

IN THE NEWS
Israel's fallen remembered

Israel remembered its 22,123 fallen soldiers and terrorism victims. The Jewish state came to a standstill Monday night as sirens ushered in Memorial Day, a 24-hour annual mourning period.

Throughout Israel, the bereaved visited cemeteries while state television and radio stations broadcast tales of the servicemen and women slain in the line of duty, or of civilian lives claimed by Arab terrorism.

Haniyeh calls for end to attacks at crossings

The Palestinian Authority prime minister asked terrorist groups to refrain from attacking border crossings.

The plea Tuesday was the first time that Ismail Haniyeh, who leads the Hamas government, has suggested that attacks by terrorist groups such as his own are harmful.

"I stress the need to protect the vital interests of the Palestinian people, including the crossings that represent the veins and the lungs of the Palestinian people," Haniyeh said at the beginning of a P.A. Cabinet meeting, Reuters reported.

"All should stay far away, as much as possible, from the crossings, the gateways to the outside world, and avoid creating any disruptions."

UJC nominates three for top lay positions

The United Jewish Communities nominated businessman and communal leader Joseph Kanfer as chairman of the board.

The UJC also chose Kathy Manning, a North Carolina attorney, as chairwoman of the group's executive committee.

Michael Gelman, chair of the UJC Consulting Committee, was nominated as UJC treasurer.

The board of trustees of UJC, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations, will consider the nominations in November.

WORLD REPORT

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Entering turbulent waters, U.S. Jews launch task force to aid Israeli Arabs

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — They live just a mile apart, but odds are Eldad Garfunkel and Kasim Abu Raya would not ordinarily have met. As a Jew and an Arab, both Israeli citizens, their paths seldom crossed.

Such is life in Israel.

Then a new school opened in town, thanks to an Arab-Jewish coeducational organization called Hand in Hand. Teachers pledged to teach Arab and Jewish kids under the same roof, emphasizing values of coexistence and democratic engagement.

Intrigued by the concept, Garfunkel and Raya took a chance and signed up their children.

Now, eight years later, the two men are in frequent contact. Raya's son has Jewish friends sleep over during the holy month of Ramadan, Garfunkel's kid had a row of Arab students at his bar mitzvah, and both men claim a new understanding for those on "the other side."

A new task force on Israeli Arabs, founded by a broad coalition of American Jewish groups, hopes this type of exchange can become the norm rather than the exception in Israel.

The coalition includes the Anti-Defamation League, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, New Israel Fund, UJA-Federation of New York, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies and the Alfred and Hanna Fromm Fund. It represents a major push

on an issue that had been on the American Jewish community's list of priorities several years ago, but was then eclipsed by the intifada.

Leaders of the new Interagency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues told participants at a New York City symposium last week that they can no longer ignore the demographic realities of the Israeli Arab situation.

According to data from Sikkuy — The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality, Arabs, who make up roughly 20 percent of Israel's population, have a poverty rate three times higher than that of Israel's Jewish population. They also face political, medical and educational inequities, the center said.

In addition to socioeconomic strain, Israeli Arabs face attitudinal biases on the part of their Jewish counterparts. Nearly 63 percent of Israeli Jews say they view the Arab population as a security threat, according to a report issued in March by the Israel-based Center for Combating Racism. The study also showed that 40 percent of Israeli Jews believe the state should encourage Arabs to emigrate, and 34 percent believe Arab culture is inferior to Jewish culture.

The hostility toward Israeli Arabs stems in part from a tendency for Israeli Jews to question the loyalty of their Arab neighbors, Sikkuy officials said.

"In Israeli Jewish minds, sometimes — oftentimes — Israeli Arabs are connected with Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and they are being blamed for what's going

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ American Jewish groups have started a task force to help Israeli Arabs

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on there," said Shuli Dichter, co-executive director of Sikkuy. "But they are a totally separate collective with a separate agenda and needs."

But recent history has shown that the issue is not so simple. Opinion polls show that Israeli Arabs increasingly are identifying as Palestinian rather than Israeli and — led by political leaders who often seem to go out of their way to provoke the Jewish majority — the community is seen as increasingly radical.

When the intifada began, Israeli Arabs staged massive riots in solidarity, and Israeli Arabs were involved in a number of terrorist attacks during the five-year uprising, using their freedom of movement as Israeli citizens to aid Palestinian suicide bombers.

"We can't just look at this as an academic issue, or even a social issue," said Alan Slifka, who founded The Abraham Fund, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting coexistence between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens. "This is a defense issue.

"It's kind of like if you have someone on drugs and you don't get them to rehab," he continued. "You're enabling a bad situation to get worse."

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, underscored that point.

"We will not be at peace externally unless we have security internally," he told the symposium.

Looking in from the outside, Ameri-

can Jews wonder what role they should assume on a difficult issue. Brian Lurie, president of the Fromm Fund, said the agency would try to avoid politics, but other task force members questioned how exactly to pursue their agenda.

"We don't want to define the identity of Israelis," Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, cautioned. "The advocacy belongs to Israel. We are a support base trying to develop strategies for how they can do this."

Hoenlein concurred.

"We're not telling the government of Israel what to do," he said. "We're talking about what we can do."

So why are influential Jewish leaders bothering to tread in such waters?

Larry Garber, executive director of the New Israel Fund, cited the Bush administration's agenda of democratization in the Middle East as an impetus.

"Israel prides itself, appropriately, on being a democracy," he said. "One of the

areas appropriate to show how strong the Israeli government is in this area of minority rights."

Others said the climate in Israel, with Ehud Olmert as prime minister, is ripe for such an initiative.

"Ehud Olmert, because he was minister of Israeli Arab Affairs, has really got to know the situation we're talking about," Lurie said.

The seven-person task force, which is planning a fact-finding mission to Israel in June, said the is-

sue requires a paradigm shift on the part of Israeli citizens. If the operation is to succeed, Israelis need to see the well-being of Israeli Arabs as a general Israeli issue, not a specifically Arab one.

"If you care about Israel, you need to care about the totality of Israel," Foxman said.

Added Amal Elsana Alh'jooj, who directs the Arab-Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation: "Minority issues are not only the issue of the minority." ■



Jewish magazine struggles in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — One recent rainy morning, Matias Mondschein visited kosher shops, trying to sell ad space for the fourth issue of his magazine. The deadline was rapidly approaching.

"I feel quite lonely but I cannot allow myself to give up," Mondschein, 28, told JTA. He is the fourth son of a traditional Jewish couple, born in the Argentine province of Santiago del Estero.

His bimonthly magazine, aimed at young Jews, is called Generacion J. "J" refers to the words Jewish and young, both of which begin with J in Spanish.

Editor and director of the publication, Mondschein still was far short of the \$2,000 he needed to print the issue.

The biggest Jewish institutions do not support the magazine, he said.

"I want it to be independent," and to allow "free, enriching communication among local young Jews, to spread Jewish values in the Argentine context, with debate and content," he said, not just provide publicity for Jewish institutions that give money.

Mondschein does most of the writing and

editing on the 22-page publication, and he covers costs for graphics work and printing. Past issues have included stories about an Israeli hospital, spiritual growth of young Jewish women and a community center project, with space for letters from young Jews in remote rural areas.

Sold for 50 cents in the shops that Mondschein solicits for ads, the magazine has a circulation of about 4,000. It's also available through www.delacole.com, a Jewish community site for Argentina.

Daniel Berliner, spokesman for the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association, or AMIA, said Generacion J is the only publication for young local Jews, and deserves the community's support.

But the project doesn't get enough support. The local office of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Argentine Zionist Organization and Chabad in northern Buenos Aires made small donations to previous editions.

But Mondschein is not giving up. His wife, Cinthia, gave him her savings, and Mondschein resigned himself to earning no money from the magazine: He just wants to continue the project. ■

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Israeli hoops team loses, fans win

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — For four days, there were possibly more Jews in the Czech capital than at any time since World War II.

They were so full of joy, bursting into song in the Old Town or trading shirts and pins with tourists, that many natives wondered how such a large group of mostly male visitors could be so well-behaved.

What also made the Jews stand out was their appearance. Yarmulkes? Stars of David? Side curls?

Nope. They were swathed in yellow, head to toe. Yellow shirts, hats and face paint.

The new Jews in town were the 10,000 to 15,000 Israelis who flew in to cheer for what was, until Sunday, the best basketball team in the European League. And even though Maccabi Tel Aviv, with its yellow and blue uniforms, was defeated by CSKA Moscow in a close game in the Euroleague final, the impression made by the fans will last a while.

Their team was a loser, but by all accounts, the Israeli fans were winners.

"This is not what we are used to in sports fans," observed Martina Kucerova, a Prague sportswriter who worked during the Final Four at Sazka Arena, the venue for the tournament. "They don't get drunk, they don't get aggressive, they are just happy and fun. It's so refreshing."

Her observations were echoed by journalists, police, stadium staff and just regular folk used to the lowbrow antics of European hockey or soccer fans, known for starting fights or at least annoying others with their belligerent and often drunken carousing.

Instead, you could find the Israelis singing everything from the Hatikvah to Maccabi team songs, exchanging memorabilia with fans of the other three teams in the championship — including the one they crushed in the semifinal, Spain's Tau Ceramica, and the Russian squad that denied them this year's championship.

Some Czech journalists attributed the fans' respectability to the more laid-back attitude of basketball fans worldwide in comparison to fans of other sports. Others said that anyone able to plunk down more than \$1,200 for a trip to the championships was going to be more sophisticated than your average soccer yahoos.

But there were so many other qualities that distinguished the Israelis.

First was their sheer number. Sazka stadium holds 18,000 spectators, and in the semifinals and finals in which Maccabi participated, more than 80 percent of the seats were filled with yellow-and-blue-clad Israelis who sang, clapped and danced for the entire game, without the usual taunting of the opposing side.

Veteran Czech sportswriter Frantisek Bouc said organizers were hoping Maccabi would make it to the finals.

"It's known all around Europe that they have some of the most loyal fans," he said.

As is the case with most European teams, Americans number among Maccabi's stars, including the team's most beloved player, Anthony Parker. The team is about 40 percent native Israeli, and two of the American players are married to Israelis.

"It doesn't matter to us if they are from Pluto — they are the Israeli team, and we love them," said Guy Alalof, who came to Prague for the game from the Negev town of Yeruham.

"There is no other European basketball team that can generate such a following," said Iren Harel, from Kfar Saba.

Dedication to the team comes also from a desire to focus on something positive "when there are so many political and security issues that trouble Israelis," Harel said, an opinion endorsed by many other fans during the weekend tournament.

The Israeli fervor led to some remarkable scenes in Prague.

After Maccabi won its semifinal Friday, 500 Israelis made their way to the Hilton to welcome Shabbat with Chabad. In a city with only 1,500 registered members of the Jewish community, and typically no more than 200 at any religious event, the spontaneous singing and dancing in the Hilton entry hall was a unique spectacle.

At the Shabbat dinner, chants of "moshiach, moshiach" — Messiah, Messiah — were interspersed with "tzahov, tzahov," or yellow, in honor of Maccabi.

The Shabbat event was held thanks to Ya'acov Globerman, reportedly the only rabbi in Israel closely associated with a sports

team. He is the rabbi of Maccabi coach Pini Gershon, who met him three years ago at a Chabad class that teaches the basics of Judaism to secular Jews.

Since that time the two have partnered in a charity organization, Hand to Hand, that has helped more than 50,000 needy Israelis. Gershon, who has said this would be his last season with Maccabi, has become more observant in recent years, mentioning God in his press conferences and even walking five miles to the stadium from his hotel on Saturday — "although without a yarmulke," Globerman noted.

As for the relationship between God and basketball, Globerman told JTA, "A stronger belief in God can help the coach in everything he does."

Ziv Rafalovitz, a fan from Tel Aviv, said he thought Globerman brought the team good luck.

"A lot of miracles happened for this team to get to the Final Four this year, since they were not having a great season," he said.

Maccabi fans range from Orthodox to secular. Rafalovitz said more religious Jews were beginning to follow basketball

because of Globerman's celebrity status.

Fortunately for them, Sazka Arena served up kosher hot dogs — though, at \$13.33 each, they cost about 15 times as much as a non-kosher Czech wiener.

Prague's Chabad rabbi, Manis Barash, was ecstatic to have hundreds of people at the Chabad house on Saturday, which normally hosts no more than 20 or 30 worshippers on Shabbat. He arranged the Hilton dinner and set up "mitzvah stations" for people to lay tefillin outside the stadium.

"You see these Israelis on a Friday night? They could go to the disco, but instead they are going to pray," Barash said, though he acknowledged that many went to the disco or the casino after praying.

Even in defeat, the Israelis dutifully waved their flags and sang several choruses of "Maccabi Maccabi."

"We'll be in Athens next year," said a slightly dejected Oren Rosenberg of Tel Aviv, sweating through the yellow and blue paint on his cheeks after the game ended, "for sure at the finals."

ARTS & CULTURE

Israeli fans 'don't get drunk, they don't get aggressive, they are just happy and fun.'

Martina Kucerova
Prague sportswriter

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S.: P.A. failed on counter-terror

Palestinian counter-terrorism efforts last year fell "far short" of U.S. expectations, a State Department report said.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' "public condemnation of terrorist acts was not matched by decisive security operations following attacks against Israelis," said the chapter on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 2005 country report on terrorism issued last Friday. The report did not cover this year, when Palestinians elected the Hamas terrorist group to power.

Palestinian security forces "did not take decisive actions to end the use of Palestinian territory for attacks on Israeli civilians" and the Palestinian Authority "did not make any sustained effort to dismantle terrorist infrastructure in territory under its control," the report said.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian security forces contributed to the failure, the report said, but the Palestinian Authority's "lack of political will" to confront terrorists "was the primary cause."

Rice: No Wolfensohn replacement for now

The "Quartet" guiding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will not replace its envoy for now because of Hamas intransigence. James Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president, until this week represented the diplomatic grouping of the United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations.

He quit because of the election of the terrorist group Hamas to power in the Palestinian Authority, and Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, said the group's refusal to recognize Israel or renounce terrorism meant he would not be replaced for the time being.

"If we believed that conditions were such that a special envoy could really do his work at this particular time, we wouldn't be seeking a replacement — Jim Wolfensohn, I hope, would be staying," Rice said Monday at Wolfensohn's farewell at the State Department. "And so that's why there isn't a replacement."

Wolfensohn circumspect on isolation

The senior envoy from the "Quartet" guiding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process came out against aid cuts to the Hamas government.

As he prepared to step down this week, James Wolfensohn said that isolating the Palestinian Authority under Hamas could backfire.

"It would surprise me if one could win by getting all the kids out of school or starving the Palestinians," he said Monday during a press conference with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The U.S.-led boycott of the Hamas administration does not preclude aid payments to non-governmental organizations working directly with needy Palestinians.

But Wolfensohn, in a report to the Quartet leaked to the press, voiced doubt that the aid shortfall could be filled through those means. "Neither the U.N. nor the NGOs many of the donors are looking toward have the capacity to fulfill these roles," he wrote.

Republican chairman booed at AJCommittee event

The chairman of the Republican Party was booed at an American Jewish Committee event over comments on Iraq.

Ken Mehlman, who is Jewish, said Iraq posed less of a challenge now than under Saddam Hussein. Mehlman was otherwise politely received when he spoke Tuesday at the AJCommittee's 100th anniversary celebrations in Washington, and he got warm applause when he said the Bush administration would not tolerate an Iranian nuclear bomb and always would stand by Israel.

The room burst into applause, however, when AJCommittee board member Edith Everett asked Mehlman to "take a message" to Presi-

dent Bush to stop linking Israel and Iran. "It does not help Israel and it does not help American Jews to appear to be stimulators of any action against Iran," Everett said.

She added that "it's easy to understand why Iran is not worried about us" because Iraq is consuming so many U.S. resources.

Mehlman replied by acknowledging that Iraq was a "challenge," but claimed it's "less of a challenge than when Saddam Hussein was in power."

Reform launches 30-day Darfur campaign

The Reform movement will lead a 30-day multifaith push to maintain the campaign for Darfur.

The campaign, announced Tuesday, will include lobbying of diplomats from nations that are in a position to pressure the Sudanese government to end the massacres carried out by government-allied Arab militias in Darfur. The Reform movement will lead the movement.

MIDDLE EAST

Iran: Israel's first

The first target in any Iran-U.S. conflict will be Israel, a senior Iranian military official said. "We have announced that wherever America does something evil, the first place that we target will be Israel," Revolutionary Guards Rear Admiral Mohammed-Ibrahim Dehkani said Tuesday, according to Reuters.

War games in the Persian Gulf last month that included the launching of long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads were a "warning to those countries that threaten Iran, including America and the Zionist regime," Dehkani said.

The United States has not counted out military action to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, though President Bush has emphasized that for now he prefers diplomacy. Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, but U.N. inspectors say Iran is probably developing weapons.

UAE leads in Israel boycott

The United Arab Emirates is the overwhelming leader in requests for compliance with the Arab boycott of Israel, according to a report to Congress.

Of the 1,037 queries demanding boycott compliance that U.S. companies received in financial year 2005, 408 came from the UAE, the Congressional Research Service reported last month in a report made available on the Web site of the Federation of American Scientists.

The requests were for compliance with the secondary and tertiary boycotts of companies that deal with Israel. Second in requests was Lebanon, with 84. Some requests came from non-Arab countries, including India and Nigeria. UAE participation in the boycott helped scuttle a deal this year to contract the management of six major U.S. ports to Dubai, one of the emirates.

Israeli population passes 7 million

Israel's population passed 7 million. In census data released this week ahead of Israel's 58th Independence Day, the Central Bureau of Statistics said there are 7,026,000 Israeli citizens — an almost nine-fold increase since the state was founded in 1948.

Seventy-six percent of the population is Jewish, 20 percent is Christian or Arab Muslim, with the remainder being immigrants or foreign workers without religious classification. Some 21,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel over the past year, almost half of them from the former Soviet Union.

There were 2,500 immigrants from France and 2,000 from the United States.