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85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Powell mission ends in failure

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell tried to put the best face on his peace mission, which ended Wednesday with no concessions from Israel or the Palestinians.

"I came here not knowing how long" Israel's military operation in the West Bank would last, Powell said. "I leave here able to say to the president, it wasn't immediate but it is now coming to an end."

Noting that Israel had promised to withdraw its troops from the West Bank within a week, Powell appealed to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to halt the violence and arrest terrorists.

"I have made it clear to him the world is waiting for him to make a strategic choice and lead his people away from violence," Powell said after meeting Wednesday with Arafat for about two hours.

Bush calls on Arabs to act

President Bush called on Arab states to help end terrorism and suicide bombings in the Middle East.

In a speech at the Virginia Military Institute on Wednesday, Bush said the Palestinian Authority "must act on its words of condemnation against terror."

Without setting a timeline, he also said Israel must continue to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Bush called on Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to "say clearly that a murderer is not a martyr, he or she is just a murderer."

Bush also congratulated Secretary of State Colin Powell for making progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire.

Sharon criticizes E.U. position

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon lashed out at European leaders for their position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In an interview with Army Radio, Sharon said European leaders "have shown interest in the toilet paper" supply to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

On the other hand, he said, they "did not bother to call me to express condolences to Israel after the horrible attacks that were here."

Sharon linked their behavior to Europe's silence during the Holocaust.

European diplomats and media have harshly criticized Israel's West Bank offensive.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Teaching Israel to U.S. kids poses extra challenge for educators

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — At Temple Kol Ami in suburban Detroit, Hebrew school students marked Israel's Independence Day by sending e-mail messages of support to Israeli soldiers and climbing on an enormous map of Israel to learn about the Jewish state's history and geography.

At Kehillah Community Synagogue in Berkeley, Calif., students attached notes hoping for peace to a poster of the Western Wall.

And in Denver, where most congregations usually skip the community Israel event and do their own thing, there has been a groundswell of support for the community-wide parade, slated for Sunday, to show solidarity with Israel.

With Israel's Independence Day, which was celebrated on Wednesday, coming on the heels of seemingly-nonstop Palestinian suicide bombings and a major Israeli military offensive, American religious schools found themselves scrambling to figure out the appropriate way to observe the holiday.

"A key question at this time has been — are we truly in the mood to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut," said Deborah Price, executive director of the Jewish Education Association of MetroWest, N.J., using the Hebrew name for Independence Day.

"There's less falafel and Jaffa orange-type celebrations going on. The mood is far more serious; the intent and the feeling of the programs does seem to be far more intense," Price said.

But Independence Day hasn't been the only challenge Israel has presented. All year, but particularly in recent weeks, congregational schools have struggled to figure out how best to teach about the embattled Jewish state.

While Israel and Zionism have long been staples of most supplemental school curricula, these institutions only have a few hours a week to teach a multitude of subjects, ranging from Hebrew to Bible.

For some, the history and politics of modern Israel fell on the back burner until recently. Israel-related sessions at last summer's Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education conference were far outnumbered by sessions on such topics as Torah, pedagogy and Jewish environmental education.

Steven Glickman, principal of the Community High School for Jewish Studies in Denver, said that many of his students start high school not knowing basic information about Israel, such as where the West Bank is or what the 1948 War of Independence was all about.

Most educators say Israel and Zionism are on their curricula, but that Israel's complicated history can be difficult to explain to young children, particularly in short lessons. Elissa Berg, education and youth director of Adat Shalom Synagogue in suburban Detroit, said her school offers an elective on the Israeli-Arab conflict to teens, and all seventh graders study modern Israeli history.

In recent months, Israel has moved closer to center stage at many schools.

Several communities have recently taken steps to improve Israel education.

This spring Baltimore Hebrew University for the first time offered a professional development course for teachers on how to bring Israel into the classroom.

Team-taught by an education professor and a political science professor, the course combines content with brainstorming sessions on how to make the content accessible to children of different ages.

In teaching about the current situation, one teacher showed students a film clip

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel celebrates Independence

Israel celebrated its 54th Independence Day on Wednesday under heavy security for possible terror attacks.

Though many public events were canceled out of fear of terrorism, a number of traditional observances were held, including a reception at the president's official residence in Jerusalem and air force flights over various parts of the country.

Bomb found in Bethlehem mosque

Israeli soldiers found a bomb hidden in a Bethlehem mosque. After locating it Tuesday in the Omar Mosque, Israel's Foreign Ministry said the "case represents yet another example of the cynical abuse of holy places by Palestinian terrorists."

In a related development, soldiers found two explosive belts Wednesday in an apartment near Ramallah. They also found Palestinian police uniforms, hundreds of bullets, 10 combat vests, incitement materials, an Islamic Jihad flag and a suicide letter from a terrorist.

Argentine immigrants arrive

Two flights carrying Argentine immigrants arrived in Israel on Wednesday. The 212 new immigrants bring to 1,446 the number of Argentines who have made aliyah so far this year, more than in all of last year. The new arrivals were met at the tarmac by Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, who said 2,902,200 immigrants have come to Israel since the creation of the state in 1948.

U.S. cancels exercise with Israel

The United States canceled an air force exercise with Israel due to regional tensions. U.S. officials said the decision was made by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld because of threat assessments to American military personnel in the Middle East

profiling a teen-age girl in Jerusalem talking about how her day-to-day life has been affected by the fear of terrorism.

Another designed a board game in which players move around a map of Israel and answer questions about life there.

Both the Jewish Education Service of North America, working with the federation system's United Jewish Communities, and CAJE have circulated curricular materials with suggestions on teaching about Israel, terrorism and the current situation.

The Jewish Education Center of Cleveland put together "Israel Now: A Solidarity Response Curriculum," which has been circulated nationally through JESNA and the UJC and focuses on several key ideas.

Among them: that Israel is a "special place" for Jews worldwide, that Jews need to stand by it in crisis and that it is "important to be 'critical consumers' of the media, carefully evaluating the veracity and slant of the news about Israel."

In addition, JESNA, the Jewish Agency and several other national players convened 40 educators — half from Israel and half from North America — in February to brainstorm how Israel education can be improved in the Diaspora, not only in congregational schools, but also in day schools and informal education.

Many schools are spending more time teaching Israel than they used to.

Susan Wyner, education director at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, a large Conservative synagogue in suburban Cleveland, said, "I don't think there's any question that we're talking about Israel more than we might normally if things weren't so fired up there."

Wyner said she has added prayers for peace and prayers for Israel to the junior congregation liturgy and asked her teachers to teach about the Six-Day War so that students can better understand current debates over whether Israel should withdraw to its pre-1967 borders.

Other schools say they have also added more geography lessons, regular singing of Hatikva, Israel's national anthem, and prayers for Israel.

Educators report that students, still reeling from the sudden lack of security from Sept. 11, are worried about Israel and terrorism, and want to know if criticisms of Israel they hear from classmates or from talking heads on CNN are true.

Adat Shalom's Berg said her teachers tell the students "if someone challenges them in school with something that throws them, instead of getting thrown, it's okay to say, 'I don't know, I'm not expert on this issue but I'll go home and ask my parents or my religious school teacher or rabbi and come back with an answer.'"

Students seem to vary a lot in their knowledge and interest in Israel.

Carol Morris, a teacher at Congregation Emanuel, a Reform temple in Denver, said, she has noticed an increased level of awareness about Israel in recent years.

When Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995, "the kids were shocked and all that, but it took them a while to get a sense of who he was because they didn't remember what they learned" about Israeli politics and history in previous grades, Morris said.

"Now, you mention the names — Arafat, Sharon — they seem to be more aware of what's going on. They're aware of the news. They listen to it more. I think Sept. 11 did a lot of that."

However, at Berkeley's Kehilla Community Synagogue, some students "are very aware of what's going on in the world and others are very focused on their own environments — how much homework they have, when's the next baseball game," said Sandra Razieli a sixth grade teacher.

The synagogue identifies as Renewal, a grass-roots movement that seeks to combine some of the spiritual vitality of Chasidic Judaism with the liberal philosophy that Judaism is an evolving religious civilization.

For the teachers at Kehilla, a congregation that caters to a primarily left-wing membership, teaching about Israel has been especially difficult because they don't want to teach that Israel's actions are always right.

Both schools have tried to spend some class time talking about the Palestinian desire for a state and the fact that many innocent Palestinians, as well as Israelis, are being killed. Hana Bor, an education professor at Baltimore Hebrew University, said she has been trying to help the teachers avoid being too political — while also instilling a love for Israel. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Kiev attack called 'pogrom,' but some see it as aberration

By Lev Gorodetsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Some Jewish observers in Ukraine say there have not been significant levels of anti-Semitism there lately. They may have to re-evaluate after last Saturday night, when about 50 youths shouting "Kill the Jews" attacked the central synagogue in Kiev, beating three people, hurling bottles and breaking windows.

"I call this act a pogrom," Kiev Chief Rabbi Moshe-Reuven Azman said. "It's a miracle that it was not worse."

The attack belies the rosy outlook that some have expressed for Jews in Ukraine.

Arkady Monastyrsky, director of the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine, was optimistic about the climate for Jews there. As proof, he pointed to the fact that more than 15 Jews were elected to the Ukrainian Parliament in the nation's March 31 elections.

Igor Desner, a Jewish leader from the city of Vinnitsa in central Ukraine, also offered an optimistic assessment.

The fact that Vinnitsa's synagogue is not guarded is proof of the benign atmosphere that prevails throughout the nation, he said.

Yet last Saturday's attack has shaken the community. Among those injured was the head of Kiev's yeshiva, Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan, who was knocked to the ground and beaten with stones. Also injured were a security guard and Azman's son.

The attack occurred after Saturday evening services, and many worshipers already had left the building.

"We didn't understand what was happening. All of a sudden, we saw a crowd running toward us with rocks," Azman's son, Jorik, told Russia's NTV television.

The mob dispersed before police arrived. According to The Associated Press, police have succeeded in arresting eight youths for the attack.

"The fact that the criminals are now in jail is an achievement," said Vadim Rabinovitch, a Ukrainian Jewish tycoon and the leader of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine. "It is a defeat for terrorism."

Broken glass covered the floor of the synagogue Sunday, and police stood guard outside. The synagogue, known as the Brodsky Choral Synagogue, was built in 1898 by sugar industry tycoon and Jewish leader Lazar Brodsky. For decades, it served as the focal point of the city's varied Jewish activities.

Soviet authorities closed it down in 1926. For decades after, the building housed several institutions, including a puppet theater. In 1992, Chabad-Lubavitch groups, which are dominant in Kiev's Jewish religious life, began seeking the building's return.

They got their wish in 1997, when Ukrainian officials handed it over to the Jewish community.

Rededicated in a festive ceremony in March 2000, the synagogue symbolized the revitalization of Jewish life in Ukraine.

Many Jews in Ukraine and abroad were left aghast by Saturday night's attack, but a rally in Kiev on Wednesday provided reason for hope.

Some 10,000 people participated in the rally, organized by the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress. Participants demonstrated not only on behalf of Israel but also to denounce racist attacks.

Along with Jewish leaders, Ukrainian legislators lashed out at fascism, anti-Semitism and terrorism.

Some Ukrainian officials this week tried to play down the significance of Saturday night's incident, telling reporters it was an act of hooliganism by drunk soccer fans.

Azman, however, was adamant.

"When a mob is moving toward a synagogue, collecting rocks on the way and shouting 'Death to the kikes' and 'Heil Hitler' — if it is not an anti-Jewish pogrom, then what is it?" he told JTA.

Azman ascribed the attack to anger over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Before they got to the synagogue, they trampled and burned Israeli flags," he said.

Some Jewish observers suggested that young neo-Nazis acted in cooperation with local Arabs.

There have been fewer anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine than in Russia during the last several years. □

Bush: PLO can have DC office

President Bush waived for six months a law blocking the PLO from having a Washington office. The waiver has been enacted twice a year since 1994, after the signing of the Oslo peace accords.

The waiver is routine, but this time the memo said future waivers would require the Palestinians to live up to their commitments to curb terrorism and incitement.

Panel to eye anti-Semitism

The head of the Anti-Defamation League will testify on Capitol Hill about anti-Semitism in the Middle East. Abraham Foxman is slated to appear Thursday before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on the impact of incitement, anti-American and anti-Semitic propaganda on American interests in the Middle East.

Also testifying are a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, and Yigal Carmon of the Middle East Media Research Institute, which monitors Arab media.

Kiev Jews rally for Israel

Some 10,000 people participated in a pro-Israel rally in Kiev, Ukraine. Participants in Wednesday's rally also denounced racist attacks. Jewish leaders and Ukrainian legislators lashed out at fascism, anti-Semitism and terrorism.

The rally came after a crowd of 50 youths attacked the central synagogue in Kiev on Saturday night, beating three people.

Anti-Israel graffiti in Colorado

Anti-Israel graffiti appeared Tuesday on Colorado University's Boulder campus.

The Anti-Defamation League and Colorado University Hillel asked the university to call for a halt to the "provocative activity, which is creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among Jewish students at the university" and to "take immediate action to clean up the offensive graffiti." The

Crackdown urged on militants

Britain's chief rabbi called for an immediate crackdown on Islamic militants in the country. Britain "has to crack down sharply on people attempting to radicalize the Muslim community," Jonathan Sacks told Reuters on Wednesday.

Simon Wiesenthal honored

Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal received a medal of honor from the International Association of Prosecutors. The group honored Wiesenthal for more than 50 years of distinguished service to international criminal justice.

Visitors to Argentina see demise of once-thriving Jewish community

By Rachel Pomerance

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — It's 10 p.m. on a weeknight and a group of teens chatter as they cross the broad and busy boulevard.

Lean, beautifully dressed women drape the arms of elegant men. And night light swirls around the boastful monuments and sprawling streets of Buenos Aires — the so-called “Paris of South America.”

Unless you look twice, you might not notice the “vende” — for sale — signs spotting the buildings, gates shuttering every third shop, cafes sparsely filled, and the fixed price menus for a modest \$12, where they once were \$70.

Unless you look twice, you might not know anything's wrong here.

But the economic collapse in Argentina worsens by the day.

Defaulted on its foreign debt, the government has zero credit. Unemployment tops 22 percent, with unofficial figures as high as 35 percent — and that doesn't include the 15 percent who work less than 10 hours a week.

Nearly half the population now lives below the poverty line — less than \$70 a month — and 8,000 new lives cross that threshold each day.

The middle class — once home to most of the 200,000-strong Jewish community — has borne the brunt of the crisis. While 30 percent of Jews are unemployed, 44,000 live below the country's poverty level.

A delegation from United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of North American federations, visited Argentina last week to survey the impoverishment of the country's Jewish community, the sixth largest Jewish community in the world.

The fact-finding mission of 162 people garnered publicity in the local mainstream paper.

The three-day mission, which ended last Thursday, whisked participants around Buenos Aires, where 80 percent of the country's Jews live.

The visitors saw what were once the community's crowning heights — its synagogues and day schools, community and relief centers and world renowned seminary — now braving new lows.

They came from nearly 50 communities around North America to see how UJC's \$42.5 million campaign will help Argentina's Jews.

UJC's overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, will be the recipients of those funds, with \$35 million earmarked to the former for immigration and absorption to Israel and \$5 million to the latter for relief on the ground.

The UJC decided last week to fold the funds being raised for aliyah into an overarching “We Stand With Israel Now and Forever” fund-raising campaign.

Mission participants were almost as astounded at the community's rich Jewish identity and activity as its profound losses.

“It's as if the economic floor had been pulled out from the Jews of Westchester, Great Neck, Pepper Pike, Ohio and Ladue, Mo.,” said Rabbi Paul Menitoff of New York, the executive vice president of the Reform Movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

“Because I really think the substantial number of middle-class

Jews here are” or “are in the process of hitting” rock bottom.

But even as many Jews here are desperate to leave, it's not an easy decision. It's been an active, thriving community, with 25 percent of the children attending Jewish day schools and a strong Zionist identity.

Armando Schmelz, born in Argentina, thought he would die in Argentina. But his words — there is no future here — resound like an eerie echo in this city.

Schmelz and his wife, Maria, will send their son, Pablo, 15, to Israel next week. Soon they, too, will follow.

As for leaving one crisis for another one in Israel, he said that poverty has wreaked such violence that he worries constantly that his son might be pushed off the train and killed for his \$10 sneakers.

Indeed that has become a common form of robbery here.

For his son's sake, the answer is Israel.

“I am giving wings,” he said, red-faced and shuddering hard. “He will fly.”

Argentina has never wanted for political catastrophe.

The military junta behind the “dirty war” of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was responsible for the “disappearance” of 30,000 people, including many Jews, still haunts everyone's consciousness.

And the Jews, though prominent here with proud and numerous institutions, talk of latent anti-Semitism.

Most believe that the Iranian-backed fundamentalist group Hezbollah, with local police collusion, was behind the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA building, a major Jewish facility here 10 and eight years ago, but the Jewish community insists officials have dragged their feet on the still-unsolved cases.

In South American style, locals say life goes on. Still, no one seems to recall being burned this badly.

The economic fallout is a result of years of mismanagement and, as the U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, James Walsh, bluntly told the mission Wednesday night, the “C word — corruption.

The United States is working to help Argentina, Walsh said, but it first wants to be sure that American taxpayer money won't go to the pockets of government officials.

The International Monetary Fund, which is also holding off loans, has scolded the country for renegeing on past obligations.

As they moved around the city, federation leaders saw the work of the JDC agencies helping to provide relief on the ground and the Jewish Agency providing an exit path out of the country.

The JDC serves over 20,000 people in its 38 centers across the country with its local partner, the Tzedeka Foundation.

In a JDC/Tzedeka microbusiness center that creates employment for Jews, Rodolfo Kleidermacher, who worked in a bank for 20 years, is a driver for the center's car service.

Women make challah from scratch to sell at local synagogues or Jewish community centers.

At the same synagogue, people gather for afternoon tea, where a rabbi singing Hebrew songs rouses people to dance.

In a room at that synagogue, 10 tons of matzah had just arrived from the Ukraine. Bureaucratic red tape had held up the shipment until now.

On the side of each box was printed a message that read: Baked by the Jews of Kiev in Ukraine for the Jews in Argentina, with a line in Hebrew meaning “all Jews are responsible for one another.”

For many on the trip, that box of matzah — late as it was — encapsulated the message of the UJC mission. □