

IN THE NEWS

Rockets strike northern Israel

Rockets fired from southern Lebanon struck an Israeli border town, causing damage.

There were no serious casualties from Tuesday night's salvo on Kiryat Shmona, though three homes were hit.

Israel retaliated Wednesday by bombing a Lebanese camp linked to a Palestinian terrorist group.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the attack.

'Quartet' calls on P.A. parties to disarm

The "Quartet" of Middle East peace mediators called on parties taking part in upcoming Palestinian elections to disarm.

"Ultimately those who want to be part of the political process should not engage in armed group or militia activities, for there is a fundamental contradiction between such activities and the building of a democratic state," the group said in a statement, recalling a similar statement it made in September. "In this regard, the Quartet calls on all participants to renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm."

Judge rules against Demjanjuk

A U.S. judge ruled that John Demjanjuk could be deported to his native Ukraine.

In a ruling Wednesday, Chief U.S. Immigration Judge Michael Creppy rejected Demjanjuk's contention that he would be tortured in Ukraine. Demjanjuk can still appeal the decision.

Demjanjuk, 85, served as a guard at the Sobibor, Majdanek and Flossenburg camps during World War II lied about his past when he applied to enter the United States in 1952.

Demjanjuk was acquitted in Israel in 1993 of being "Ivan the Terrible."

Due to New Year's, the JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, Jan. 2.



WORLD REPORT

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Experts say Israel must prepare for possibility of natural disaster

By GIL SEDAN

TEL AVIV (JTA) — What's the greatest threat to Israel today? It's not Iranian nuclear weapons, according to one expert.

In terms of potential loss of life and property, a natural disaster could be much more destructive than war — and Israel is unprepared for a mass disaster, Ephraim Laor, head of a Haifa University program on the geography of disaster areas, told JTA.

"It's not a matter of budgets, but rather preparing yourself for the unknown," Laor said. "It's more convenient to talk about the Iranians than about the real dangers. If all Arabs mobilize all their air forces from Mauritania in the West to Iraq in the East, they will be less dangerous than terrorists blowing up one ship laden with ammonia in the Port of Haifa."

Preparing the population for a massive catastrophe is mostly a matter of education.

"We need to teach the population and the decision makers how to act in time of disaster," reserve Brig. Gen. Arnon Ben-Ami told JTA. "Right now we don't have a sufficient number of experts for this major challenge of education."

Ben-Ami is acting chairman of the Defense Ministry's Supreme Emergency Economy Board, which is in charge of preparing the economy for times of national emergency or disaster.

Ben-Ami called on Israel's business community to help make Israeli citizens more aware by holding exercises, making preparations and conducting conferences about emergencies. The Education Ministry

recently introduced a pilot program, training students from first grade to high school for a mass-disaster situation.

"Rescue work is not a science," Ben-Ami said. "Rescue workers do not need to be construction engineers. Some things can be learned within a matter of hours."

It was thanks to Ben-Ami that Haifa University introduced a program in the Geography of Disaster Areas two years ago. At a recent symposium at the university, the scenario was presented of a terrorist takeover of a ship laden with dangerous chemicals.

Under the scenario, terrorists succeeded in taking over a large chemical carrier laden with deadly ammonia and blew it up in Haifa port. Scores were killed by the blast and toxic fumes, and hundreds were injured.

How prepared is Israel to deal with a mass tragedy like that? How can it prevent it?

"It's a very possible scenario that can be prevented, but against which deployment is now very shallow," Laor warned.

The government has established a special ministerial committee for earthquakes. An expert steering committee provides the ministers with professional guidance.

The Haifa program aims to establish the professional infrastructure to prepare the population, mostly through a trained task force at the municipal level. Some 51 students will conclude the first master's program next year.

There are 150 such programs at universities in the United States, but Hurricane Katrina showed that even that is not necessarily enough.

"In the past I used to say that the U.S. is

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

Israel has suffered at least one major earthquake every century

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ready for unexpected disasters," Laor said, "but 9/11, Katrina, Rita and Wilma have proven that it was not."

It's difficult to prepare for the unknown, but Israel is unprepared even for fairly common disasters such as earthquakes. That's particularly alarming given Israel's location on the Syrian-African Rift and on the Yagur Rift near Haifa, and because it has a history of earthquakes, having suffered at least one major earthquake every century.

Some 30,000 people died in an earthquake in 31 BCE. The town of Safed was almost totally destroyed in an 1831 earthquake that killed thousands. The last fatal earthquake in Israel was on July 1, 1927, and it left 300 dead, thousands wounded and considerable damage.

■

Four earthquakes have taken place in the past year, which geologists take as a sign that a major one is on the way. Experts say up to 16,000 could be killed, 90,000 injured and 400,000 left homeless by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake in the next 50 years in the Jordan Valley or on Mt. Carmel.

Ben-Ami, Laor and their teams try to envision the worst possible catastrophes, but they insist that no matter how prepared the country is, a catastrophe will take it by surprise.

The assumption is that basic services would be paralyzed for the first three days after a catastrophe. Many emergency services also would be hit, while those that remain would be used to extend help to other emergency services, such as hospitals, electricity, food and water supplies.

One lesson Israel learned from the U.S. experience in Hurricane Katrina is that at a time of major catastrophe, the individual may be on his own for the first few days, without outside help.

Some Israelis contend that after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government invested too much on anti-terrorism measures, neglecting natural disaster preparedness. Israel's Supreme Emergency Economy unit recommends being prepared for various disasters.

"I'm trying to balance out the preparation for terror attacks, for a conventional war and natural disasters," Ben-Ami said, "but in recent years I devote more energies to earthquakes, because the better prepared I am for an earthquake, the better prepared I will be for other potential disasters."

Above all, it's paramount that municipal leadership be prepared to set the emergency wheels in motion. If they fail, as happened in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, everything collapses.

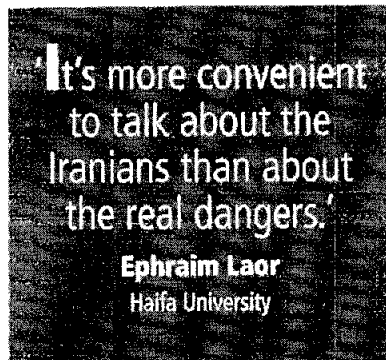
"Israeli citizens have been accustomed to rely on the army and on the government to take care of all security problems," Ben-Ami said. "One needs to educate them otherwise. The army cannot provide an answer to natural disasters or mass disasters."

Laor suggested that Israel's state of preparedness is improving: Buildings constructed after 1970 stand better chances in an earthquake,

while others are being strengthened, particularly schools. But the challenges are overwhelming.

"We need more than \$2 billion to reinforce all schools and at least \$50 billion to reinforce all buildings in the entire country, but no such money exists," he said. Israel's entire national budget for next year will be around \$60 billion.

So the race against time and its potential menaces continues. The challenge is to be better prepared when the catastrophe hits; the frustration is knowing that one can never be sufficiently prepared. ■



Auschwitz trip ad blasted

By DINAH SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — A Polish Jewish leader is criticizing a Polish bus company's recent advertisement for round-trip tickets to Auschwitz, with barbed wire in the ad's background.

The advertisement is "outrageous and beyond tasteless," said Piotr Kadlcik, chairman of Poland's Union of Religious Jewish Communities.

Kadlcik was reacting to an article published Wednesday in the Krakow edition of Poland's leading daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which reported that the PKS Malopolska bus firm recently had put up posters in hotels, travel agencies and hostels around Krakow that read, in English, "Auschwitz? With a return ticket? From the city center? Yes it's possible."

The roughly \$24 offer, which includes a tour guide for the former death camp, is superimposed against a fuzzy photograph of a camp building with barbed wire in

sharp focus. More promotional information is written across the photograph, including departure times and reservation contacts.

Kadlcik told JTA he was writing a letter of protest to the company.

"I don't think they intentionally meant to offend people, but I think they're just being stupid," he said. "I found it highly inappropriate, not just for the Jewish victims in Auschwitz but also for all the people who have perished in this camp. There is an unfortunate tendency in marketing to do shocking things, but this is way, way beyond what's acceptable."

PKS Malopolska's president, Tomasz Stanek, says he doesn't understand what the fuss is about.

"I really did not mean to hurt anyone, and if the 'return-ticket' line is offensive to people, I will just change it," he told JTA.

PKS Malopolska has distributed 30,000 leaflets of the ad and 20 wall-size posters. ■

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Russian American Jews to help Israeli brethren

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Swapping stories in Russian, sharing smiles and posing for photographs, the American visitors in suits and ties connect with Israeli soldiers in uniform.

The first-ever leadership mission of Russian American Jews traveled though Israel last week meeting with immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Their special focus was on getting to know soldiers who immigrated alone, leaving their families far behind in their home countries.

"They have a lot of hardships," said Dr. Igor Branovan, from New York, president of the visiting Russian American Jews for Israel. "This is a subject that really resonates in our community."

The mission symbolized the growing organization and strength of Russian Jewish immigrants in North America, and their desire to make common cause with Israeli immigrants from the former Soviet Union who need help. Of Israel's 2,500 "lone soldiers" — soldiers without families living in Israel — approximately 80 percent are immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The organization has pledged to raise \$1 million in their community for these soldiers, who often struggle both financially and emotionally doing their army service.

"This signals the transition of our community as a receiver of support to one that is becoming more active," Branovan said.

They have promised to raise the money within a year, to be donated to a Jewish Agency for Israel fund for the soldiers.

"Because most of the lone soldiers are from the FSU, they are doing our job for us, defending the Jewish homeland," said Margo Volfstun, a member of the delegation from the Washington area who came to the United States as a teenager from Kiev, Ukraine. These soldiers "do not have adequate support. They need more, and it is our job to provide it to them."

Unlike their counterparts with parents in the country, these soldiers must tend to their own shopping, meals and laundry when they come home on Shabbat or holidays — often exhausted from long weeks in training or in combat.

Most rent their own apartments and their salaries of about \$550 a month is stretched thin covering rent, utilities, transportation and food.

"Any human being must be touched by the example they set," said Alex Goldin, a New York lawyer who was among the 10 Russian Jews from cities across America on the mission.

"Their courage must serve as an example to all Jews in the world of what it means to be a Jew," said Goldin. "If I help these

lone soldiers then vicariously we feel their courage and passion."

Olesya Kuleshova, 21, who immigrated to Israel by herself from Ukraine in 1999 and is now an officer in the army, was

among those lone soldiers who met the group.

She said she was both surprised and impressed at the group's involvement with lone soldiers.

"It's very impressive that people are doing this," said Kuleshova. "It's very important and it is really helpful, especially to soldiers who come alone and have nothing."

Some 2 million Jews left the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. One million came to Israel; many of the others made their way to North America.

Many Russian American Jews have prospered, including members of the mission who are prominent business people and professionals in America. Now they want to give back.

Russian American Jews, who number between 600,000 to 800,000, identify with the need for a strong Jewish state after living with state-sponsored anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union.

This connection is reinforced because an overwhelming majority — some 90 percent — has close relatives and friends living in the Jewish state — and because a disproportionate amount of immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union have been killed in terror attacks in the past five years.

Branovan has helped bring over victims of terror attacks from Israel to the United States for surgery including two young immigrants from

the former Soviet Union, according to media reports.

Aware of the potential of the Russian American Jewish community, the Jewish Agency for Israel — which organized the mission's program — sent its first-ever shaliach, or emissary, to the Russian immigrant community in the United States three years ago.

On its final day in Israel on Dec. 20, the group met with young soldiers from the former Soviet Union who are studying Judaism in a Judaism enrichment course called Nativ. The course is part of the conversion process for immigrants who are not Jewish according to Jewish law.

They also met with several university students from the former Soviet Union who were formerly lone soldiers and are now studying and facing financial difficulties juggling studies and part-time jobs.

Alex Koifman, a computer engineer from Boston, said meeting the young immigrants gave him a sense that the new Israelis are on the right track.

"I saw the future of the community and that future is the young people going through the school system and the army," Koifman says.



FOCUS ON ISSUES

Terror victim weds again

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli who lost his family to Palestinian terrorists remarried.

David Hatuel, whose wife and four daughters were killed in a 2004 ambush outside a Gaza Strip settlement, tied the knot Monday with Limor Shem-Tov, 32, at a ceremony attended by more than 1,000 well-wishers.

Hatuel, 35, has been living in temporary housing and teaching in an Ashkelon school since being evacuated from Gaza.

"I am building my new home on the ruins of the old, though I will never forget it," he said, referring to his marriage.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

No-go zone in Gaza

Israel declared off-limits an area of the Gaza Strip that Palestinians have used to fire rockets into Israel.

The ordinance went into effect at 6 p.m. Wednesday, after the Israeli air force dropped thousands of leaflets over Gaza warning residents not to approach land abutting the northern boundary where Jewish settlements formerly were located.

"Anyone who will not heed this warning is placing his or her life in immediate danger," read the leaflets, which included a map of the new buffer zone.

Israel vowed to step up counter-measures after Palestinian rockets with extended range were fired from Gaza at the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon and two army bases.

Immigration to Israel up

Immigration to Israel from North America and France rose in 2005, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Some 3,052 people moved to Israel from North America, an increase from 2,640 in 2004, and 2,980 came from France, a rise from 2,415 the year before.

Overall, an estimated 23,000 immigrants will arrive before Dec. 31, a slight increase from 2004.

Immigration from the former Soviet Union dropped by 10 percent, although the 9,124 people who came still made up 40 percent of all new immigrants.

In addition, 29,712 young Jews took part in short-term programs to Israel, while 5,583 took part in longer-term educational programs.

Both of these numbers were up from 2004.

Dichter joins Kadima

A former Israeli security chief joined Ariel Sharon's new Kadima Party.

Avi Dichter, who retired earlier this year as head of the Shin Bet, announced Wednesday he would run for a senior position in Kadima.

Dichter has been widely touted as a potential internal security minister if Sharon is re-elected prime minister in the March 28 vote.

Dichter's predecessor as Shin Bet chief, Ami Ayalon, is a candidate in the rival Labor Party.

Settlement lease proposed

Israel's Labor Party proposed leasing West Bank settlement blocs from the Palestinian Authority.

Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York now running as a Labor candidate in upcoming elections, said Wednesday that the idea of a long-term lease of the Ariel, Gush Etzion and Ma'aleh Adumim settlement blocs likely would be incorporated into the party's election platform.

"We need to distinguish ourselves with an effective diplomatic plan," he told Israel Radio.

Pinkas suggested the Palestinian Authority could suspend its claim on the lands of the settlement blocs under a 99-year lease, which he likened to the recently expired deal in which China allowed Britain to rule Hong Kong.

No Hamas posters at consulate

The U.S. Consulate in Cairo opened its doors to reporters to show that employees don't display pro-Hamas posters on the walls.

The unusual step came after an article in the New York Post alleged that the pro-Hamas posters are hung on consulate walls.

NORTH AMERICA

Reform Jews help Katrina victims

A group of Reform Jews is in New Orleans helping to repair homes damaged in Hurricane Katrina.

The group of 18, including several teenagers and their families, are taking part in the Adult Mitzvah Corps project sponsored by the Union for Reform Judaism and Temple Shalom in Succasunna, N.J.

"In the midst of this crisis we have seen an inspiring generosity of spirit emerge from our community," said Rabbi Marla Feldman, director of the Reform movement's Commission on Social Action.

The Mitzvah Corps project offers participants the chance to worship, study and discuss Jewish values while offering hands-on assistance.

The mission is one of several from the Jewish community helping Katrina victims during Chanukah.

250 North American Jews make aliyah

Some 250 North American Jews made aliyah.

The planeload of immigrants, which landed Wednesday at Ben-Gurion International Airport, is the seventh such flight in 2005 sponsored by Nefesh B'Nefesh, an organization that facilitates aliyah for Jews from the United States and Canada, and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

More than 3,000 North American Jews moved to Israel this year, the highest figure since 1984.

Christian group to monitor Israel votes

The Christian Coalition announced plans to start showing legislators' votes for Israel as part of the group's biennial voters guide.

The Christian advocacy organization told the Jerusalem Post it would include foreign affairs in its Christian Voters Guide, which highlights how members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives voted on key pieces of legislation.

"It is very important for people of faith to know where our legislators stand on support for Israel," Christian Coalition President Roberta Combs told the newspaper. "Our heart is with Israel."

WORLD

Jewish leader meets Japanese prime minister

Malcolm Hoenlein urged Japan's prime minister to take a proactive role against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"Because Japan has been a moral force against proliferation, this is a critical case and they have an obligation to be proactive," Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he told Junichiro Koizumi during a rare meeting in Japan last week. "Because they have extensive trade still with Iran, they have to consider what Iran is doing."

Koizumi responded positively to the concerns, Hoenlein said, and subsequent meetings with other Japanese officials — including Foreign Minister Taro Aso — raised the profile of the Iran issue ahead of Koizumi's visit to Israel next month.

Islamist group banned in Germany

Regional German authorities banned an Islamic group that allegedly had material inciting Muslims to kill Christians and Jews.

The state of Bavaria took action Wednesday against the Multi-Kultur-Haus association.

The group backed efforts that are "incompatible with the basic values of a government order which respects people's dignity," said Bavaria's interior minister, Guenther Beckstein.