wounds sustained in a Feb. 16 suicide bombing. Rachel Theler, 16, was critically wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up near a pizzeria in the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron. Two other teen-agers were killed in the attack.

The daughter of immigrants from England and the United States, Theler was the oldest of three children. Her brother, Lior, was seriously wounded in the attack. Theler's family donated her organs for transplants.

Former Israeli officials warned

Fourteen former senior Israeli officials could face charges related to Israeli Arab riots in October 2000. The 14 were notified of this by a state commission of inquiry investigating the riots in northern Israel, in which 13 Israeli Arabs were killed by police.

Among those told that they may need to hire lawyers to defend themselves are former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, former Public Security Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and former Police Commissioner Yehuda Wilk.

Female bomber was persistent

Hamas refused to give explosives to the woman who carried out a suicide attack Wednesday at a West Bank roadblock. After Hamas refused her request because she was a woman, Dureen Abu Aisheh, 21, got the explosives she needed from the military wing of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah.

Fatah's Al-Aksa Brigades claimed responsibility for her attack, in which she killed herself and wounded three Israeli police, but her relatives said she had only used the Fatah militants to get the bomb and remained at heart a fervent Hamas supporter, like other members of the family. She was the second woman to carry out a suicide bombing since the start of violence.



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United States in recent months, since the Argentine economy collapsed, were fearful that Argentines would come and stay illegally past the 90-day period.

Many Argentine Jews have done just that over the years, boosting their numbers and likely giving Miami the largest concentration of Argentine Jews in the United States.

Despite concerns about the Jews' illegal status, the Miami community has felt compelled to help.

There is a strong consensus from the community and within the federation leadership that Jews have to be helped no matter what, said Judy Gilbert-Gould, director of the local Jewish Community Relations Council. Now, she said, they are faced with the "tachlis"—or the nuts and bolts of what's needed.

The federation set up a Latin American Immigration planning committee six weeks ago in the hopes of achieving consensus decisions on the particulars — meaning what services they can provide and making sure that those services are legal.

The committee is made up of service providers, rabbis, JCRC staff and Argentine Jews.

At the same time, the Israel Aliyah Center, which is funded by the Jewish Agency for Israel, hired additional staff and is making the rounds at local synagogues to tell Argentines about their aliyah options.

There have been at least 20 interviews with Argentine Jews over the last two months, according to Ran Sagee, the center's director, and six people have already gone to Israel.

The center is doing everything to expedite the process.

"The minute they are ready to go, we are ready," Sagee said.

Some 3,000 to 5,000 Argentine Jews are expected to make aliyah this year from Argentina.

The cost of an aliyah package for a family of four — which includes airline tickets, shipping household goods, housing and Hebrew ulpan — is around \$28,000, or \$7,000 per immigrant.

The Jewish Agency recently approved a \$140 million budget for Argentine Jews who immigrate to Israel.

The money is based on the possibility of 20,000 Argentine Jews moving to Israel during the next few years.

Argentine Jews — both in Argentina and Miami — are still considering all options but some could end up making decisions that could split families apart.

On the one hand, Israel is offering benefits packages that are enticing, but many Argentines do not want to send their children into the Israeli army, Sagee said.

On the other hand, with the visa waiver program gone, Miami is not as viable an alternative as it once was. Beatrice Minuchin, a 49-year-old divorcee who just arrived in Miami in January, must decide whether to stay in Miami or go to Israel by April.

One thing is for sure, she is not going back to Argentina.

"It is impossible to live there," she said in a phone interview from Miami this week. "There are no possibilities for anyone. I have to begin again."

Minuchin left three of her four children behind in Argentina, but one daughter is in school in Miami and her parents live in the area as well. Her brother and his family, still in Argentina, plan to make aliyah in May.

Minuchin said she wants to hear all the options about employment and housing opportunities before she makes her decision.

"I want to have a life with dignity," she said. □

Synagogues to help Argentine Jews

NEW YORK (JTA) — Synagogues across North America will help some 40 Argentine synagogues feed Jews hurt by the country's ongoing economic crisis.

The program, sponsored by the North American Boards of Rabbis and the World Jewish Congress, will begin by supplying kosher-for-Passover foods to Argentina.

"The binding of synagogues not only is assisting Jews in Argentina, but it's strengthening our self-identification as Jews here in North America," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the rabbis group. "Not only do we share a common faith, but we share a common fate." □

JEWISH WORLD

U.S. eyes extremist groups

U.S. officials are probing contacts between American extremists and foreign terrorist groups to make sure the two don't start collaborating.

The officials say they have evidence that neo-Nazis, white supremacists and black Muslim groups have reached out to foreign terrorists whose shared hatred for Israel and the U.S. government might make them natural allies.

Hillel expands in Latin America

The largest Jewish student organization in the world is stepping up its presence in Latin America. Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which opened a center in Uruguay last year, plans to establish offices soon in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires.

The Latin American ventures are being funded in part with \$1 million from the Baltimore-based Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, which also recently donated \$1 million for social justice programming through campus Hillels.

Rabbi pleads to porn charges

An Atlanta-area rabbi pleaded guilty to having child pornography on his temple computer, according to The Associated Press.

Rabbi Juda Mintz, 59, faces more than two years in prison for possessing at least 10 computer files containing photographs of minors engaging in sexual acts. Mintz allegedly had the files while serving as spiritual leader of Mount Freedom Jewish Center in Randolph, N.J.

Mintz's lawyer told the AP that Mintz will never serve as a rabbi again and is now working as a clerk in a convenience store.

Pet program rewarded

El Al was honored for its frequent flier program for pets. Israel's national airline received the Platinum Golden Bell, the highest honor given by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International.

Under the program launched in March 2001, pets earn a free round-trip flight after three round trips within a three-year period.

Holocaust artist, writer dies at 82

Gizel Berman, who recounted her experiences as a Holocaust survivor in sculpture, books and storytelling to schoolchildren, died Monday at 82. Berman was a Czech native whose sculptures are displayed at the Yad Vashem Holocaust art collection in Jerusalem.

In her book, "My Three Lives: A Story of Love, War and Survival," Berman told how she and her husband, Nick, managed to survive Nazi death camps. She also visited dozens of schools to tell her story.

E-mail lists 'good addiction' for Brazil's Jewish community

By Marcus Moraes

RIO DE JANEIRO (JTA) — Brazil's 120,000 Jews increasingly are using the Internet to learn more about their heritage.

The listas de discussao — Portuguese for "discussion lists" — have become an alternative "non-shul" way for Brazilian Jews of all ages to debate the meaning of their Jewishness, discuss Jewish religion and culture and get news about Israel and the Diaspora.

In addition, these virtual forums offer a great opportunity to develop new friendships, meet old friends and — why not? — find a date.

For Rabbi Sergio Margulies, "Judaism is characterized by debate, rather than obligatory ideas."

Margulies, a confessed Internet addict, is the spiritual leader at the Associacao Religiosa Israelita do Rio de Janeiro, also known as ARI. The 800-family congregation, the largest in Rio, is affiliated with both the Reform and Conservative movements.

"The study of the Torah makes us understand the different interpretations of the various commentators," he said. "The Talmud itself is an enormous net of rabbis who dialogue among themselves, transcending their own place and time."

The Talmud is a "philosophical precursor of the debate groups that the Internet technology is able to provide nowadays," he added.

Among some of the older Web sites popular with Brazilian Jews:

- Pletzale, Yiddish for "a small get-together."

The Pletzale discussion list includes about 180 members who exchange an average of 80 daily e-mails. These messages include analyses of Torah laws, discussions about Israeli-Palestinian relations, personal accounts of members' encounters with anti-Semitism and information about Jewish holidays.

According to Gustavo Erlichman, 22, the discussion list's founder and moderator: "Thanks to the site's pluralism, people of all ideologies are able to engage in friendly debate."

- Unishalom, which is known for attracting college-aged Jews. Its discussion list has some 80 members, aged 18-30.

"I subscribe to more than five discussion lists on Judaism, but it is particularly nice to see young Jews debate all kinds of Jewish subjects at Unishalom," Andre Occenstein, 25, said.

"At Unishalom, I found people who I had met years ago on trips specially organized by the Jewish community to bring Jewish young people together," said Tamara Socolik, 27, who lives in Brasilia, Brazil's capital. "At Unishalom, I found the right place to get back to those delicious discussions."

Unishalom's members meet in person three times a year, during Israeli dance festivals held in Brazil.

Danielle Bar, 27, said she doesn't dance at the festivals, but always joins a dance group "when there is a festival coming up so I can enjoy the event and meet my cyberfriends."

Pletzale's members also have met in person. The list's first meeting took place in a Sao Paulo bar in December, when members celebrated the site's third anniversary.

A new discussion list is Shachar Brasil, which founder Etel Wengier described as a pro-Israel group with a common past in youth movements and no affiliation to any political parties or religious institutions.

Shachar Brasil has about 110 members. Unlike Pletzale and Unishalom, Shachar Brasil's e-mail topics focus almost exclusively on Israeli politics.

Other, more recent, discussion lists have been created by Brazilian Jews for specific purposes. For example, the ARI-Forum includes members of the ARI congregation; Jornalistas Judeus allows Jewish journalists to discuss media issues; Estudos Judaicos deals with Hebrew literature and language studies; JudeusGaysBr is tailored to gay Jews; and Ivritmeshugas is for those who enjoy debating in transliterated Hebrew using the Latin alphabet.

Among the various lists' subscribers are Brazilian Jews who live abroad, most of them in Israel. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**As intifada continues to rage, Israeli left and right both revive***By Gil Sedan*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — They used to say that the idea of Greater Israel was null and void. They also used to say that it would take the Israeli left years to recover from the shock of the intifada.

Now both political extremes are making a comeback, claiming to offer solutions where the government has failed.

The extreme right has given renewed legitimacy to the idea of "transfer," the deportation of the Arab population to neighboring countries. Radical elements in the left are flirting with the idea of civil disobedience — until now, a rarity in Israeli society.

In the middle, the national unity government has been unable to offer any dramatic breakthrough in the escalating Israeli-Palestinian conflict, virtually paralyzed by its own leftist and rightist extremes.

Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, who was assassinated last October by Palestinian terrorists in Jerusalem, was the champion of the transfer idea, making it the main platform of his Moledet Party.

As long as Ze'evi was alive, his political power was marginal. In May 1999 — four months before the outbreak of the intifada — Moledet won only two seats in the Knesset.

Since Ze'evi's murder, however, the idea seems to have gathered momentum. A recent public opinion poll conducted by Ma'ariv showed that 35 percent of Israeli Jews support transfer of some kind.

That is an unprecedented rate of support for an idea that just months ago was considered taboo. It is seen as much as a reflection of Israeli despair at the violence of the Palestinian intifada and the destruction of the Oslo peace process as much as it is an expression of animosity toward Arabs.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, despair led some 200 reserve army officers to announce that they would no longer serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "to protect the settlers."

The publication of their open letter, and the subsequent controversy, was followed by a rally of more than 10,000 people in Tel Aviv calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip — and dismantling the settlements there.

Compared with the massive left-wing demonstrations before the 1979 peace agreement with Egypt and after the 1993 Oslo accord, the turnout was relatively small.

Still, it was the first time the left had taken to the streets since the shock of the peace process' collapse and the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000.

A week later, the settlers responded with a massive demonstration in Jerusalem — the first such demonstration after months in which they allowed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to conduct the standoff with the Palestinians as he saw fit.

The right is unified in its solidarity with the settlements — at the very least, in the conviction that Israel should not withdraw from them under fire — and the need to crush the intifada.

However, the right still is divided on the question of transfer. Some speak of transfer by consent; others of an exchange of Jewish settlers moving from the West Bank and Gaza Strip into Israel and of Arabs moving from Israel to the territories. Still others support using the possibility of transfer mainly as a rhetorical threat.

Similarly, the left is divided over the question of whether

soldiers can take the law into their own hands by refusing to serve in the territories.

During the demonstration in Tel Aviv two weeks ago, Knesset member Roman Bronfman of the Democratic Choice Party won enthusiastic applause as he expressed his total support for the disobedient officers.

Calling them "the conscience of the country," he praised them for having returned pride to the leftist camp. He ended his speech by telling them, "I salute you."

Meretz Party leader Yossi Sarid, head of the opposition, was furious. Despite his unequivocal opposition to the Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Sarid objects to private initiatives of civil disobedience. When Bronfman came off-stage, Sarid reprimanded him for having violated an agreement among the demonstration's organizers.

But Sarid could not ignore the fact that the "refuseniks," with their controversial letter, gave the left new life.

"The issue certainly keeps us busy," said Moriah Shlomot, secretary-general of Peace Now.

On Monday, a military judge sentenced two officers who refused to serve in the territories to 25 days in jail. They were the first to suffer for their act of civil disobedience.

Yet even Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer understood that the matter can't be dealt with through punitive measures alone. He intended to meet with the refuseniks, Ben-Eliezer said, "to cope with the difficult questions they were raising."

Other examples of the leftist revival is Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg's insistence on addressing the Palestinian legislative council in Ramallah, despite the government's objections, and growing calls for Israel to withdraw unilaterally from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

And, in a long interview in Ma'ariv, Rami Heuberger, one of Israel's most popular actors, delivered a shock to the Israeli conscience.

"I am not saying we are Nazis. However, once you lose your moral codes, the door is wide open," Heuberger said. "To be a people which annihilates another people, this frightens me."

Heuberger and others are frightened because so much seems to have changed since the days when former right-wing Knesset Member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, son of late Prime Minister Menachem Begin, described Ze'evi's transfer idea as "moral trash."

By July 2001, in fact, Knesset Member Michael Kleiner tabled a bill proposing financial benefits to Arabs who leave Israel for Arab countries.

In September, Infrastructure Minister Avigdor Lieberman suggested the exchange of settlers for Israeli Arabs. Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, an influential religious leader among the settlers, recently wrote in a settlers publication: "Since many of the Arabs" in Israel "do not accept our sovereignty, it is a mitzvah to deport them."

Uri Elitzur, editor of the settler periodical *Nekudah*, was candid enough to acknowledge that deporting an entire population would not work.

"The world will not allow it, the Arabs will not agree and Israeli society will be torn to pieces," Elitzur said. He conceded that transfer was impossible "both morally and politically," but said it was legitimate to talk about transfer as a matter of tactics.

By countering maximalist Palestinian demands with moderate proposals intended to reach real compromise, Israel inevitably suffers when the world demands a solution somewhere in between, Elitzur said. □