

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Study: Jewish population down

The U.S. Jewish population has declined by 5 percent during the past 10 years. The total Jewish population in the United States now stands at 5.2 million, according to the just-released National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001. [Pages 1, 4]

Sharon: Gaza actions to continue

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel will continue its anti-terror operations in the Gaza Strip. Speaking to reporters Tuesday, Sharon called the previous day's raid of a Hamas stronghold in southern Gaza a success.

Some of the 14 Palestinians killed in the raid were civilians, Israeli officials said. Sharon expressed regret for the civilian casualties, but said Israel had to prevent future terror attacks.

The raid drew criticism from the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia.

In a statement, the White House expressed concern over Israeli raids "that have resulted in the deaths and wounding of many Palestinian civilians."

On Tuesday, the Israeli commander in Gaza, Brig. Gen. Israel Ziv, acknowledged that none of the people killed in Monday's raid was wanted by Israel.

Sharon skips N.Y. visit

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is planning to scale back his visit to the United States next week because of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Sharon told reporters Tuesday that he is cutting out a stopover in New York, where he was supposed to meet with Jewish leaders.

Sharon's Oct. 16 meeting with President Bush will go ahead as planned.

Crown Heights retrial likely

The U.S. Supreme Court paved the way for a third trial stemming from the 1991 Crown Heights riots.

The high court decided this week not to consider a defense request to throw out charges against Lemrick Nelson stemming from the riots in the Brooklyn neighborhood.

During those riots, a Chasidic man, Yankel Rosenbaum, was fatally stabbed during black violence that followed the death of Gavin Cato, a black child hit by a car in a Chasidic motorcade.

A smaller, graying American Jewry poses new challenges for community

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — America's Jewish population declined by 5 percent during the past 10 years, according to a new survey, a trend that is likely to continue given the community's aging population and low birth rates.

The number of Jews now stands at 5.2 million, down from 5.5 million in 1990, even as the total U.S. population is growing, according to the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001.

The picture of a declining, graying population was unveiled Tuesday by the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of local Jewish federations that sponsored what is believed to be the most comprehensive demographic survey of the Jewish community to date.

The statistics released this week — including the fact that Jews now represent 2 percent of the American population — represent only the demographic findings of the survey.

Other parts of the study, which will address issues of Jewish identity and affiliation, will be released at the group's annual gathering in Philadelphia at the end of November.

The study is likely to be scrutinized for years to come as the findings spark new debates about the numbers themselves and what they mean for the Jewish community.

Much of the study pointed to demographic changes that have been emerging for years, some contained in the 1990 NJPS.

Other findings confirmed what has been known, but they are still seen as significant, including the aging population and the low birth rates.

The median age of American Jews climbed from 37 in 1990 to 41 in 2000, with 19 percent age 65 and older, compared with 15 percent in 1990. At the same time, Jewish women approaching the end of their childbearing years, aged 40-44, have had an average of 1.8 children, which is below the replacement level of 2.1.

With fewer Jewish children, agencies might examine policy questions about Jewish camp fees, Jewish school costs, even college aid.

One who welcomed the scrutiny on an aging Jewish population was Rabbi Dayle Friedman, who is currently developing Hiddur: The Center for Aging and Judaism at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

"I hope we'll stop viewing this as bad news but as an invitation to tap the resources of people who are older and tap their creativity in ways we haven't imagined," said the Philadelphia-based rabbi, who has worked extensively with the Jewishly elderly.

Referring to the overall demographic trends, Frank Mott, a professor of sociology at Ohio State University who co-chaired the National Technical Advisory Committee, which helped steer the 2000-01 NJPS, said: "It doesn't look too good."

"Unless there are some significant changes" in Jewish demographic patterns, Mott added, Jews ultimately "are not going to replace themselves."

America's 5.2 million Jews live in what the NJPS identified as 2.9 million Jewish households. But the study found a total of 6.7 million people in those households, which means that 1.5 million people in them are not Jewish.

NJPS officials are not yet saying how those non-Jews are related to the identified Jews.

To study America's Jews, the NJPS — the largest Jewish demographic study to date — surveyed 4,500 Jews from every state and the District of Columbia.

The NJPS relied on four questions to determine Jewishness. They were: What is your religion, if any; do you consider yourself Jewish for any reason; if your religion is

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian girl said killed in Gaza

A 10-year-old Palestinian girl was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers near the Gaza-Egypt border on Tuesday, according to Palestinian sources.

The girl was hit when soldiers fired at youths who were throwing rocks at tanks and bulldozers, the sources said. The army had no immediate comment.

Four Israelis wounded in ambush

Four Israelis were wounded, one critically, in a Palestinian ambush in the West Bank. Following the attack on a road near Hebron, Israeli troops entered Hebron and imposed a curfew. Soldiers also imposed a curfew on the nearby Palestinian village of Yatta and launched searches for the assailants, Israel Radio reported.

In another development, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian near Tulkarm on Monday night. The Palestinian was suspected of being on his way to carry out a terror attack, the report said.

Hamas, P.A. clash in Gaza

Hamas supporters threw grenades at the headquarters of the Palestinian police in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday. The incident took place after Hamas members killed a senior Palestinian police officer Monday and after four Hamas members were killed in a clash with Palestinian police hours later. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority held negotiations Tuesday but have not reached a truce, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

In another development, Palestinian official Nabil Sha'ath lashed out at Monday's murder of the police officer.

Sha'ath told the Voice of Palestine radio that the Palestinian people must understand that the Palestinian Authority is the supreme authority and that all illegal weapons in the Palestinian territories must be collected to avoid such incidents in the future.

not Judaism, do you have a Jewish mother or father; and if your religion is not Jewish, were you raised Jewish?

Those questions remain virtually unchanged from the 1990 NJPS, which threw American Jewry into upheaval by showing that 52 percent of Jews who had married in the previous five years had chosen non-Jewish spouses.

That revelation sparked intense debate and soul-searching and spurred tens of millions of dollars' worth of programs in the past decade meant to solidify Jewish identity and reach out to Jews.

Those in the Jewish demographics business — and the Jewish professional world — had waited eagerly to hear Tuesday's initial results, which NJPS officials had kept closely guarded for weeks.

Among those who found the results less than surprising was Egon Mayer, who chairs the Brooklyn College sociology department and directs the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

"I wish I could say they have got it all wrong, but on this macro level, it's pretty much what every study has found. They've identified what's real," said Mayer, who sat on the NJPS advisory panel.

If U.S. Jewry dropped 5.45 percent during a decade when the U.S. population expanded by 33 million to 288 million, in some part due to immigration, then even "a modest decline is not a good thing," Mayer said.

Mayer led his own 2001 demographic survey meant as a second opinion to the 2000-2001 NJPS. His survey, which used criteria similar to the 1990 NJPS, counted 5.5 million U.S. Jews.

But Mayer also found that only 51 percent of them identified themselves as Jews, down from 58 percent in 1990.

One critic of the NJPS who issued his own report last month, identifying 6.7 million Jews, blasted the initial results as a "methodological disaster."

Gary Tobin, president of the San Francisco-based Institute for Jewish & Community Research, said the NJPS scared away some Jews by asking screening questions about their religion immediately. Unlike his own study, which located 250 Jewish households by first asking a series of general questions, the NJPS "waded way too quickly" into the Jewish survey, he said.

But Ira Sheskin, a member of the NJPS advisory panel and a geography professor at the University of Miami, said the NJPS used synagogue and Jewish community center lists of known Jews to test whether people admitted to being Jews.

Sheskin, who has criticized Tobin's study for casting too wide a net in determining Jews, added that the dueling studies are ultimately "about the same" and differ largely along lines of "how you go about defining who is a Jew."

Indeed, some demographers cautioned that it would be a mistake to focus too heavily on the NJPS numbers.

Calvin Goldscheider, a professor of Judaic studies at Brown University, said one key challenge will be to study the 1.5 million non-Jews living in the 2.9 million Jewish households the study identified.

"Who are these people? What's attractive about the Jewish community from the point of view of a non-Jew?" he said.

These non-Jews are associated with Jews because the community is family-oriented, well-educated, relatively high income and strongly American, he said. Given the earlier focus on intermarriage, the community now should focus not on its smaller numbers, but on what kind of Jewish life is happening in these homes, he said.

Mayer, who has been involved in outreach programs for interfaith families, agreed.

The greater the decline in those identified as Jews, Mayer said, "the greater the question is, 'Who are these people in the Jewish household, and what impact will they have on the life of the Jewish community?'"

Stephen Cohen, a sociologist of American Jewry and professor at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, said few sociologists would be surprised that after a decade of high intermarriage rates, the NJPS pointed to many non-Jews living with Jews.

Now, the community needs to "look at how to intensify the involvement of Jews, and how to negotiate the boundary between Jews and non-Jews," said Cohen, who was a consultant to the NJPS. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Report: Firm used slave labor

German media giant Bertelsmann used Jewish slave labor and made large profits by selling millions of anti-Semitic books during the Nazi era, according to a commission set up by the firm.

In a report issued Monday, the commission also said that Bertelsmann's longtime contention that it was a victim of the Nazis was a lie.

The Nazis closed the firm in 1944, but probably because the Nazis' own publishing house wanted to kill off competition, not because of any subversive texts published by Bertelsmann, according to the commission.

Accepting the report, the company immediately issued a statement expressing regret for its wartime activities and for subsequent inaccuracies in its corporate history.

Shoah-denial conference blasted

The Anti-Defamation League called on Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to denounce a Holocaust-denial conference planned for Oct. 12-14 in Verona.

The group organizing the conference is called the Nuovo Ordine Europeo — the New European Order — which the ADL said is dedicated to promoting Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism.

Y.U. bequest worth \$36 million

Yeshiva University plans to begin awarding scholarships from a multimillion-dollar bequest to the school.

The scholarship and loan fund was created after Anne Scheiber, a retired New York civil servant, left \$22 million to the school when she died in 1995. The bequest was invested during extended probate hearings and is now worth \$36 million.

Beginning with the current academic year, students enrolled in Y.U.'s Stern College for Women and those attending the Albert Einstein College of Medicine who previously graduated from Stern will be eligible for the scholarship.

Jew wins vote for Rio legislature

A Jewish candidate won the most votes for the Rio de Janeiro state assembly. Carlos Minc was re-elected for the fifth time when Brazilian voters went to the polls Sunday to vote in federal, state and municipal elections.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil's most populous state, Jewish candidate David Neto lost his bid for the state legislature.

In the presidential vote, leftist Luis Inacio Lula da Silva fell short of the majority needed to win in the first round. He will square off against the government-backed candidate, Jose Serra, in an Oct. 27 runoff.

Groups seeking to hammer out joint resolution about Iraq action

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish groups are raising concerns about a draft resolution from the umbrella organization of American Jewry expressing support for U.S. actions on Iraq, with one key member even saying it will not sign on.

Yet despite the concerns — which come from both sides of the political aisle — most groups seem willing to sign on to the five-paragraph statement from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The debate comes as Jewish groups seek to establish a common position on an issue that could have important repercussions for Israel and American Jewry.

A draft of the statement expresses support for President Bush's and Congress' efforts to make Iraq stop developing weapons of mass destruction and to comply with U.N. resolutions and "other standards set forth by the president."

The Conference of Presidents hoped to receive member groups' feedback by Wednesday and issue a final statement later this week.

The draft reads: "We support the measures necessary to ensure Iraqi disarmament, including the consequences for Iraq if it fails to meet its obligations."

Some Jewish leaders say the resolution is too vague, granting support to Bush without specifying what Jewish groups do or don't support.

Several groups argue that the resolution does not enunciate a preference for nonviolent tactics, the need to build U.N. support for any action and a clear explanation of why military action is needed, steps some Jewish groups have called for.

"It's vague in the bad sense," one Jewish leader said. "It's a blank check for the president to do whatever he sees fit."

Others say the wording is not strong enough, mentioning only "consequences" — rather than an explicit warning of military action — if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein does not meet with U.S. demands.

Many leaders say they will sign on to the resolution despite their concerns. Few were willing to speak for attribution before a final version of the resolution is released.

Malcolm Hoenlein, the Conference of Presidents' executive vice chairman, said he has received several requests for revisions to the resolution and has tried to accommodate them. But the resolution generally has received overwhelming support, he said.

There will be no vote on the statement, but Hoenlein is seeking unanimity.

Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said the vagueness might be an indication that the conference has heeded the reservations expressed by many groups. The JCPA last month tabled a resolution on the Iraq issue, a sign that Jewish support for a U.S. attack may not be as comprehensive as once thought. The JCPA is expected to review its policy at an Oct. 14 meeting in New York.

The American Jewish Committee, one of the largest groups in the Conference of Presidents, says it will not sign on to any resolution because it doesn't think this is the time for Jewish groups to speak out.

"It's not helpful for American Jewish organizations to be out front on this," said Kenneth Bandler, the AJCommittee's spokesman.

But the AJCommittee and the Anti-Defamation League have come under pressure. The American Jewish Congress, a staunch supporter of Bush's policy, issued a press release last week calling on the two other organizations to "take the tough stand."

"Now, we're in a full-fledged debate in Congress and the United Nations, and Jewish groups should state their position publicly," the president of the AJCongress, Jack Rosen, told JTA. "If this is not the time, I can't imagine a better time."

The AJCongress and three other Jewish groups were expected to express support for Bush's Iraq policy at a press conference Wednesday on Capitol Hill. Joining the AJCongress and Sens. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) will be B'nai B'rith International, the Orthodox Union and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

ADL National Director Abraham Foxman called Rosen's advice to the ADL "arrogant grandstanding." □