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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Envoy meets Palestinians

An American team led by U.S. envoy John Wolf met with senior Palestinian officials in the Gaza Strip. Tuesday's talks came as Palestinians called for a larger American monitoring team that would address all aspects of the "road map" peace plan, not just its security elements.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas was due to meet Tuesday evening with representatives of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups to continue efforts to reach an agreement to halt attacks against Israelis.

In a related development, the head of Israeli military intelligence told legislators Tuesday that he believed the Palestinians are seeking a halt to violence for several days to advance cease-fire efforts.

Plan aims to simplify divorce

Men who refuse to give their wives a religious Jewish divorce must pay \$150 a day under a revised prenuptial agreement released by a coalition of Orthodox groups.

The pre-nup released Tuesday by the Beth Din of America, the Rabbinical Council of America and the Orthodox Caucus aims to resolve the long-standing problem of agunot, "chained women," who are unable to remarry because their spouses refuse to grant them divorces.

The new agreement names the Beth Din of America as a default venue for giving the get and also simplifies earlier pre-nuptial agreements, the groups say.

Israeli girl killed

A 7-year-old Israeli girl was killed in a suspected terrorist attack near the border with the West Bank.

The girl was killed Tuesday when shots were fired on a car near Kibbutz Eyal. A second child and an adult were wounded in the attack.

Romania admits Holocaust

Romanian officials reversed course and acknowledged that the country's former leaders collaborated in the Holocaust.

The Romanian regime during World War II used "methods of discrimination and extermination, which are part of the Holocaust," a government statement released Tuesday said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

New Jewish spat erupts over New York Jewish stats

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish poverty in greater New York has doubled in the past decade to 21 percent of the community, while the number of Jews in the city fell 5 percent to 972,000, the lowest level in a century, a new study shows.

The figures — which show one in six Jewish homes in the New York area living in poverty — are "shocking," said Alisa Rubin Kurshan, vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York, which funded the Jewish Community Study of New York. It was released this week.

This "will help shatter the myth of Jewish affluence," said Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding.

Thanks in part to suburban flight and a major influx of Russian-speaking Jews, the Jewish population in the wider metropolitan area remained steady at 1.4 million, or 643,000 households.

Even as it was released, however, the report already was embroiled in a "Who is a Jew?" dispute among researchers. Three members of the study's 10-person advisory panel objected to the methodology. Two resigned from the panel long before it was issued, and one demanded that her name be removed from the report.

Bethamie Horowitz, who directed the last study of New York Jewry, which was conducted in 1991 and released in 1992, said this report did not follow the same research methods as the earlier report. Direct comparisons between the two should not be made, she warned. The difference between the two studies, Horowitz said, "is not apples to elephants, but it's not apples to apples either."

The report on eight New York counties sheds new light on the nation's largest Jewish community, which includes a rising Orthodox sector that is the largest nationwide, and which saw the percentage of intermarried couples drop by 10 percent since 1991.

With the total U.S. Jewish population estimated at 5.2 million to 6.7 million people, the New York report "delivers good data about one-fifth to one-quarter of the national Jewish community," said Jacob Ukeles, the study's principal investigator.

The \$860,000 report was released around the same time the long-awaited 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey was expected to be published. But that overall study of American Jewry has been beset by unexplained delays and technical glitches, generating considerable controversy.

Officials of the United Jewish Communities' federation umbrella, which bankrolled the \$6 million NJPS, said this week that an independent panel was still reviewing the study, and that it was not likely to be presented before September.

The director of the NJPS, Lorraine Blass, welcomed the New York portrait. "This should not affect how the NJPS is received because the NJPS will be releasing a whole trove of data on the national picture," Blass said.

Researchers say New York's Jewish community displays some singular characteristics.

New York has the largest populations of Orthodox and Russian-speaking Jews in the United States, the study found. In addition, the total Jewish population of 1,412,000 is close to the 1,420,000 found in 1991, showing that the community remained steady in a period of change nationwide, Ukeles said.

"At a time when people expect the word 'decline' to be bracketed with the word

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ben-Eliezer drops out

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer dropped out of the race for interim leader of Israel's Labor Party.

The move by the former Israeli defense minister, who also is a former Labor Party chairman, paves the way for former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to be elected to the post in Thursday's race.

The interim chairman is expected to be barred from seeking the permanent chairmanship in primaries set for next June.

Israel to feed U.S. soldiers

Israel will supply fresh produce and food to American forces serving in Iraq.

The American military command agreed to the Israeli agriculture minister's proposal that the food be transferred via Jordanian suppliers, Israel Radio reported.

The deal is estimated to be worth millions of dollars.

Gay pride posters vandalized

Vandals torched rainbow flags hung to accompany a gay pride march slated for Friday in Jerusalem.

Monday night's vandalism, believed to have been carried out by members of the outlawed Kach movement, came after last Friday's planned march was postponed by a week after last week's suicide bus bombing in Jerusalem.

Security fence work continues

A security fence being built to separate Israel from Palestinian areas of the West Bank now extends some 85 miles.

That section is made up of physical barriers.

More than 30 miles of electronic barriers also have been installed, a Knesset committee was told Tuesday.

'Jewish,' we found a period of stability," he said.

The report's conclusions on poverty are likely to generate debate:

- Of all New York Jewish households, the study found that 10 percent live below federal poverty guidelines, which are based on salary, number of people per home and other factors. An additional 6 percent live at 150 percent of those standards;

- There are 103,000 poor Jewish households, representing 16 percent of all Jewish homes, or 226,000 people. Of those homes, 91 percent include a Russian-speaking person aged 65 or older;

- Most poor Jewish homes, 96,000, were in New York City.

William Rapfogel, chief executive officer of New York's Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, said perhaps even more than one-third of New York Jews may qualify as poor, because many more people have lost their jobs in the economic fallout following Sept. 11 attacks.

"There was a lot of skepticism" when the council said 145,000 New York Jews qualify for government assistance and another 275,000 are classified by federal guidelines as near-poor, Rapfogel said.

"This should cure some of that skepticism."

Another likely area of contention is intermarriage, which has proven especially controversial since the 1990 NJPS found that 52 percent of Jews who married in the previous five years had married out of the faith.

The New York study used two figures: the percentage of individual Jews who married out of the faith and the share of couples who are intermarried.

While many studies focus on the rate of Jewish individuals intermarrying, Ukeles said it is more important to examine the share of intermarried Jewish couples, because "we see the household as the crucial building block in the Jewish community."

The study found that 22 percent of marriages over the past decade involving Jews had been interfaith marriages, but that reflected only 13 percent of all New York Jews.

In addition, the study found that synagogue affiliation dropped among the intermarried. While 63 percent of in-married Jews said they belonged to a synagogue, only 16 percent of intermarried Jewish homes did. That compares to 44 percent of homes with a converted spouse.

While 83 percent of Jewish households said they are raising their children as Jews, only 30 percent of intermarried households said they are doing so, while 48 percent are raising their children as non-Jews.

In that regard, New York's interfaith couples reflect national trends, said Paul Golin, spokesman for the New York-based Jewish Outreach Institute.

Some, however, called the study's methods into question. Horowitz, director of the 1992 report, objected to how the newer study tracked down Jews, among other issues.

She asked people in random calls what their religious affiliation was. The new study asked a more direct question: "Do you consider yourself to be Jewish or non-Jewish?"

That could dissuade some marginal Jews from answering truthfully, she said.

Shortly after the panel first convened in 2001, Andrew Beveridge, a sociology professor at Queens College of the City University of New York, also quit the study's advisory panel over the methodology dispute.

Beveridge said he felt the report was based on some "a priori assumptions," since the survey relied partly on lists of Jews provided by Jewish groups in addition to reaching Jews through random calls.

"We really don't know how many Jews there are in New York," he said.

But Ukeles said he was "at peace" with the study.

The study was based on 4,553 telephone interviews with 6,035 Jewish households identified both through randomly generated calls and from lists of Jewish organizations and synagogues. The surveys were taken between March and September of 2002.

The study carries a margin of error for various sections from plus or minus 1.8 percent to 2.7 percent.

A decade ago, the preceding study relied largely on random calls. This year's study relied partly on 1,263 names from lists of Jews provided by the federation and the local Jewish Community Relations Council, Ukeles said.

But Ukeles said all the calls were based on 32 statistical subsamples built from the incidence of Jewish names in eight New York telephone county exchanges, ensuring a "truer sample" overall. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Report: Terror messages on Web

Terrorist groups increasingly are slipping encoded messages to their supporters on the Web, according to a new report. "Digital Terrorism and Hate 2003" is a CD-ROM report of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Al-Qaida and similar groups "have learned how to use every aspect of Internet technology" to support terrorism, said Abraham Cooper, the center's associate dean.

Elie Wiesel recovering

Elie Wiesel was transferred from intensive care at a Greek hospital after receiving treatment for a respiratory infection.

The Nobel laureate was in Greece to address the country's Foreign Ministry on human rights and foreign policy.

But the Holocaust survivor's address was canceled due to the infection.

Wiesel, who survived Nazi death camps, is 74.

Holocaust-looted art returned

A painting looted during the Holocaust era will be returned to its prewar owner.

"Le Procession" was one of approximately 1,000 paintings owned by Ismar Littmann that was sold at a forced sale in Berlin in 1934, when Nazis ordered that Jewish-owned art be sold at rock-bottom prices.

The return of the artwork to Littmann's heirs was processed by the Holocaust Claims Office of the New York State Banking Department.

U.S. doctors go to Israel

Doctors from the United States will go to Israel to train for voluntary mobilization in case of a crisis in the Jewish state.

The physicians from Dallas, Des Moines and Indianapolis are part of the Medical Emergency Response Group, a program of the United Jewish Communities, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Western Galilee Hospital in Nahariya, Israel.

The doctors will be in Israel on June 22-29.

'Protocols' published in Lithuania

Lithuanian officials will investigate a newspaper in western Lithuania for publishing an anti-Semitic forgery.

The Zemaitijos Parliamentas paper currently is publishing the infamous "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in serial form.

Publisher Justinas Burba said he decided to reprint "The Protocols," which purports to be a work depicting an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world, in response to public demand from Lithuanians sick of Jewish "blackmail" over the Holocaust.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Synagogue and school open doors to Berliners eager to know neighbors

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Just who are those funny-looking people and what goes on behind those wrought-iron gates with the Jewish star?

Those are the kinds of questions it turns out that neighbors of the Rykerstrasse Synagogue and the Ronald S. Lauder Jewish school, housed together in former East Berlin, have been asking. They have seen kippah-clad young men coming out of the large, turn-of-the-century school building. They have heard the sounds of prayer and singing filtering out into Ryker Street.

So on Sunday, the neighbors got some answers. For the first time, the school and synagogue opened their gates to the public for a miniature festival. Kosher wurst — sausages — were available, as were tours of the synagogue and the school.

"We always thought it was a closed community," Christel, 40, said while having her first kosher meal. She even got a tour of the school's kosher kitchen, which has separate rooms for dairy and meat.

"This was a good opportunity to look behind closed doors," she said.

"We thought they'd rather we not come in," Arno, 33, said of the synagogue. "They don't post the time of services outside, the way churches do, so we didn't know anything about Shabbat."

Now, he said, he knows he, too, can attend a Shabbat service at 7 p.m. on Friday nights in the summer, 6 p.m. in winter. The idea for the neighborhood party came from Wolfgang Thierse, the president, or speaker, of the German Bundestag and a leading member of the Social Democratic Party.

Thierse happens to live only a few streets away.

"I considered it important that the school and synagogue are not hidden," Thierse, who is not Jewish, told JTA.

"People think it is strange and closed. They only see that there are police in front of the door. This way, we get rid of their fears and build a connection," he said.

"It is a very good idea," Alexander Brenner, president of the Jewish community in Berlin, said, adding that the Lauder school is a model of integration in a country that is grappling with immigration issues.

"Here they have Russian Jewish students who had no idea two years ago what being Jewish meant. Here, they discover daily Judaism," Brenner said.

"I hope this is an example to other Jewish institutions in this city and, generally, in Germany and Europe," said Rabbi Josh Spinner, director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Berlin, whose yeshiva has 19 full-time students and 35 weekend students. The school also services dozens of Berlin Jews who attend classes there.

The Lauder Foundation also has programs in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Koln, Leipzig and Wuerzburg. Despite the need for security, Spinner said, it is possible to "create understanding and friendship."

Ironically, he said the only neighbor who openly objected to the party was an Israeli who complained about noisy prayer services.

On the summery Sunday afternoon of the party, neighborhood families lined up for a quick security check at the synagogue entrance. Children bounced on a giant inflated trampoline and watched a puppet show. Some adults mingled with the yeshiva students, asking questions.

Each time the doors opened for another tour of the synagogue, guests surged forward.

"People didn't trust themselves to come in," said Renate Israel, gabbai of the traditional Rykerstrasse Synagogue, who gave the tours. "They asked shyly, 'May we come in here for services?'"

She told them that they were more than welcome but that large groups had to call in advance.

Interest in Jewish life is high here among non-Jews, evinced by the record-breaking number of visitors to Berlin's Jewish Museum and by the long lines of people who waited to get into Berlin's synagogues on an open-house night in November 2002. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Did air strikes help the 'road map?' Cease-fire now seems more likely

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA)—The violence that threatened to scuttle the nascent "road map" peace plan last week seems to have had quite a different result.

It has redoubled the resolve of American, Israeli and Palestinian leaders to prevent terrorism from wrecking the reconciliation process launched in Aqaba, Jordan just a fortnight ago.

In a desperate effort to salvage the process amid deadly violence, the Americans, Israelis and Palestinians have been exerting pressure on Hamas, third parties and each other. It now seems possible that that pressure could lead to a cease-fire.

In an ironic twist of fate, the lethal post-Aqaba wave of terror might finally get the road map on the road.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon maintains that Israel's decision to target Hamas leaders like Abdel Aziz Rantissi yielded two dividends: It forced Palestinian terrorist groups to consider a cease-fire with Israel more seriously, and it pushed Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas closer to taking responsibility for security in some of the Palestinian areas.

Abbas had hoped to wait several months before taking over security responsibility, allowing the Palestinian Authority to rebuild its armed forces. Abbas also had hoped waiting would enable him to convince Hamas and other terrorist groups to declare a cease-fire in the meantime, thereby ducking the sort of confrontation with those groups that taking over security responsibility might entail.

But the strike against Rantissi, and Israel's strikes against other leading Hamas members in subsequent days, truncated the timetable. Feeling their own lives threatened, Hamas leaders resumed talks on an immediate cease-fire.

Abbas wanted to see the military strikes stopped quickly, too. If they continued, Abbas risked being accused of failure and forced out of office.

On the other hand, the U.S. said it would underwrite an Israeli pledge to halt the strikes if Abbas took security responsibility for some Palestinian areas. Such a move could save not only Abbas' job, but also the peace process he has been charged with pursuing.

Palestinians and some members of the Israeli opposition maintain that Sharon, in trying to kill Rantissi, Hamas' No. 2, deliberately was trying to scuttle a peace plan he ultimately distrusts.

Sharon sees things very differently. Immediately after the Aqaba summit, he dreaded a repeat of the Oslo conundrum: Terror groups supposedly beyond the Palestinian Authority's control attack Israel, the Palestinian Authority does little to stop them and Israel is pressured not to respond to avoid allowing the "extremists" to undermine the "peace process."

At first, the pattern appeared to be repeating: Just days after the summit, an unprecedented joint attack by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aksa Martyr's Brigade, the terrorist wing of Abbas' own Fatah movement, left four Israeli soldiers dead.

When Israel responded by targeting Rantissi on June 10, President Bush took the international lead in criticizing Israel for ostensibly undermining the new peace process.

Quickly, however, the tenor changed: After a Hamas bus bombing in Jerusalem on June 11 that killed 17 people, Bush called

on the international community to join together against Hamas. Israeli strikes against Hamas members in the ensuing days made it clear that as long as terrorist groups were allowed to operate in the Palestinian areas, there would be no peace and quiet.

Sharon believes that by attacking Rantissi he turned the tables on Hamas: He signaled to the Palestinians and the world that until the Palestinians can make good on the pledge to dismantle terrorist groups, Israel will not allow its hands to be tied. The strong American desire to see the road map succeed seemed to have made Hamas leaders legitimate targets.

Israel's military brass fully backs Sharon's approach. The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, is convinced that despite international criticism of the strikes, the assault on Hamas' leadership has changed the situation.

During a 50th anniversary celebration this week for the paratrooper brigade in which he began his army career, Ya'alon declared that Hamas was "on the verge of surrender and already negotiating a cease-fire." If the cease-fire doesn't work out now, Ya'alon intimated, he might have to send ground forces into Gaza to finish the job of disarming the Hamas threat.

Avi Dichter, head of the Shin Bet security service, told the Cabinet on Sunday that Israel should not fear pushing Abbas into a confrontation with Hamas that he isn't ready for. On the contrary, Dichter said, with 20,000 men under its command in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Authority should be more than a match for a few hundred Hamas and Islamic Jihad fundamentalists.

The Americans, too, have been playing a pressure game aimed at isolating Hamas and achieving a cease-fire, while retaining the confidence of both Israelis and Palestinians. This has taken the form of pressure on:

- Israel, to suspend targeted killings if a cease-fire is declared.
- The Palestinian Authority, to use a cease-fire to assert its authority over Hamas.
- European leaders, to publicly denounce Hamas and cut off the flow of funds to the group.
- Arab states, to stop funding Hamas and pressure both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to accept a cease-fire.

More than anything else, it is this American pressure that has created the conditions for a possible cease-fire.

The American pressure also has succeeded in getting Egypt to again actively mediate between the Palestinian Authority and the terrorist groups.

The Egyptians sent intelligence chief Omar Suleiman and his deputy Mustafa al-Buheiri to lean on P.A. President Yasser Arafat and Hamas leaders. Suleiman threatened Arafat with public condemnation if he doesn't stop trying to undermine Abbas; al-Buheiri showed Hamas an Israeli commitment to the United States to stop targeted killings if Hamas adheres to a cease-fire.

Abbas' key slogan is "one political authority and one armed force," which effectively means disbanding Hamas and the other terrorist groups as rival military powers.

He hopes a cease-fire will enable him to do just that, while Hamas hopes to use a cease-fire to rebuild and retain its militia, enabling it to challenge Abbas politically and militarily.

To a large extent, the outcome of that internal Palestinian struggle will determine the fate of the road map and the peace process it seeks to revive — and Sharon's aggressive strikes at Hamas last week kept that issue squarely in the spotlight. □

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the *Jerusalem Report*.)