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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

2 Israelis killed by infiltrators

Two Palestinian terrorists killed one Israeli and seriously wounded another after infiltrating a farming community Sunday in northern Israel.

Israeli forces arrived at Moshav Gadish shortly after the shooting occurred to carry out extensive searches of the area.

They later killed the two infiltrators.

In another development Sunday, an Israeli was killed by terrorists who crossed the Israel-Egypt border, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. Two of the terrorists were later killed by Israeli troops.

Sharon blasts Arafat statement

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon lashed out at Yasser Arafat after the Palestinian Authority president called Saturday for a halt to terror attacks until after the Israeli elections.

Sharon said a day later at the weekly Cabinet meeting that Arafat's statement proves "what Israel has maintained for the past two years — that Yasser Arafat has established, is responsible for and leads a coalition of terror, which he can leash or unleash and use as he pleases."

Sharon also said the Arafat statement proves that the murder of Israelis is a "constant and permanent goal" of the Palestinian leader.

Bank president's wife fuels anger

Jewish groups voiced outrage after the wife of the president of the European Central Bank said the "Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is worse than the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands."

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the Dutch government to immediately revoke the diplomatic passport granted to Gretta Duisenberg, wife of Wim Duisenberg.

"It is no longer possible for the Dutch government to look the other way" as she "continues to leverage her husband's position to grotesquely abuse the memory of the victims of the Nazis," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, the center's dean and founder.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem also attacked Gretta Duisenberg's comments. She "should have educated herself about those violent chapters in Dutch history before making senseless comparisons," said the chairman of Yad Vashem, Avner Shalev.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

On Birthright trip, participants sip coffee, learn about Israel's woes

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The North American Jewish students sat on plastic chairs under the blue-and-white-striped tent, sipping thick black Turkish coffee as they listened to one Israeli Arab family's tale of woe.

A widow with nine children had illegally built a home in Lod, a mixed Arab-Jewish city in Israel, only to have it demolished by the government, leaving her homeless.

The students were in Israel on a recent trip sponsored by Birthright Israel, which offers free trips to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds. They sat with the members of the extended Arab family next to the site of the demolished house, and listened to Busayna Dbait, coordinator of the Shatil mixed cities project, a project of the New Israel Fund.

Dbait, who is an architect by training and lives in Ramle, was showing the students around Ramle and Lod, explaining the history and politics of the Arab neighborhoods in the two traditionally mixed Arab and Jewish cities.

Susannah Gordon-Messer, a senior at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., shook her head in confusion. "No one's come up with an alternative to demolishing illegally zoned houses?" she asked. "There's got to be a better way."

It has been a complex, eye-opening introduction to Israel for Gordon-Messer and 39 other college students who are participating in a new Birthright program, "Peace & Politics."

The students are some of the nearly 700 students on Hillel's December-January Birthright missions. Despite reduced numbers caused by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence, Birthright registered close to 4,000 participants for its series of winter missions. The organization stipulates that the Birthright trip must be the first organized tour of Israel for participants — in other words, family trips don't necessarily disqualify otherwise valid applicants.

The group, which is exploring the complexities of Israel's political situation, was originally supposed to be two distinct groups.

One group, led by the Anti-Defamation League in conjunction with Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, was planned as an advocacy-training mission for Birthright students, many of whom have been confronting anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiments on their home campuses.

The other group was organized by Hillel and the New Israel Fund, a philanthropic partnership that works for equality and social justice for all Israeli citizens, and was supposed to focus on those issues.

"We wanted to be involved in Birthright," said Laura Kam Issacharoff, director of media relations for the ADL in Israel. "We thought we could offer something substantial and build off other missions."

As the fall progressed, it became clear that there were not enough students for two separate trips, and Hillel decided to combine the two groups. For the Peace & Politics trip, that meant one bus for 40 students.

With a handful of students on the right politically, another handful on the left, and the majority in the center, there was "a spectrum of opinions," said Keith Krivitzky, director of campus Israel services for Hillel. "We knew it wasn't an ideal combination, but we wanted to see how it worked," he added.

Many of the students said the mixed group created a more stimulating and thought-provoking trip through the political complexities of Israeli society. "We ask the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Two killed in Gaza attack

Israeli and Palestinian officials disagree about who was killed after an Israeli helicopter fired missiles at a car in the Gaza Strip.

Israel said two members of Hamas were killed, a claim confirmed by a Hezbollah TV station in Lebanon. Palestinian hospital officials said the two victims, a 14-year-old and a 19-year-old, were not members of any terrorist group.

Palestinians fire rockets at Israel

Palestinians fired rockets into southern Israel on Sunday. Three rockets were fired toward the Negev town of Sderot, slightly injuring two people.

The attack followed Israeli military operations Saturday night in the Gaza Strip. During those operations, Palestinian sources said, two people were killed and some 20 others injured during exchanges of fire with soldiers.

2 Syrian infiltrators sought water

Two Syrian soldiers who crossed into Israeli territory last week were looking for water, according to Israel's defense minister. Making the assessment during Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting, Shaul Mofaz said Israel would seek to maintain calm along the border with Syria.

Israel turned over to the United Nations one of the two, who was captured after he infiltrated northern Israel last week. Israeli officials also handed over the body of the man's colleague, who was killed in a shootout near the Israeli-Syrian border.

Armed boys infiltrate settlement

Two Palestinian boys armed with knives were captured Saturday night after infiltrating a Gaza settlement.

The boys managed to reach the home of the settlement's rabbi, who opened fire, driving them off.

same questions to each person, and get a different answer every time," said Gordon-Messer, who admits that she knew only "the basics" when she first arrived. "Then we duke it out on the bus."

The group's 10-day trip included standard Birthright tour stops geared for first-time visitors to Israel, such as the Bahai Gardens in Haifa and an archeological dig.

The tour also made less traditional stops.

They met with Palestinian journalist Khaled Abu Toameh, who spoke openly and candidly about his views of the intifada, the matter of anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli sentiment, and Palestinian life while under siege.

They heard from Shaul Goldstein, the mayor of the Gush Etzion regional council, representing a bloc of 14 Jewish settlements south of Jerusalem, and were surprised to find themselves sympathizing with the plight of the Jewish settlers.

They drove through poor Arab neighborhoods in Ramle and Lod, shocked by the garbage piled by the side of the pothole-ridden road.

"These are things that I knew nothing about," said Gordon-Messer, who describes herself as a Jew with little Jewish education, who wanted to do something to mark her senior year in college. "I'm happy to leave here more confused than when I came."

Not every Birthright participant arrived in Israel with only a basic understanding of the Jewish country.

At times, it was obvious whether it was an advocacy student or a social justice crusader who was asking a question during a tour stop.

The ADL participants were more likely to wonder about whether anti-Israel sentiment can be considered anti-Semitism while those on the NIF trip wondered more about everyday life in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

But what surprised many of the participants is how much they have learned about both sides of the spectrum.

"I come from the left, but I wanted to learn about the right," said Mark Belinsky, a sophomore and social justice major at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. "We all tested the waters for the first couple of days to find out where everyone stood, but with this situation you quickly learn that there's no easy fix."

For Dan Yagudin, a senior at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and an Israeli native who moved to the United States at the age of 10, the Birthright trip was a chance to meet and talk to people who want to create a new vision of life in the Middle East.

"The trip's approach is not to find the solution, but possible solutions," Yagudin said. "There's no propaganda, no indoctrination, just open discussion." □

Far-right march canceled in Prague

PRAGUE (JTA)—Czech Jewish leaders are welcoming a last-minute decision by Prague officials to cancel a march by extreme right-wing supporters through the city's Jewish Quarter.

City authorities had come under heavy pressure from Jewish groups for originally agreeing to allow Saturday's procession organized by right-wing figures Petr Kalinovsky and Petr Fryc, who said they wanted to commemorate "Palestinian Holocaust victims" in Israel.

Approximately 40 extremist supporters, including several young girls, were told that the march was canceled shortly before it was due to start at 5 p.m.

The group then walked away from its gathering point on Franz Kafka Square, next to the Jewish Quarter, under the watchful eye of dozens of police, including officers on horseback. There were no arrests and the group dispersed about a mile from the city center.

Before calling off the procession, Kalinovsky told his supporters that Jewish immigrants "started massacring" the original Palestinian inhabitants "under the pretext of a dubious historical right."

He also described the Israeli flag as "a mere rag."

Prague's Jewish leaders intensively lobbied Czech politicians and Prague officials in the 24 hours before the march after having been told by police that there was nothing they could do to stop the procession because it had been cleared by city officials. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Argentine blasts Christian law

A Jewish politician in Argentina is reportedly challenging a law that requires the governor of an Argentine province to take a Christian oath.

"I never thought, in the 21st century, we'd see something like this," said Jose Alperovich, a federal senator who polls say is likely to become the next governor of the province of Tucuman.

Article 80 of the Tucuman Constitution says the governor must swear allegiance to "God, the Fatherland and the Christian saints," according to the Los Angeles Times.

Muslim saves Brooklyn shul

A Muslim from Pakistan helped save a Brooklyn synagogue. The man, who worked at a gas station near the Congregation Young Israel of Kings Bay, became suspicious when another man came by several times to fill a container with gasoline.

The man called police when he saw the second person dousing the synagogue with the gasoline. Police soon arrived at the scene and arrested the alleged perpetrator, who said he wanted to "get back at the Jews." The gas station attendant, who was applauded by local Jewish officials and politicians, said his religious beliefs prompted him to contact the police.

French leaders support rabbi

Four former prime ministers of France came to a solidarity service for a Paris rabbi who was stabbed earlier this month. Rabbi Gabriel Farhi said his assailant yelled in Arabic, "Allah is Great," but police say they have not ruled out the possibility that the attacker was a Jew with far-right political views who opposed Farhi's Reform movement. Farhi was only lightly wounded in the Jan. 3 attack.

Last Friday's ceremony in a small Paris synagogue was so full that members of the crowd, which included France's interior minister and other government officials, had to stand outside. A letter of support also was read from British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

NCSY launches campaign

The Orthodox Union's youth organization is launching a congressional lobbying campaign about the deaths of Israeli teen-agers at the hands of Palestinian terrorists.

As part of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth's grassroots campaign, "It Could Have Been Me," teen-agers will send letters and photos of themselves to U.S. senators.

The letters, which note the large number of Israeli teen-agers killed by Palestinian terrorists, will remind the lawmakers that the letter-writers also could have been killed or injured had they been near a suicide bomber.

British envoy after Munich attack: Let's 'put ourselves in their shoes'

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — A British diplomat in Jerusalem showed sympathy for the Palestinian terrorists who kidnapped and killed Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, newly declassified documents show.

"Before we reproach the Arabs too much, perhaps we might try to put ourselves in their shoes," Britain's highest-ranking diplomat in Jerusalem wrote less than a week after the terrorist operation that led to the death of 11 Israeli athletes.

The Palestinians "have seen their land taken away from them by a group of mainly European invaders equipped with superior armed force and modern technology," wrote the diplomat, Consul General Gayford Woodrow.

His official dispatch to the Foreign Office was made public Jan. 1 under rules that declassify most British government documents after 30 years.

An Israeli Embassy spokeswoman in London said the dispatch, quoted in Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper, was "appalling if it's accurate."

She said the embassy had not seen the original document.

Woodrow wrote his report to London on Sept. 12, 1972, six days after a group of eight Palestinian terrorists attacked Israeli athletes at the Olympic village in what was then West Germany. Two Israelis were killed in the attack and nine more were taken hostage. The terrorists demanded the release of 200 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Israel refused, and German police stormed the terrorists at a Munich airport. Five Palestinians were killed and three were captured, but not before the terrorists killed the nine remaining Israeli captives.

In Jerusalem, Woodrow expressed admiration for the terrorists' performance.

"Whatever one's moral criticism, it must be agreed that the Munich operation was well planned and that the Arabs there carried it out to the bitter end. It is said that lives were really lost because of Israel and West German bungling incompetence," he wrote.

Woodrow's superior, James Craig, expressed mild criticism of the diplomat's report. "Not bad but he goes just a little too far," Craig wrote on the letter.

The British Foreign Office declined to speak to JTA about the issue. A spokesman said the department does not comment on material from previous administrations.

A British special forces report on the event said the Germans had used the wrong kind of gun in the shootout. A quieter weapon would have been more appropriate for the ambush at a Munich airport, the report concluded.

A month later, another British diplomat cautioned against condemning the Palestinian hijacking of a Lufthansa flight from Beirut to Frankfurt.

"Before we shed too many tears about the Lufthansa hijacking," wrote David Gore-Booth, a first secretary at the Foreign Office, "it would be as well to ask ourselves what the implications are so far as the Arab/Israel dispute is concerned.

"What the hijacking does is to remind the international community that the Palestine problem exists," he wrote.

Hence Israel's "apoplectic reaction to the hijacking," his report continued.

"It also provides" the Israelis "with an excellent opportunity to slip into Syria, bomb a few more bases and kill a few more innocent people with impunity. Deplorable though the hijacking may be it caused the loss of no lives," while "casualties in Syria may be as many as 45 or even more." □

Orient House reopened?

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinians have renewed operations in Orient House, their former headquarters in eastern Jerusalem, according to a Palestinian Authority official. Samir Rosheh, head of the P.A.'s Jerusalem operations, said limited work is now being done in the office, including legal tasks. In April 2001, Israel shut down Orient House and seized large volumes of documents.

They later were cited as evidence that the Palestinian Authority was breaching its peace agreements with Israel, which forbid P.A. activity in Jerusalem. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**As Germany agrees to fund Jews, liberal Jews fight for recognition***By Toby Axelrod*

BERLIN (JTA)—A long-simmering internecine Jewish battle in Germany is boiling over.

Saying they have been shut out of official Jewish life here, progressive Jews in Germany have intensified efforts to gain recognition and funding with an open plea to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

In a letter released at a Jerusalem news conference on Jan. 7, Uri Regev, executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, urged the German leader "to address the needs and the entitlements of the Union der Progressiven Juden in Deutschland and the communities and institutions it represents."

There has been as yet no response from the Schroeder government to the letter, Shmuel Bahagon, executive director of the Union for Progressive Judaism in Germany, told JTA.

The fight highlights a battle between liberal Judaism and Germany's traditional Jewish officials in what has been the world's fastest-growing Jewish community.

The move comes as Schroeder prepares to sign a historic contract with the Central Council of Jews in Germany, pledging an annual \$3 million of support for the Jewish community.

The signing of the contract is scheduled for Jan. 27, Holocaust Memorial Day in Germany.

The established Jewish community is celebrating the pending federal contract.

But representatives of the Union of Progressive Judaism in Germany are crying foul.

The problem is that the contract does not clearly include the Progressive movement, which also needs funding to support programs and to attract new members, Regev says.

In his letter, he says, "The anticipated contract has to make explicit reference to the Progressive Union and the communities affiliated with it."

But Central Council President Paul Spiegel said the council includes all streams of Judaism, so specific movements don't need to be named in the contract.

Spiegel told JTA the council would not exclude any Jewish group from membership — and therefore funding — as long as its members meet the requirements of halachah, or Jewish law.

Spiegel said a progressive congregation in Lower Saxony had applied for membership in the Central Council.

The application will be considered at the next meeting of the board, he said.

"We have to be convinced — as always — that the members of these communities are Jews, based on halachah. We don't want the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation to become members of the Central Council," he said.

The letter to Schroeder is part of a three-pronged battle in which the World Union, with some 2 million members worldwide, and its German affiliate are pressuring the German government, and through them, the German Jewish establishment that they say refuses to accept them.

Some observers see the battle as long overdue, heralding the return of liberal Judaism to the country of its birth.

The Reform movement has its roots in mid-19th century

Germany. But critics see this as an attempt by a small group to establish itself outside the umbrella of the Central Council, thereby laying claim to government subsidies to religious groups.

They say such a split is destructive and unnecessary, as long as the members of the Progressive movements meet traditional standards of "who is a Jew."

The Central Council, created after World War II, is designed to be inclusive.

But the council is an umbrella that only covers those defined as Jewish according to Jewish law.

Most European Progressive movements abide by matrilineal descent, but their policies on conversion to Judaism do not meet Jewish legal standards.

Though it does not accept non-Jews as members, the Progressive movement encourages non-Jewish spouses and children to participate in religious life as a means of bringing them toward full membership as converts, said a spokesperson.

According to a Progressive Union spokesperson, there are about 2,000 members in 15 Progressive Union congregations in Germany.

Excluding the members of the Progressive Union, there are some 100,000 Jews in Germany, and 83 congregations serving them.

In 1998, the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a resolution decrying what it called "discrimination" against Reform groups "by the organized Jewish community virtually everywhere" in Germany.

The group called on the German government and officials of the Jewish communities to support pluralism and end discrimination in funding for Progressive Jewish congregations.

In 2002, the Progressive Union in Germany tested the courts, with as-yet-inconclusive results.

A congregation in the former East German city of Halle, which belongs to the Progressive Union but chose not to join the Central Council, sued for a share of the state subsidies distributed by the council.

According to Germany's highest administrative court, the congregation did not seek arbitration with the Central Council before suing.

In February 2002, the high court sent the claim back to a lower court to decide whether this was a religious organization worthy of state funding and to determine whether the congregation's claim was purely financial.

No decision has yet been reached.

In recent weeks, following the November announcement of the new government contract with the German Jewish community, leaders of the World Union and its American affiliate, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, have pressed their case in all the German consulates in the United States, as well as the German embassies in Washington and Tel Aviv.

In each instance, they have been told that the German government is sympathetic to their cause but does not get involved with the internal affairs of religious groups.

Regev told JTA he was encouraged by positive meetings with Paul Spiegel and Central Council Director Stefan Kramer in the fall.

"I would not have jumped the gun if it had not been for the surprise announcement about the federal contract," he said. "I would have allowed more time for this to take its course. But we were forced to move." □