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## ISRAELI ROUNDUP

**JUST 23,200 immigrants arrived in Israel in 2003 - 31% fewer than last year, according to the country's Central Chamber of Statistics. It's the lowest number of olim to arrive since 1990 and includes a 77% drop in immigration from Argentina and 33% from the former Soviet republics. Since 1990, 1.2 million people have immigrated to Israel, according to the report. Meanwhile, 7.5% of those who arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s have left the country. The majority of them - about 68,000 of 906,000 arrivals - moved to the United States and Canada.**

YITZHAK Rabin's assassin Yigal Amir formally asked prison authorities on Sunday for permission to marry Larissa Trimbobler, a 38-year-old divorcee who met him during visits. Upon hearing of Amir's wedding plans last week, Labour Party leader Shimon Peres proposed that the Knesset pass a law denying Amir the conjugal privileges usually accorded to prison inmates in Israel.

ISRAEL'S Bank **Leumi** is holding hundreds of inactive accounts of **Holocaust** victims, according to an accountant who led a Knesset probe of the bank. Yehuda Barlev said documents revealed that Bank **Leumi** not only knew how much money belonged to the **Holocaust** victims but used some of their assets for its own business expenses. Bank officials rejected the charges as "myths".

JORDANIAN experts have reportedly fixed a bulge in a retaining wall of the Temple Mount which was allegedly caused by renovation work conducted by the Wakf - the Islamic trust that oversees the mount compound. Israeli experts said the bulge could have caused the wall to collapse, but the Jordanians denied the defect was so serious.

ISRAELI police forensics specialists have managed to decipher segments of the diary Israeli astronaut Col. Ilan Ramon kept on the doomed Space Shuttle Columbia. A native American tracker discovered fragments of paper from the diary in Texas months ago, and NASA officials sent the items to Ramon's widow Rona, who passed them on to the forensic experts.

WOMEN in Green activists brought some 350,000 signatures of people opposed to a Palestinian state to a meeting with President Moshe Katsav on Sunday. The petition, which included the names of some 200 Israeli Arabs, said a Palestinian state would "jeopardise the continued existence of Israel."

ZVI Mazel, Israel's controversial Ambassador to Sweden, is to be pensioned off at the end of March, soon after his 65th birthday. Mazel captured international media attention last week after pulling the plug on an art exhibit he felt glorified terrorism. A career diplomat for nearly 40 years, he was previously ambassador to Egypt.

JERUSALEM is the poorest of Israel's large cities, according to a new survey. Tel Aviv ranked high on the list of cities ranked by the Central Bureau of Statistics, as did Haifa and Rishon le-Zion. Per-capita income, the unemployment rate and the number of residents who receive

welfare were among the factors used in the rankings.

FOREIGN Minister Silvan Shalom says Israel would be willing to re-route or even remove the West Bank security barrier under a peace agreement. Noting that Israel went 35 years without a fence and began building it only reluctantly to stop terrorist attacks, he insisted: "The fence is reversible. Human lives are irreversible."

THE Israeli organisation Save a Child's Heart is flying youngsters to the Wolfson Medical Centre in Holon for heart surgery. Children from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria and Russia will join more than 750 treated by the group since it was founded in 1995.

EUROPEAN Union investigators are in Jerusalem investigating claims by the International Monetary Fund that as much as \$1.1 billion of EU funding was laundered into illegal operations by the Palestinian Authority.



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