

IN THE NEWS

State Dept. team to define settlements

The United States and Israel are working to define what constitutes settlement activity.

Adam Ereli, the State Department spokesman, refused to address Israel's recent announcements of tenders for more than 1,000 new housing units in West Bank settlements.

Instead, Ereli said, a State Department team due to arrive in Israel in coming weeks will work on a definition of settlement activity. Ereli denied that the United States had endorsed settlement expansion in general.

Security tightened at Paris Jewish sites

The mayor of Paris announced that security would be stepped up at Jewish institutions in the capital.

Following the arson of a Jewish social center over the weekend, Bertrand Delanoë said Monday that additional video surveillance cameras would be installed at buildings frequented by the Jewish community, and that he would ask the city council to increase its security budget by a third to protect Jewish institutions.

Security systems would be improved around Jewish nurseries, schools, synagogues and old-age homes, Delanoë said in a statement. In addition, a campaign will be launched early next month to sensitize citizens to fight anti-Semitism and racism.

Death toll high in Palestinian conflict

More Israelis have died in the current Palestinian conflict than in two Middle East wars.

Security officials said Tuesday that 1,001 Israelis have been killed by Palestinian terrorist and guerrilla attacks since the intifada erupted in September 2000.

The death toll outstrips the 803 Israelis killed in the 1967 Six-Day War and the 738 who died in the War of Attrition that followed.

WORLD REPORT

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Escape hatch: French Jews visit Israel as anti-Semitism up at home

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — French is one of the common languages spoken around the sparkling blue pool at the David Intercontinental in Tel Aviv, along the sandy beaches of Netanya and Eilat and the hotel lobbies of Jerusalem this summer.

Some 50,000 French Jews decided to forgo usual vacation favorites such as the French Riviera this summer and come to Israel instead.

The French tourist boom is credited with making August the best single month in a decade for hotels in the greater Tel Aviv area. According to Ha'aretz, for the past three weeks, there has not been a single room available at a beachfront hotel in Tel Aviv, Bat Yam, Herzliya or Netanya.

"This never happened before," said Lyon Rosenbaum, chairman of the French-speaking Immigrants Association, noting the unprecedented numbers that are credited, in part, to a campaign by community leaders to make Israel the destination this summer.

The tourism exodus from France is not only a quest for solidarity with the Jewish state and for sun during troubled times in Israel.

For some it is about shopping for property and looking into schools for their children: A growing number of French Jews — some spooked by the upsurge in anti-Semitic attacks in France — are considering the possibility of making aliyah, or immigrating to Israel.

Nissan Cohen, 25, who works for a mobile phone company in Paris, heads to the Tel

Aviv beach in a yellow tank top and shorts. Peering over a pair of reflective sunglasses, he said he is here for a good time but that aliyah lies in the back of his mind.

He and many of his friends are considering immigrating, he said, "because of anti-Semitism and also because we feel good here, it's a Jewish country."

Some 3,000 French Jews are expected to make aliyah in 2004, say officials in Israel — about double the number that came in 2001.

Numbers have been rising, the Jewish Agency for Israel says.

About 2,085 new French immigrants arrived in 2003, at a time when immigration figures overall were down in part because of the intifada.

Last month, the issue of French Jewish immigration to Israel became the center of an international diplomatic flap after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called on French Jews to make aliyah immediately.

"If I have to advise our brothers in France, I'll tell them one thing — move to Israel, as early as possible. I say that to Jews all around the world, but there, I think it's a must and they have to move immediately," Sharon said.

The comments drew fire from French government officials. Sharon was even told he would not be welcome in Paris, and Israel's charge d'affaires in Paris was called in to account for the remarks.

The flap soon died down, but the Jewish Agency has set up an information tent along the boardwalk in Eilat targeting vacation-

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

■ French Jews are flocking to Israel for vacation this summer

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ing French Jews. There they pass out brochures about aliyah and present information about study options and other programs for new immigrants.

Rosenbaum, a lawyer who made aliyah from Paris in 1976, said French Jews are considering aliyah for two main reasons: a feeling of being under threat by elements in France's Arab Muslim population — which is accused of being behind many of the physical attacks against Jews there — and because of the French media, which he describes as especially hostile to Israel.

The growing number of anti-Semitic incidents "makes for an uncomfortable situation," he said, singling out the French media for what he sees as anti-Israel editorial policy.

Yossi Borniche, a 58-year-old pharmacist who immigrated from France last year and is now living in Netanya, said coverage of Israel in the French media contributed to his decision to leave.

"There is very biased news against Israel," he said. "For me it was very hard to be a Jew there. It's not a pleasant place to be now."

He said one of his daughters who lives in an upscale Paris neighborhood had the mezuzah on her door smashed.

"Always, always, every day something else happens. It's hard to live with," Borniche said.

■

The French government has published figures showing that out of 230 racist attacks against persons or property in the

first half of 2004, 135 were committed against Jewish targets.

Sitting in a low-slung chair by the swimming pool at the David Intercontinental, a luxury high-rise hotel overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, Yael Marciano watches her 4-year-old daughter splash in the water.

She says living in Israel is something she and her family would like to eventually do, but the question for her and other French Jews remains slightly abstract.

"I think everyone wants to live here," but "we don't know when, we don't know how. I think French Jews are not doing so well in France so many are coming to see, to buy, to look," said Marciano, a 29-year-old mother of three.

Those French Jews immigrating to Israel still represent only a small percentage of the French Jewish community — which, at around 600,000, is the largest in Western Europe.

But Olivier Rapovitz, the director of the aliyah department of the Jewish Agency in France, said that in the past three years some 3,000 apartments in Israel have been purchased by French Jews.

In 2004, some 1,000 apartments are expected to be sold to French Jews.

"Most people purchasing apartments are not necessarily people making aliyah, but it is clear it is a very important step to

making aliyah," said Rapovitz in a phone interview from Paris. "Today it's become a normal step to also have an apartment in Israel."

According to Rapovitz, anti-Semitism is not the main factor fueling interest in moving to Israel.

"Anti-Semitism is too easy of an answer and not the right one," he said.

French Jews, he said, believe that Israel is simply the best place for future generations to thrive.

Furthermore, he said, as Israel's economy begins to stabilize, spe-

cifically the high-tech sector, more see a viable economic future for themselves in the Jewish state.

He denied reports that the Jewish Agency, seeing an opportunity to push aliyah in the community, had increased its staff in the wake of the rise of anti-Semitic incidents in France.

"We are working very hard everywhere. We have in the last two or three years been present even in smaller, more remote areas where Jews are living," he said.

This means hitting the airwaves on the radio, going to universities and student associations and holding evening informational meetings explaining what programs are in place to help families and students ease the transition to life in Israel. ■

For French Jews, 'it's become normal to also have an apartment in Israel.'

Olivier Rapovitz
Jewish Agency for Israel

Ukraine hosts Yiddishists

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Yiddish enthusiasts from Eastern Europe spent two weeks this month in Kiev, Ukraine, taking classes on the Yiddish language and literature.

The 15th annual summer school on Yiddish and Yiddishkeit in Eastern Europe was aimed at popularizing Yiddish in the region's Jewish communities, the organizers said. Classes were taught by teachers from Israel, France and Ukraine.

"We taught the students not only Yid-

dish but also all elements of the Jewish way of life: we celebrated Shabbat, ate kosher food and sang Jewish songs," said Mordechai Yushkovsky, an expert on teaching Yiddish with the Israeli Ministry of Education.

Yushkovsky co-organized the Aug. 3-18 event together with the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine.

The 55 participants included language teachers, klezmer musicians and aficionados from six countries. Interest in Jewish culture has blossomed among Jews and non-Jews alike in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism. ■

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Palestinian prisoner strike: What's it about?

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Now into its second week, a hunger strike by Palestinian security prisoners in Israeli jails encompasses close to 3,000 out of 3,800 inmates, making it the largest such demonstration in Israeli history.

The issue quickly captured the attention of a Palestinian public in which nearly everyone has ties to someone who has done time in Israeli prisons.

But Western public opinion has remained indifferent, preoccupied with the Olympic Games, rising oil prices, American elections and the continued crisis in Iraq.

The strike began Aug. 15, with prisoners refusing to eat until wardens put an end to strip searches, allowed more frequent family visits, improved sanitation and installed public telephones.

But the reasons behind the strike run deeper than creature comforts.

The successful international campaign against Israel's West Bank security barrier led Palestinian leaders to believe that the time was ripe to put another supposed civil rights issue on the national and international agenda.

Israeli authorities, on the other hand, perceive the strike as yet another front in the comprehensive battle against terrorism, and have refused to negotiate.

Israeli authorities say the strikers — most of whom were arrested on suspicion of involvement in terrorist attacks — merely want to improve their ability to communicate with the outside world so they can continue planning attacks from jail.

Israel has refused to bring the strikers to Israeli hospitals for medical treatment. Health Minister Dan Naveh has suggested setting up a mobile health facility at the prison if necessary.

The timing of the strike was not coincidental: It began just as internal Palestinian criticism against Yasser Arafat was mounting. Diverting attention to Israel's prisons conveniently served the Palestinian Authority president's political needs.

The security prisoners are perceived on the Palestinian street as "freedom fighters" who have paid a high price in the Palestinian war against Israel. They are second in rank only to the "martyrs"

who have died in the intifada.

According to the Addamir Prisoner Support Center, a Palestinian organization, approximately 650,000 Palestinians have served time in Israeli prisons since 1967.

According to Israeli Prisons Service figures, some 54 percent of the prisoners serve up to five years in jail, 9 percent serve up to 10 years, 15 percent serve up to 20 years and fully 22 percent serve life sentences.

Some say prison terms have become what military service is to Israelis.

According to the Prisons Service, some 70 percent of the "security inmates" have "blood-stained" hands — meaning that they were directly involved or were accessories in terrorist attacks.

Israeli jails always have been a hotbed for Palestinian terrorism. Ironically, there is a direct correlation between the growing number of security prisoners and the role of prisons as operation centers for terrorist networks.

Captured terrorist commanders continue to exercise their authority from their prison cells. Indeed, it is believed that quite a number of terrorist attacks have been directed from prisons.

Though prison authorities strictly forbid the use of cellular phones, hundreds of such phones have found their way into Israeli prisons, allowing prisoners to maintain open lines with terrorist organizations outside.

One former security prisoner said in an interview with Ha'aretz that he used to tease the prison warden by using his cell phone to order pizza to the warden's office, while still succeeding in hiding the phone from authorities.

Since the outbreak of the intifada, Hamas terrorists — the main organizers of the present strike — have become more dominant in Israel's prisons.

Though the strike hasn't played significantly in the West, it has strengthened ties between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority orchestrated wide national support for the inmates, and solidarity demonstrations

and parades have become a matter of a daily routine throughout the territories.

These have included parades of prisoners' children, lawyers and Muslim worshipers, who have taken to the streets following Friday prayers.

The Prisons Service has reacted to such demonstrations of solidarity with a series of countermeasures, such as banning family visits and cigarettes.

Jails also have used psychological tactics such as barbecuing meat outside prisoners' cells to intensify their hunger. So far, nearly 125 strikers have dropped

their fast, authorities say — and one of the most prominent strikers, West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, was caught on camera surreptitiously wolfing down a meal.

Previous hunger strikes have ended with gradual improvements in prisoners' benefits.

Over the years, the prisoners have been awarded a number of privileges that are not defined by law, including access to television, radio, newspapers, university education, special food and electronic games.

But unlike previous strikes, this time around there have been no signs of surrender by either side.

Tzachi Hanegbi, Israel's minister of internal security, said that as far as he is concerned the "prisoners could strike till they starve."

Hanegbi was widely criticized for the comment, but he didn't back off, reiterating this week that the government was determined not to give in to any of the prisoners' demands.

However, much depends on the course of events.

Prison authorities indeed are concerned that if any of the prisoners starves to death, the strike may turn into an international affair, further complicating Israel's stand on humanitarian issues.

So far, only one such strike, in 1980, ended with the death of two prisoners during an attempt by prison authorities to force-feed them.

It's believed that several Palestinian terrorist attacks have been directed from Israeli prison cells.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Hamas operative arrested videotaping bridge

A Hamas operative was arrested while videotaping the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in Maryland, authorities said.

Ismael Selim Elbarasse was detained last week as a material witness in a terrorism case in Chicago that charged another Hamas operative with laundering hundreds of thousands of dollars to the organization.

Elbarasse was not charged in connection with the videotaping incident.

Muslim scholar can't come teach

U.S. officials revoked the visa of a controversial Swiss Muslim who was to become a visiting scholar at Notre Dame.

Under terms of the Patriot Act, the State Department announced Tuesday that it was revoking a visa granted to Tariq Ramadan, who recently said French Jewish intellectuals are more beholden to their religious and ethnic identity than to universal values.

Ramadan is widely considered to be an apologist for radical Islam, though he also has spoken out against anti-Semitism.

Religious groups press Sudan

Religious and human rights groups across the United States are planning an interfaith day to raise consciousness about the killings in Sudan.

Wednesday's Sudan: Day of Conscience comes after months of increased attention in the international community to the ongoing situation in Sudan, where government-sponsored Arab militias have killed tens of thousands of Africans.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience has declared a genocide emergency in the African country.

Yahoo loses appeal

A U.S. court judge did not have the authority to rule on a case involving the online sale of Nazi memorabilia in France, a U.S. appeals court ruled.

The court ruled Monday that the judge didn't have the authority to rule that a French decision ordering Yahoo to prevent the sale of Nazi memorabilia from its French site, yahoo.fr, was invalid.

MIDDLE EAST

Terrorist's femme fatale?

The Israeli friend of a leading Palestinian terrorist denied complicity in a Jerusalem-area bombing.

Tali Fahima denied the charges Monday in court, where she was remanded for seven days as the investigation proceeds.

Fahima, 28, was arrested after the Aug. 11 blast at Kalandia checkpoint that killed two Palestinians and wounded three Israeli border policemen, apparently a botched attempt to smuggle a bomb into Israel.

Security sources said Tuesday that Fahima was believed to have helped her friend Zakaria Zubeidi, an Al-Aksa Brigade chief who claimed responsibility for the incident.

Hospital no haven for terrorists

Israeli forces captured two Palestinian terrorists in a French-run West Bank hospital.

The two Al-Aksa Brigade members were found hiding in the administrative section of Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem, along with an arms cache. In Nablus, the army rounded up 300 Palestinian men in a search for local terrorists.

Striking prisoners to stay behind bars

Hunger-striking Palestinian prisoners who fall ill will not be treated in Israel's hospitals.

"I am not prepared for the lives of patients and medical teams in our hospitals to be endangered by admitting these murderers," Health Minister Danny Naveh told Army Radio on Tuesday.

Naveh was referring to 2,800 Palestinian security prisoners who are now in the second week of a hunger strike, demanding better conditions.

Israel has refused to negotiate with the inmates, saying they are seeking concessions that will allow them to communicate with terrorist groups on the outside.

"If a field hospital needs to be set up at a Prisons Service installation, then that is what should be done," Naveh said. But the Prisons Service said no prisoners were yet in serious condition, and that 124 of them had resumed eating.

Shalom, France

Israel's foreign minister arrived in France on Tuesday for a two-day trip hastily arranged in response to an anti-Semitic arson.

Silvan Shalom was to hold talks with his French counterpart, Michel Barnier, as well as Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin and Jewish officials.

The Israeli Embassy in Paris said Shalom likely would visit the site of Sunday's arson, which destroyed a social center for the elderly, on Wednesday.

Swastika vandal arrested

French police arrested a man Tuesday after seeing him drawing a swastika and a Magen David on an Interior Ministry building in Paris.

The man, described as being of Romanian origin, also shouted "Long live Germany," police said.

WORLD

Russians split on jailed oil magnate

Russians are split over the case of a Jewish oil magnate standing trial at a Moscow court.

According to a recent poll, 48 percent of Russians do not believe the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, founder of the Yukos oil firm, will be fair.

According to the survey, conducted by the Yuri Levada Analytical Center, an independent polling firm, 25 percent of Russians agree that the case was caused by the authorities' desire to curb Khodorkovsky's political influence.

At the same time, 41 percent said Yukos should be nationalized and its founder sentenced to a long prison term. No margin of error for the poll was reported.

Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, is being tried on multiple counts, including massive tax evasion and the theft of state property in dubious privatization schemes.

A pile of gold

Israeli judo bronze medalist Arik Ze'evi has been awarded a full college scholarship.

After promising in June to grant scholarships to two students of the Interdisciplinary Center who would be competing in the Olympic Games should they return home with medals, the center's president, Uriel Reichman, made good this week.

Ze'evi, a third-year law and business student, will receive a full ride toward completing his studies.

"For us you were always gold," Reichman said of Ze'evi.

The other student, also a judoka, did not win a medal in Athens.