

IN THE NEWS

Israel seals territories amid new terror alert

Israel's closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will continue through most of April.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday that the closure, imposed last month amid fears Palestinian terrorists would try to avenge the assassination of Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin, would remain in place until after Israel's Independence Day on April 26.

The announcement was made two days after an Israeli father of six was killed in a terrorist infiltration in the West Bank.

Security has also been stepped up inside Israeli cities for the Passover holiday.

U.S. wants support in U.N. for Gaza plan

The United States will seek U.N. recognition of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Israeli officials say the United States will ask for a U.N. statement after the withdrawal declaring that the Israeli occupation of Gaza has ended.

It would be similar to the U.N. statement issued after Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. U.S. officials believe such a statement would aid efforts to garner support for the move in the Arab world.

Nazi-looted painting returned to owners

A Nazi-looted painting was returned to its rightful owners. The Utah Museum of Fine Arts returned Francois Boucher's "Les Jeunes Amoureux" to relatives of Andre Jean Seligmann, a European Jewish art dealer who lost his collection when he fled to the United States after the ascension of the Nazis in Germany.

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WORLD REPORT

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From 'clients' to 'partners': Ties among Jews are changing

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Russian Jews in America are "tired of being perceived by the American community as clients and not as partners."

That's what Susan Fox, executive director of the Shorefront YM-YWHA, just off the Russian bistro-lined boardwalk of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, says. After nearly 30 years of working with people in neighborhoods where English is less commonly heard on the streets than Russian, Fox has her finger on the pulse of the community.

Roughly 25 years after the first wave of Jews from the former Soviet Union arrived in the United States and 13 years after the mass exodus that followed the collapse of communism, the Russian Jewish community in America now generates its own organizations and philanthropists.

"There has been a visible maturation of their involvement, and there is a momentum that has gotten the attention of many," Fox says, describing an array of Russian Jewish groups and leaders.

Indeed, American Jewish groups are reaching out to the community with new programs that reflect the community's growing size and stature.

Most estimates of the number of Russian Jews across the country, including those who emigrated and the families they have created since they arrived, range from 600,000 to 800,000.

Today, many of those immigrants live in the New York area, making up a quarter of New York Jewry.

Russian Jews also have significant com-

munities in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Philadelphia.

But even far from the shores of Brighton Beach, integration with mainstream American Jews around the country remains, for the most part, elusive.

Russian Jews and those involved with the community say the situation stems from an early misunderstanding on both sides.

American Jews expected Soviet immigrants to be grateful to them for working for their liberation and eager for Jewish life. The emigres, for their part, anticipated a fraternal reception with generous assistance in landing jobs and Jewish education that would extend beyond the initial programs local Jewish communities made available to them.

In addition, the new immigrants, after enduring more than 70 years of atheist Soviet rule, arrived with a Jewish identity that seemed foreign to American Jews, especially given their customs of erecting Christmas trees or savoring pork sausage.

American Jews expected "either Natan Sharansky or their bubbe," says Mark Handelman, president and CEO of the New York Association for New Americans, which helped resettle some 250,000 Russian Jewish refugees.

Echoing a favorite line among many in the community, Mariya Kogan, coordinator for the citizenship program at FECS, a Brooklyn social-service center, says with barely contained exasperation, "When we were in our native country, we were Jewish," she says. "Now we're Russians!"

Another big obstacle for Russian-speaking

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**RUSSIAN JEWS
IN AMERICA**

■ *Russian Jewish communal life is emerging across North America*

Continued from page 1

Jews was psychological. Arriving with the Soviet mentality, which mistrusts religion and organizations, many Russian Jews steered clear of synagogues and Jewish educational institutions. In addition, immediate resettlement needs, like learning English and finding a job, eclipsed everything else, including Judaism.

This alienation was further accentuated as Russian immigrants often chose to stick together, especially in cities that drew large numbers.

But with years of basic resettlement under their belt, Russian Jewish communal life now is emerging.

Home to about 300,000 Russian-speaking Jews, New York represents not only the largest Russian Jewish community in the country, but also the most organized one. Thirty-four Russian Jewish organizations recently have joined together to form the Council of Jewish Emigre Community Organizations, or COJECO.

This model is being replicated nationwide. In San Francisco, for example, a group of young Russians recently formed a social club called the 79ers — reminiscent of the date they immigrated as children. In Atlanta, Bukharan Jews, who hail from Uzbekistan, recently formed their own synagogue and community center.

Amid all this activity, American Jewish groups are reaching out to them.

"This is one of the major sources for energy, creativity and, frankly, human power for the American Jewish community," says Shula Bahat, associate executive director

of the American Jewish Committee.

"You're talking about over half a million Jews" that comprise an "educated" and "inspiring" community that want to join American Jewish life, she says.

The American Jewish Committee, which for six years has run a leadership training program for New York's Russian Jews, plans to go national, beginning a program in Boston in February. In September, it launched the National Committee on Russian Jewish Community Affairs, mandated to fulfill the current needs of the community, such as integration into American Jewry.

With regional directors in Atlanta, Milwaukee and Los Angeles, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society created a program to train community leaders and aid their organizations in October 2002. It also plans to create a civic education and voter registration program this spring in New York.

And the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby, is creating partnerships with New York's Russian Jewish community.

But outreach efforts to the community is not without its critics.

Zvi Gitelman, professor of political science and Judaic studies at the University of Michigan, charges that the American Jewish community is dropping the ball on outreach to the population.

"The American Jewish community has spent next to nothing on what has happened economically, socially and, most importantly, Jewishly, to the largest single immigration to the United States since before the First World War," he says. "There has been no systematic national study, not even a regional study of, for example, the effects of all these outreach programs."

Several Russian Jews community officials maintain that successful integration begins with separate communal structures for Russian American Jews.

By caring for itself, the community rids itself of its image as clients of Jewish community services, Fox says. Furthermore, "You provide someone that level of entree and comfort," she says, then they become "participants in other organizations as peers."

Most observers suspect differences

between veteran American Jews and Russian Jewish immigrants to America will evaporate over time.

America "dilutes and it changes people's perception of themselves," says Gary Shteyngart, who authored the acclaimed Russian Jewish immigrant novel, "The Russian Debutante's Handbook."

In a few decades, the rate of participation in Jewish communal life among Russian American Jews and American-born Jews "will be fairly indistinguishable," he predicts.

Meanwhile, tensions between the communities persist. Referring to a flap over a survey published last

year by the UJA-Federation of New York, in which Russian American Jews believed they were undercounted, Arkady Kagan, senior editor of the Russian Forward, a national Jewish weekly, says American Jewish groups underestimate and ignore the Russian Jewish community.

Kagan says he is grateful to American Jews for helping liberate Jews from the Soviet Union, but he fumes, "I'm not a poor client anymore!"

"Each time I meet American Jews," Kagan says, "they think we are all food stamp recipients."

Marina Temkina, 56, a Manhattan poet organizing a Russian Jewish immigrant archive, is cynical about the outreach efforts. Now that the Russian Jews are beginning to flourish, the American Jewish community wants not only to support, but also to control its emergence, she says.

But Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society President Leonard Glickman says his group is responding to a Russian Jewish "thirst for some kind of assistance" to connect with American Jewry. Intent on following their lead, the program is headed by members of the Russian Jewish community, Glickman says.

Many of the efforts under way reflect a willingness at least by some for community leaders to come together. In any immigration, the "host community is impacted on as much as the newcomers," says Handelman, of the New York Association for New Americans. "There was a mutual kind of disconnect that had to happen until both sides began to adjust to each other, which is what's beginning to happen."

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Arkady Kagan
Editor, Russian Forward

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Reviled by some, Beilin hopes to revive Israeli left

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Since the violent collapse of the Oslo peace process more than three years ago, the Israeli left has been struggling.

Now, ironically, it's none other than Yossi Beilin, one of the chief architects of the failed plan, who hopes to revive the peace camp's flagging fortunes.

Recently chosen to head the new Yahad Party, formed out of a merger between his own Shachar movement and the veteran Meretz Party, Beilin believes he can widen the left's political base by sharpening its peace and socio-economic messages and vociferously challenging Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government on its stance toward the Palestinians and its failure to alleviate Israel's widespread economic hardship.

Pundits say it won't be easy. But if the Labor Party under Shimon Peres joins the government to help push through Ariel Sharon's plan for disengagement from the Palestinians, Beilin and Yahad will take center stage as the main left-wing opposition — which could pay dividends in the next election, slated for November 2007.

Beilin hopes to encroach on support for three parties: centrist Shinui, left-leaning Labor and, to a far lesser extent, the ruling center-right Likud.

He already is targeting Shinui, which he calls the "Archie Bunker" party in reference to the girth and politically incorrect statements of its leader, Yosef "Tommy" Lapid. Beilin says 40 percent of Shinui voters supported his "Geneva Accord" — a draft peace initiative signed by Israeli and Palestinian doves — and that the figure among Labor supporters was 60 percent.

Beilin believes Yahad will be able to attract voters from both parties on the peace issue. He also hopes to do well with young first-time voters, a demographic that supported Shinui in the last election.

He also thinks Yahad's softer socio-economic policies will pick up some working-class support in the development towns, which usually vote for Likud.

At present, Yahad has only six Knesset members, elected in January 2003 on the Meretz ticket. Theoretically, it could gain seats quickly if doves such as Avraham Burg, Amram Mitzna and Yuli Tamir defect from Labor.

But while those politicians are much

closer personally and ideologically to Beilin than to Peres, an idiosyncrasy of Israel's campaign finance law makes their defections unlikely. Instead, Beilin has called on Peres to form an "opposition directorate" that would initiate and coordinate anti-government moves in Parliament.

"I am ready to work with Labor in opposition," Beilin declared recently. "But if Peres joins the government, he shouldn't be surprised if we attack Labor more fiercely than we attack the Likud."

A former Laborite himself, Beilin won the Yahad leadership by a comfortable 10 percent margin over Meretz's Ran Cohen in nationwide primaries March 16.

He immediately launched a "100-day plan," focusing first on clearing the \$3.3 million debt the party inherited from Meretz. He also set up teams to start planning for the 2007 election and clarifying all aspects of party ideology.

After three and a half years of Palestinian intifada, Beilin argues that the right may be in power, but left-wing ideology is regaining its ascendancy in Israel.

"The 37-year-long debate over the territories is over," Beilin told JTA. "There is a general consensus that we can't go on keeping them."

In other words, the ideological battle between right and left is no longer about whether to hold onto the Palestinian territories but about how best to get rid of them. The center-right under Sharon, and many in Labor, say it's best to do so by unilateral disengagement; the left, led by Yahad and including Labor doves, says an agreement with the Palestinians is preferable.

Beilin acknowledges that, in taking the left's ideas, the right to some extent has usurped its political space. But, he argues, it also has given the left a new legitimacy that it had lost after Oslo's failure.

In making the case for unilateral disengagement, Sharon argues that there is no Palestinian partner for a peace agreement, now or in the foreseeable future.

In arguing for a negotiated settlement, Beilin distinguishes between a Palestinian partner for signing an agreement and one for implementing it.

He says he is certain the Palestinians would sign something like the Geneva

initiative — which gives them considerably more than what Israel was offering before the intifada began — though they might not implement even that.

Still, he argues, it would be better than a unilateral withdrawal.

"The worst-case scenario for an agreement is better than the best-case scenario for unilateral withdrawal," he maintains: It would give Israel internationally recognized borders, solve the problems of Jerusalem and refugees and, presumably,

bring funding from the international community for implementation. In contrast, he says, unilateral withdrawal would achieve none of these things.

Moreover, he says, if the Palestinians violate a signed agreement by launching more terrorism, the international community would support Israel's right to retaliate — though many Israelis similarly expected widespread international support when the Palestinians violated virtually all of their commitments under Oslo. Instead, Israel found itself more isolated internationally than ever, its efforts at self-defense condemned.

Still, Beilin says, a unilateral withdrawal would leave the Palestinians with an excuse for continuing the intifada, and Israel with far less international backing for self-defense.

Beilin also says he intends to draw up what he calls a "social Geneva," an alternative economic program designed to restore the welfare state and provide incentives for unemployed Israelis to go back to work. The idea would be to present a number of social programs — such as a long school day — and to pinpoint sources of government financing for each one.

Still, Beilin's power to attract voters as a leader is unproven. He is seen as effete, Ashkenazi and elitist.

In many sectors, Beilin is among Israel's most reviled politicians, blamed more than anyone else for the debacle of Oslo.

The Geneva deal, an unprecedented bit of freelance diplomacy in which Beilin circled the globe building opposition to the policies of Israel's elected government, didn't help his reputation among many Israelis.

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

Yossi Beilin says the long debate over the territories is over.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon talks tough in government

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told restless right-wing coalition partners they could leave the Israeli government.

Political sources said Sharon's plan to disengage Israel from the Palestinians came under criticism from National Religious Party chief Effi Eitam and National Unity bloc chief Benny Elon in Sunday's Cabinet meeting. "Whoever feels uncomfortable is welcome to get up and leave, rather than sit in government," Sharon was quoted as telling them.

Pre-Passover terror sweep

Israeli forces swept through Nablus in a bid to prevent a Passover terrorist attack.

Twenty-six wanted terrorists, most from Hamas, were arrested in last Friday's operation in the West Bank city regarded as the Palestinian "terror capital."

Israeli security sources said the army acted on intelligence reports that Nablus was to be the staging point of an attack reminiscent of the Park Hotel bombing in Passover 2002 that killed 30 people.

Score settled in Tulkarm?

Israeli commandos killed a Palestinian believed to have masterminded a deadly weekend attack.

Witnesses in the West Bank city of Tulkarm said Israeli special forces killed a Hamas terrorist and wounded his associate on Sunday. The dead man is believed to have ordered last Friday's attack on the nearby Avnei Hefetz settlement in which an Israeli was killed and his daughter wounded.

Sharon: Arafat not immune

Ariel Sharon said Yasser Arafat shouldn't think Israel can't touch him.

The Israeli prime minister told Israeli television Friday that it was not clear whether the Palestinian Authority president could stay in his leadership position forever, according to news reports. Israel's Security Cabinet in September approved the principle of removing Arafat from power, but hasn't done it for fear of inflaming Arab and world opinion.

A U.S. official said the Bush administration opposes any attempt to kill or exile Arafat.

Palestinians riot on Temple Mount

Muslims threw stones at Israeli police after prayers on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Israeli police fired stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets in an attempt to disperse the hundreds of rioters. More than 20 Palestinians and four policemen were injured in the melee. Police said most of the injured Palestinians were hit by rocks thrown by other Palestinians.

UNRWA stops food delivery

A United Nations agency says it has stopped delivering food to the Gaza Strip because of Israeli restrictions.

The U.N. Relief and Works Agency said April 1 it was forced to halt food distribution because of an Israeli ban on moving empty shipping containers out of Gaza.

The new restrictions come after Palestinian suicide bombers entered Israel through secret compartments in empty containers and killed 10 people in a March 14 attack at the Ashdod port. UNRWA said it distributes 11,000 tons of food to 600,000 Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip.

WORLD

Jewish broadcaster takes over BBC

A Jewish media mogul was named chairman of the BBC.

Michael Grade, 61, a high-profile but controversial figure in British media, will take the top non-executive position at the state broadcaster after he receives royal assent.

Grade formerly was head of Britain's Channel 4, where he was dubbed "pornographer in chief" by some because of his late-night programming.

He is also a keen supporter of Yiddish culture. Israel and Jewish groups have accused the BBC of anti-Israel bias.

Documentary in the dock

Students at a Paris high school went on strike April 1 to protest a TV documentary that portrayed the school as a center of Jewish-Muslim strife.

Students and teachers at the Lycee Turgot said the documentary, shown last week on the public channel France 3, had deliberately misrepresented the situation at the school.

A seder in Kosovo

A Passover seder will be held in Kosovo.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is sponsoring Monday night's seder for the few Jews who remain in Kosovo and Jewish soldiers stationed there.

The seder was moved from Prizren, where Kosovo's two Jewish families live, to Pristina because of security concerns. Ethnic tensions have recently flared anew in Kosovo.

Rabbinical students go to FSU for Passover

Twenty-one U.S. Reform rabbinical students are coming to the former Soviet Union to conduct Passover seders.

The students from the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College will work in pairs in provincial communities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, with each pair traveling to two different communities during the week.

NORTH AMERICA

Apple falls far from tree

An 18-year-old accused of multiple acts of anti-Semitic vandalism in the Toronto area is the son of the caretaker of a Jewish cemetery. Steven Vandermeij is accused, along with two unidentified 15-year-olds, of toppling 27 tombstones in March near the cemetery where his father works.

The younger Vandermeij was set free on bail last week after taking part in the anti-Semitic spree, causing \$20,000 in damage at Bathurst-Lawn Cemetery.

His father, Frank Vandermeij, has been a caretaker at the nearby Beth Tzedec Memorial Park Cemetery for more than a decade.

Judge rules against PLO

Palestinian leaders must pay more than \$232 million for the killing of two West Bank Jewish settlers, a U.S. judge ruled.

A federal magistrate in Rhode Island ruled this week that the PLO and Palestinian Authority provided safe haven to a Hamas gunman in the 1996 drive-by shooting of Yaron Ungar, a U.S. citizen, and his Israeli wife Efrat, the Associated Press reported.

Ungar's family filed a \$250 million lawsuit under the 1990 Anti-Terrorism Act.

A federal judge ruled in January that Hamas must pay the family \$116 million as well.