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86th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. asks citizens to leave Israel

The United States urged private citizens to leave Israel immediately ahead of a possible war with Iraq.

In addition, non-essential State Department personnel were evacuated Sunday from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the consulate in Jerusalem.

"The decision to move to ordered departure status is a result of an overall assessment of the security situation in the region due to the threat of military action in Iraq," the State Department said Monday in a news release.

Israeli reserve call-up begins

Hundreds of Israeli reservists in the Home Front Command and anti-aircraft units received emergency call-up orders Monday evening in anticipation of a U.S. strike on Iraq.

A wider call-up of reservists is expected in the coming days, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported.

Israelis also were advised to stock up on materials needed to seal a room in their homes against a potential biological or chemical attack.

Argentines remember bombing

Argentine Jews on Monday marked the 11th anniversary of the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

At 2.50 p.m. — the exact time the bomb exploded — a memorial was held in front of the former embassy.

Relatives of the victims, Jewish community members, writers and politicians were expected to attend.

The 1992 attack killed 29 people. Argentina's Supreme Court has been leading an investigation into the case, which remains unsolved, though suspicion has focused primarily on the involvement of Iran and Hezbollah.

Many Argentine Jews say the lackluster investigation enabled a subsequent attack, two years later, that destroyed the AMIA Jewish community center, killing 85 people.

In a related story, Israel said it has uncovered Hezbollah and Iranian links to the two bombings.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom revealed Monday that Israel has intelligence information directly linking Hezbollah and Iran to the terrorist bombings against both the embassy and the AMIA center.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

As civilian casualties mount, some ask if soldiers getting trigger-happy

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli bulldozer set out to attack a building that Israel believed was being used by Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip town of Rafah.

It ended up with the death of Rachel Corrie, a pro-Palestinian activist from Washington state.

Corrie, 25, a member of the International Solidarity Movement, wanted to serve as a human shield to prevent the demolition.

She died in a Gaza hospital.

Corrie was the fourth foreigner killed by Israel Defense Force soldiers during the 30 months of the intifada. The others were German doctor Harald Fischer, Italian cameraman Rafaeli Ciriello and British U.N. worker Iain Hook.

"This is a regrettable accident," IDF spokesman Capt. Jacob Dallal said. "We are dealing with a group of protesters who were acting very irresponsibly, putting everyone in danger — the Palestinians, themselves and our forces."

It may well have been an accident. But too many accidents have characterized IDF operations in the territories recently, with too many civilian casualties, raising the question of whether 30 months of grinding daily warfare against a ruthless and elusive enemy have eroded Israeli soldiers' sense of restraint.

On Sunday, the Ha'aretz newspaper issued a strongly worded editorial charging that the army, which since its inception had sought to preserve humanistic values, instead had turned into "an annihilation apparatus."

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said last week in the Knesset that no other army in the world is so considerate of civilian life in the course of fighting. Indeed, to a certain degree, preventing such tragedies in the midst of urban warfare may be almost a "mission impossible."

For the past year or so, the IDF has been engaged in intensive anti-terrorism operations, much of which take place inside densely populated residential areas that give shelter to Palestinian terrorists. It is often impossible to identify innocent bystanders ahead of time, especially when Palestinian gunmen fire from amid a crowd.

The army has not disguised the fact that many innocent lives have been claimed during anti-terror actions. According to the IDF's own count, some 18 percent of the 1,975 Palestinians killed since the intifada began in September 2000 had nothing to do with terrorism and did not pose any threat to Israelis. Seven percent have been children under the age of 16.

Palestinians say Israeli soldiers and settlers have killed 2,181 Palestinians and injured 22,218.

With Israelis focused on their own civilian casualties — and with most Israelis blaming the Palestinians for the outbreak and continuation of the violence — Israelis have developed a thick skin about Palestinian civilian casualties. Palestinian civilian deaths are reported in the media, but generally receive little fanfare.

They usually are regarded as "regrettable accidents," the kind that could not be prevented during combat against terrorists who deliberately seek shelter among their own side's innocents.

A few Israeli organizations and individuals have made a point of following such incidents, among them the human rights organization B'Tselem — and Ha'aretz journalist Gideon Levy, who reports weekly on alleged human rights violations in the

MIDEAST FOCUS

9 Palestinians killed in Gaza

Seven Palestinians were killed and 18 wounded in a raid in Gaza's Nusseirat refugee camp. Israel said the dead included a wanted Islamic Jihad member who was involved in several terrorist attacks.

Two other Palestinians were reported killed in an Israeli army operation in northern Gaza.

3 Arabs suffocate in sealed room

An Israeli Arab woman and her two teen-age sons suffocated while sleeping in a sealed room the family had prepared in case of a possible Iraqi attack.

The woman, 37, and her 13- and 14-year-old sons died from lack of oxygen due Sunday night to a coal-run heater they used to warm the room. The father of the family and two smaller children survived.

Palestinians mourn slain activist

Palestinians held a symbolic funeral for an American killed by an Israeli bulldozer in the Gaza Strip. Some 1,000 Palestinians marched Monday, with some holding a stretcher draped with an American flag through the Gaza Strip refugee camp where Rachel Corrie was killed a day earlier.

Israel says the accident occurred because the driver of the bulldozer could not see Corrie when she lay down in front of the bulldozer to prevent a house demolition.

Palestinians march for Saddam

Palestinians over the weekend urged Saddam Hussein to attack Israel if the United States attacks Iraq.

Protesters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip burned British, American and Israeli flags and denounced the leaders of these countries as enemies of Islam, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Some demonstrators called on Saddam to use weapons of mass destruction against Israel.

territories. Levy's persistence in covering "the other side of the intifada" has made him a frequent target of criticism by Israelis who feel he ignores Palestinian responsibility for the violence.

Some reportedly have canceled their subscriptions to Ha'aretz because of Levy's articles.

That shield of indifference was shattered last week with the tragic killing of two Israeli security men — Yoav Doron and Yehuda Ben-Yosef — who were mistaken for terrorists.

The two were on guard duty in a secluded position near Hebron when an Israeli commando unit that had been alerted to the presence of a terror squad in the region spotted them and launched a barrage of gunfire and a helicopter missile.

The men's car was poked by hundreds of bullet holes, an indication of the soldiers' determination that no one would escape alive.

"The incident reminded Palestinians of hundreds of similar incidents that have never interested most Israelis," Levy wrote in Ha'aretz.

The incident came after the United States and Britain recently criticized the IDF for the recent spate of killings of Palestinian civilians.

In an interview conducted prior to the killing of the two security men, the IDF's chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Moshe Ya'alón, rejected allegations that soldiers have become too light on the trigger.

"Every incident in which innocent people die is personally investigated by the chief of staff," Ya'alón told the Ma'ariv newspaper last weekend.

As a case in point, he noted the recent killing of a pregnant woman during the demolition of a house in a Gaza Strip refugee camp.

Ya'alón's inquiry showed that the officer in charge did not want to risk the lives of his soldiers by sending them personally into the building, which was to be demolished. He sufficed with a warning on his loudspeaker, which the woman apparently did not hear. She stayed in the building, and was killed under the rubble.

In another incident, an Israeli tank commander was sent to jail for having shelled a taxi in Nablus.

Few soldiers have protested such operations. During the early stages of the intifada, the army expressed concern over soldiers who refused to serve in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, and newspapers like Ha'aretz gave the phenomenon extensive coverage.

However, the phenomenon never reached the level of a real protest movement.

Perhaps the most egregious example of civilian casualties on the Palestinian side was the decision last July to drop a one-ton bomb on the Gaza apartment building where the head of Hamas' military wing was sleeping. The bomb destroyed the building, killing Salah Shehada — but taking the lives of 15 Palestinian civilians as well.

Recently, a military intelligence officer prevented an air attack against Palestinian targets for fear that innocent people would be hurt. Ayalón's reaction to that incident was indicative of the moral dilemmas the IDF faces.

"This officer should be decorated with honors from an ethical perspective," said Ya'alón, "but he should be fired from a functional point of view."

It was the officer's responsibility to make sure that no innocent civilians would be hurt in the IDF operation, not to cancel it altogether, Ya'alón implied.

"I can state unequivocally that there was no intention whatsoever to hurt innocent people, since I was the one who authorized the operation," Ya'alón said.

Instead of "immediately raising the black flag, he spoke about the subject with friends and withheld the necessary information," Ya'alón said. "I am proud that we have such officers who are sensitive to the moral and ethical aspects of their work, but from the functional point of view he has failed in his job." □

Israeli Arabs support Iraq

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The umbrella leadership group of Israeli Arabs declared its support for Iraq.

The Supreme Monitoring Committee called on all Israeli Arab political movements to hold pro-Iraq rallies on Saturday. The organization also denounced what it called "American aggression" and expressed concern that Israel might use a war in Iraq to escalate military action against the Palestinians. □



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JEWISH WORLD

German politician quits party

A German politician accused of making anti-Semitic statements quit his political party. Jurgen Mollemann said Monday he would leave the Free Democrats after party leaders tried for months to expel him.

Mollemann was the Free Democrats' deputy leader until last fall, when he quit after being blamed for the party's poor showing in September elections.

Just days before the elections, Mollemann issued a flier criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Michel Friedman, a prominent talk show host and vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, in language that many people found anti-Semitic.

Mollemann later refused to provide details about funding of the flier.

Man arrested for torching shul

A man was arrested in upstate New York for his alleged torching of a synagogue in 2000.

Ramses Uthman faces charges that could land him up to 25 years in prison for torching Temple Beth El in October 2000. Uthman is a U.S. citizen of Palestinian descent.

Kerry goes Borscht Belt

U.S. presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry poked fun at his Jewish heritage at a St. Patrick Day's breakfast in Boston.

"So who said I didn't have the matzah balls to be here," said Kerry (D-Mass.), who surprised the crowd at Monday's event by attending despite recent prostate cancer surgery.

He then sang a parody of an Irish song that he titled, "If You're Yiddish Come Into the Parlor."

Kerry recently learned that his grandparents on his father's side were Jewish.

Jews meet French leader

European Jewish leaders discussed ways to fight anti-Semitism on the Continent with the prime minister of France, Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

At last Friday's meeting, the president of the European Jewish Congress, Germany's Michel Friedman, reportedly expressed his support for recent French measures to combat growing anti-Semitic incidents in the country.

Prague cantor dies at 84

One of the most prominent spiritual figures in Prague's Jewish community has passed away.

At least 300 mourners attended the funeral Sunday of Viktor Feuerlicht, cantor of Prague's world-famous Old-New Synagogue, who died last week at 84 after a long illness.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Book revision by British chief rabbi placates critics, disappoints others

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — You can't please all of the people all of the time.

That seems to be the lesson for Britain's Orthodox chief rabbi after he published the revised edition of a controversial book.

In the second edition of "The Dignity of Difference," Rabbi Jonathan Sacks removed statements suggesting that Christianity and Islam are as valid as Judaism.

The publication of the first edition in August 2002 sparked a storm of criticism from fervently Orthodox rabbis in Britain and Israel.

The attack culminated in an advertisement in London's Jewish Chronicle newspaper last October from two leading fervently Orthodox British rabbis, who called the book "a grave deviation from the pathways of traditional and authentic Judaism."

Rabbi Joseph Dunner and Rabbi Bezalel Rakow demanded that Sacks "repudiate the thesis of the book and withdraw the book from circulation." Rabbi Yosef Elyashiv of Jerusalem, one of the world's greatest living Torah scholars, backed their complaint. There even were rumors that Sacks would face charges of apostasy.

To the dismay of many British Jews, Sacks backed down and let it be known in November that he would issue a revised edition of his book — which, perhaps ironically, is subtitled "How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations."

Rabbi Jeremy Rosen, director of Yakar, an Orthodox Jewish study center in London, said he is disappointed that Sacks retreated.

"I am very disappointed that the thinking side of Torah Judaism allowed itself to be bullied by the side that has no philosophical training," he told JTA.

Reform Rabbi Jonathan Romain echoed Rosen's view, calling the new edition of the book "a victory for the dinosaurs."

He said Sacks's original view "that other monotheistic religions have validity" was "normative for Judaism."

In his preface to the new edition, Sacks wrote that some people maintained "that certain passages could be understood in ways incompatible with Jewish belief."

"I believed I had guarded against this possibility by making it clear that I was writing as an Orthodox Jew, implying that any interpretation incompatible with the classic tenets of Jewish faith was misinterpretation."

"In the event, the caveat proved insufficient. Certain passages were misunderstood. I therefore decided to restate them in less problematic terms," he wrote.

Sacks's original book contained the passage, "God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to the Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims . . . God is the God of all humanity, but no single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity."

The new edition, published March 1, substitutes: "God communicates in human language, but there are dimensions of the divine that must forever elude us. As Jews we believe that God has made a covenant with a singular people, but that does not exclude the possibility of other peoples, cultures, and faiths finding their own relationship with God within the shared frame of the Noahide laws."

"God is the God of all humanity, but between Babel and the end of days no single faith is the faith of all humanity."

Sacks prepared an extensive list of rabbinic sources backing his position and posted them on his Web site, www.chief Rabbi.org.

He was not available for comment for this article.

A spokesman for the fervently Orthodox Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations in London told JTA the new edition "has taken care of the concerns."

Although the debate over the book focused on theology, historian Geoffrey Alderman says the real issue was showing who's boss.

"This was the world of Torah Orthodoxy telling Jonathan Sacks, B.A., Ph.D., that he was a very small player and they were big players," Alderman said.

Alderman, the author of a definitive history of British Jewry, says Sacks is "trying to ride two horses" by satisfying both liberals and conservatives. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

**500 years after the Inquisition,
Spaniards returning to Judaism***By Jerome Socolovsky*

MADRID (JTA) — When Nuria Guasch's grandfather was on his deathbed, he called her over to tell her something he had never told anyone in his 88 years of life.

"I want you to reflect on your heritage — and think for yourself," Guasch recalls him saying. "And then maybe you'll have the answer to all those questions you were asking."

And then he had a final request: Don't let the hospital's Roman Catholic priest into the room.

As a child growing up in a village near Barcelona, Guasch had wondered about her family's unusual habits, like putting bread and salt on the table every Friday night.

Since most everybody else in Spain was Roman Catholic, she just assumed they were bizarre customs from the Spanish island of Mallorca, where her family came from. But, as her grandfather had predicted, the answers did come later.

It turned out her grandparents were "Chuetas," or Mallorcans of Jewish origin accused of being Crypto-Jews — or Hidden Jews — for centuries after the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492.

Many Chuetas married among themselves until the early 20th century because of continued discrimination.

Today, the 49-year-old school principal from Barcelona is ready to reclaim the faith of her forebears. In a few weeks, she says, she will finalize her conversion to Judaism before a Beit Din, or Jewish court, in Israel.

More than five centuries after the expulsion of Jews by the monarchs of Spain and Portugal, descendants of those who converted to Roman Catholicism to escape the punishment of death increasingly are examining their roots.

During the more than 100 years of pogroms that started in the late 14th century, more than 100,000 Jews are believed to have converted to Christianity. But many continued practicing Jewish rituals in secret.

In Spanish, the converted Jews were known as Conversos, or "those who converted." The secret Jews were known as Marranos, or "accursed."

Although there is some debate about whether the label Marranos should be considered derogatory, some today prefer Anousim, the Hebrew term for "forced converts."

Their descendants are found not only on the Iberian Peninsula, but also in former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South and Central America and even in the Southwestern United States.

Brazilian-born Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn of the New Reform Temple in Kansas City, Mo., recalls that as a child his family had a servant from the rural interior of Brazil.

One Friday night, she saw them kindling Sabbath candles, and she said, "Oh, you light candles too!"

Later, at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College, he wrote his thesis on the Crypto-Jewish community in Brazil.

"For every Jew in Brazil, there may be potentially a hundred people who have Jewish blood, who are descendants of Marranos," said Cukierkorn, who has helped organize Marrano communities in Brazil.

Cukierkorn also has written a guidebook to Judaism in Spanish and has traveled to Spain to convert several Jews here, partly

because he feels that Jewish communities in Spain — dominated by Sephardi Jews who returned from Morocco in the last 50 years — are not open to Marrano descendants.

Reform Jewish leaders are not the only ones reaching out to the Anousim. The Amishav Institute in Jerusalem was founded in the 1970s by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, who embarked on a search for the Ten Lost Tribes and who helped convert the now-famous Crypto-Jews of Belmonte, Portugal.

The organization recently worked with the Bnai Menashe tribe in India — many of whom have since made aliyah — and "Lost Jews" in other parts of the world. Now it is turning its efforts back to the Anousim in Spain.

"We the Jewish people have a moral and historical obligation to these people," says Amishav's director, Michael Freund.

Freund, who visited Mallorca and Iberia in recent months to talk to descendants, estimates that up to 20,000 people in Mallorca alone are identifiable as Chuetas, while hundreds of thousands of people in the Iberian peninsula and South America can be considered descendants of Anousim.

However, Freund urges caution with his own estimates.

"Not all descendants of Anousim are necessarily aware of their heritage," he says. "And of those that are, not all of them are necessarily interested in returning to Judaism. Some might be happy to remain Catholic while just finding out more about who their ancestors were."

Although Amishav's director prefers to talk about "return" rather than conversion, the organization still advises Anousim to undergo an Orthodox conversion to "remove any doubts" about their Jewishness.

Spaniards in general are becoming increasingly interested in their Jewish history, despite a long tradition of anti-Semitism and official discrimination that lasted through the 1939-1975 church-backed dictatorship of Gen. Francisco Franco.

There has been a surge of interest in Israeli and Jewish culture since the establishment of ties with Israel in 1986.

And an increasing number of Spaniards — though still a very small group — consider themselves Jewish, or partly Jewish, by virtue of their Jewish ancestry.

Several years ago, Pere Bonnin, a Barcelona writer of Chueta origin, wrote "Sangre Judia," or "Jewish Blood," a book in which he compiled a list of 3,500 surnames of Jewish origin, using documents found in old Jewish neighborhoods and Inquisition archives.

The book's first printing sold out within 15 days, he says.

But Bonnin says he told an Amishav rabbi that it's unrealistic to expect mass conversions on the scale of its Indian program, especially in Mallorca.

"You have to change your whole way of life to do this, and it's already difficult enough" being a Chueta, the writer says.

Nevertheless, he feels "culturally Jewish" and passionately defends the State of Israel against its many detractors in Spain.

In the old Jewish quarter of Cordoba, near a statue of the great Jewish thinker Maimonides, an old man guards the entrance to the freshly restored synagogue.

He says his surname is Peres Peres, which according to Spanish tradition means that both his father and mother were named Peres. But he adds that even his grandmothers were named Peres, "so actually I'm Peres Peres Peres Peres."

Asked if there are many people in Cordoba who are aware of their Jewish roots, he says: "Half of Cordoba is Jewish!" □