

IN THE NEWS

After bombing, Israel seals off Gaza Strip

Israel sealed off the Gaza Strip and may resume strikes against Hamas leaders after Wednesday's suicide bombing.

Thousands of Palestinian workers from Gaza had been allowed to work in Israel following a lull in terrorism this fall, but a total blockade was reimposed following Wednesday's attack at the Erez border crossing.

President Bush touts faith-based programs

President Bush touted his faith-based initiative.

In a speech Thursday in New Orleans, Bush said he was "changing a culture" by making it easier for both churches and synagogues to receive federal financial aid for their social-service programming.

Several Jewish organizations are against the president's faith-based program, concerned that the programs blur the line separating church and state.

En garde for Israelis in Jordan tournament

Jordan's fencing union allowed an Israeli team to compete at a tournament in Aqaba.

The head of the fencing union originally had said that Israel's two competitors would not be allowed to attend the international tournament beginning Thursday because their presence might lead to a boycott by Arab fencers.

But the union reversed course under pressure from the Jordanian government, Israel and the International Fencing Federation.

Still, the organizers refused to fly the Israeli flag alongside those of other nations competing, forcing the Israeli fencers to climb the flagpole to do it themselves.

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REMINDER: The JTA World Report will not publish Monday, Jan. 19.



WORLD REPORT

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Brian Hendler

Palestinian children watch construction of the Israeli security fence in Abu Dis, near Jerusalem.

What's old is new: The idea of a binational state resurfaces

By **LESLIE SUSSER**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When the Palestinian Authority prime minister warned recently that Palestinians might abandon their goal of an independent state and instead seek a single state of Arabs and Jews, Ahmed Qurei was playing one of his trump cards in the conflict with Israel.

The idea is ultimately to delegitimize Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip through an international campaign for a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, in which Arabs soon would be a majority. If successful, the strategy would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

Abandoned years ago by a PLO that ostensibly had recognized Israel's right to exist,

the one-state idea has made a comeback in recent months among left-wing intellectuals and among Palestinians who either fear Israeli plans to withdraw unilaterally from areas the Palestinians claim or who feel they are close to realizing cherished dreams of dismantling the Jewish state.

The plan is not without its problems. The United States remains fully committed to President Bush's vision of separate Israeli and Palestinian states living next to each other in peace, as does the European Union.

Moreover, the Israeli government's declared intention to withdraw unilaterally from most of the West Bank and Gaza is designed partly to preempt international pressure for a binational state. Once Israelis and Palestinians are clearly

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**NEWS
ANALYSIS**

■ Old becomes new again with notion of a single, binational state

Continued from page 1

separated, the theory goes, the single-state solution will lose much of its appeal.

Qurei's binational threat came in an early January interview with Reuters and was in response to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan, if the peace process remains moribund, to withdraw unilaterally from much of the West Bank behind Israel's security fence.

If that means annexing land the Palestinians claim, Qurei declared that the Palestinians would have no choice but to press for a binational state because, he said, they would be left without enough land to establish a viable state of their own.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell quickly rejected Qurei's position as contrary to the "road map" peace plan. Probably influenced by Powell's stance, Palestinian officials meeting two days later took a different tack: They proposed preempting Sharon's plan by declaring a Palestinian state in all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a unilateral countermove that would at least be consistent with America's two-state vision.

Clearly, the Palestinians have been badly rattled by the fence's efficacy in preventing terrorist attacks and by Israel's unilateral separation formula. Now they're trying to create levers of pressure to disrupt the planned Israeli moves.

The Palestinian-led appeal on the fence to the International Court of Justice in The Hague is one such gambit; Qurei's binational statement and the unilateral declaration of statehood threat are two more.

Though the Palestinians for now still officially favor a two-state solution, P.A. policy easily could switch to a binational state if conditions on the ground or the international stage change.

But how effective would such policy be?

Much will depend on Israel's security fence. Its very presence creates, de facto, a two-state situation. But if the fence is delegitimized and perceived by the inter-

national community to be dispossessing Palestinians, calls for a binational state to replace what is seen as an unjust reality could gain momentum.

For many Palestinian intellectuals, the binational threat is the ultimate weapon against Israel. It revives the old PLO demand for a secular-democratic state in all of the land between the Jordan and Mediterranean, including Israel.

The demand expresses a goal that would mean the elimination of Israel. Even if that proves unrealistic, it still could be useful as a means of pressuring Israel: The specter of a binational state, the thinking goes, could be used to wring concessions from Israel in negotiations for a two-state model.

Besides the Palestinians, pressure for a binational state could come from Israeli Arabs and left-wing intellectuals in Europe and the United States. Azmi Beshara, an Arab member of Israel's Knesset and a leading Israeli Arab intellectual, has been touting the binational idea for years.

Over the past few months, binationalism also has been gaining ground in Western intellectual circles. In *The New York Review of Books* last October, New York University professor Tony Judt caused a stir when he described Israel as "an anachronism" that ought to be replaced by a binational state with a Palestinian majority.

Support for a binational state among Jewish Israelis is confined to a left-wing fringe. When maverick left-winger Haim Hanegbi tried to circulate a paper in sup-

port of the idea among members of the radical Gush Shalom group last summer, he encountered wall-to-wall opposition and decided to leave the group.

Another maverick, Meron Benvenisti, vaguely proposes Jewish and Palestinian cantons but is not sure how this would work and says he still dreams of a sovereign Jewish state.

For most Israelis, the binational state is the ultimate nightmare because it spells the end of the Zionist dream of a homeland for the Jewish people. While Palestinians and some left-wing intellectuals may see this as the optimal outcome, many Israelis fear it could happen simply by default.

Haifa University geographer Arnon Sofer, one of the most active campaigners for separation between Israelis and Palestinians, warns that if Israeli leaders fail to act in time, they could wind up with a binational situation of their own making.

According to Sofer, the biggest threat to Israel is not Iran's missiles or Syria's chemical weapons, but what he calls the "demographic time bomb." According to Sofer, there already is a non-Jewish majority when Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are taken as a single unit.

If nothing is done to separate Israel from the West Bank and Gaza, he says, Israel could face an apartheid-like situation, with the Palestinian majority demanding one-man-one-vote in a binational state.

Sofer calls for immediate separation from the Palestinians and calls the security fence "a last, desperate attempt to save the State of Israel."

The fear that Israel could become a pariah state facing international sanctions for occupying Palestinians while denying them political rights is driving Likud leaders like Sharon and his deputy, Ehud Olmert, to press for separation.

Olmert put his fears on the table when he called for unilateral separation.

"I am appalled at the thought that at the head of the campaign against us we will find the same liberal Jewish organizations that carried the struggle against apartheid in South Africa on their shoulders," he said in a December interview with Israel's *Yediot Achronot* newspaper.

Qurei's seemingly off-the-cuff remark was a first shot in what could become one of Israel's most difficult wars of survival.

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.) ■

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Jews good with pork in government spending

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When it comes to politics, even the Jews want pork.

American Jewish communities and some national organizations have become well versed in getting their share of millions of dollars available for social-service programs, medical research or other community essentials.

A search of the 2004 omnibus spending bill under consideration in Congress this month found 37 earmarks with the word "Jewish" in the name, amounting to \$9,973,000 in appropriations.

If you include the terms "Hebrew" and "Sephardic," it climbs to 41 appropriation earmarks and \$10,723,000.

Many other projects of importance to local Jewish communities may not have identifiable names and could be buried in the vast spending document.

Getting funding for a project takes massive time, energy and, often, money. Many Jewish communities send representatives to Washington to make the pitch directly to their lawmakers, as well as members of congressional appropriations committees. Some hire Washington lobbyists to make the necessary introductions for them.

Next week will be an important one for the budget process. In its first session of the year, the Senate will vote on the omnibus spending package for 2004, because it did not pass all 13 spending bills before the end of last year's session.

The omnibus bill lumps all appropriations not approved by Congress into one piece of legislation, and contains \$328.1 billion in discretionary spending. It passed the House on Dec. 8 by a vote of 242-176.

President Bush's State of the Union address on Jan. 20 then will launch the budget process for 2005. The president will lay out his fiscal priorities in the speech before officially submitting his budget proposal early next month.

Garnering money for one's local Jewish community depends in large part on the influence of local congressmen. Five of the Jewish appropriations next year are in Pennsylvania, amounting to \$950,000, in part because Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), is chairman of the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education subcommittee of the appropriations panel.

Jewish officials bristle when they hear

the projects described as "pork," a term used to describe pet projects in a lawmaker's congressional district.

"One man's pork is another's essential program," said Reva Price, the Washington representative for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

JARC: A Jewish Association for Residential Care in suburban Detroit, received \$500,000 in 2003 for its facility for people with developmental disabilities. It is likely to receive an additional \$150,000 this year.

Joyce Keller, JARC's executive director, says her program provides an essential service and shouldn't be lumped in with more frivolous appropriations. She cited one notorious example of Washington pork, a study on the sex lives of fireflies.

"These are the needs of people that are not being met by whatever states have to offer," she said of her clients.

JARC began pursuing a federal appropriation because Michigan's state mental-health funds were not properly funding its clients, many of whom are mentally disabled. They hired a lobbyist in Washington, met with their congressmen and both senators and hoped for the best.

"We had no idea, and we were very ecstatic that we were successful," Keller said. "We knew it was a gamble."

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) last month touted six Jewish community projects that were funded in the appropriations process. Among them were allocations to the Sephardic Community Center in Brooklyn and two allocations for the Sephardic Bikur Holim center in Brooklyn.

Brett Heimov, Nadler's Washington chief of staff, said the office receives 15 to 20 requests from the Jewish community each year, and forwards them to the appropriators.

"In 11 years here, I've seen maybe a dozen projects that are just stupid," he said. "Most are worthwhile."

Heimov said appropriators, who have the final say on what projects receive money, prefer programs that already are advanced in their development, giving a better sense of how the money will be spent.

A lawmaker touting a project may go it

alone or may seek additional support when he sends a letter to members of the appropriations committee. Eight lawmakers signed a letter in October to the chairman of an appropriations subcommittee seeking \$543,375 for the Center for Jewish History in New York's archival preservation project. The center was allocated \$328,000.

While some Jewish organizations seek money individually, others group their requests. The United Jewish Communities

helped win \$4,320,000 for 19 Jewish communities for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, or NORCs, which seek to assist elderly living independently in areas with large aging populations.

Robert Goldberg,

UJC's assistant legislative director, said the organization is able to serve as a conduit between the local communities and lawmakers who know the value of NORCs.

"We are the ones that have done the legwork with the appropriation committees and educated them on NORCs as a community based service," he said.

Jewish communities in big cities often need less assistance because they have more resources and are more familiar with the process.

The need for federal appropriations is growing in the Jewish community. Budget crunches in many states, as well as decreases in social-service block grants that give federal money to the states to distribute, have led to a decrease in the availability of other public funding sources, Price said.

It is hard to pin down some of the ingredients for a successful bid for funds. Communities with Republican lawmakers may be served better because the Republican leaders of the divided Congress have been reticent to provide funds for Democratic districts, Jewish officials said.

Some suggest that having a Jewish lawmaker in one's district helps. Others say that Jewish lawmakers, concerned about a backlash, try not to have too many Jewish projects funded in their districts.

One Democratic aide said he believed Republicans may be working to give more assistance to Jewish communities as part of their efforts to court the Jewish vote in 2004.

Some Jewish groups hire Washington lobbyists to make the pitch to lawmakers.

Birthrighters in Israel worry for program's future

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — On the stage where Yitzhak Rabin gave his final speech, young American Midwesterners and Israeli students from the Galilee sit together talking about where they were the night the Israeli prime minister was assassinated.

Clustered in a semicircle, the Midwesterners — participants of birthright Israel — listen raptly as their Israeli peers tell of the confusion and horror that rocked the country after Rabin's killing, when most of them were teenagers.

The Americans tell of hearing the news across the globe, on the way home from Hebrew school or basketball practice. They speak of feeling somewhat removed from the events, unable to visualize what life was really like in Israel.

That's why they went on birthright.

Now the Israelis and Americans are touring Israel together — hiking desert canyons, exploring kibbutzim in the north and praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City.

But their tour — part of the birthright Israel program, which offers young Jews free trips to Israel in an effort to boost Jewish pride and bolster bonds with Israel among Diaspora Jews — is facing serious funding problems.

Now in its fourth year, the ambitious \$210 million program provides free 10-day tours of Israel to Diaspora Jews aged 18 to 26 who have never before visited the country on a peer trip. This winter, the program is bringing a record 11,000 young Diaspora Jews to Israel.

In total, some 60,000 Jewish youths from 35 countries have come to Israel on birthright since the launch of the program. About 10,000 Israeli soldiers and students have also participated.

The program was originally initiated for a five-year period, but with the hope it would be extended indefinitely.

“I love it here,” said Jillian Schutkin, 18, from Milwaukee. The trip “has given me a stronger connection to Israel. Israel is something that is always one of the things in the back of your head, but it is something I had to experience for myself.”

With questions about birthright's future funding, organizers are worried about the program's survival.

The program's original \$210 million

price tag for five years was meant to be shared equally between three parties — a handful of Jewish philanthropists, the Israeli government and the North American Jewish federation system.

But due to Israel's recession, the Israeli government drastically cut its funding of the program this year, to \$400,000 from \$9 million the previous year.

In a phone interview from New York, Israel's minister for Diaspora affairs, Natan Sharansky, said that after a lengthy debate in the Cabinet, the government had compromised and would fulfill its financial commitment after this year.

Meanwhile, the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella group also has failed to get all of its members to allocate the amounts requested for the program.

“We don't know where the government and federations are,” said Lynn Schusterman, who, along with her late husband, Charles, was one of the founders of birthright. They were among the philanthropists who each pledged \$5 million to the five-year program.

Because of the drop in funding, far fewer participants will come on the trips this summer as compared with last year, said Gideon Mark, director of marketing for birthright in Israel.

“It will be the first time we will have to cut down on numbers — not because of security, not because of people not wanting to go to Israel, but for the first time it will be because we don't have enough money,” Mark said.

He blamed the UJC for the shortfall.

“It has to do with federations in the United States. We don't have as strong a problem in other communities in the world,” he said.

However, Stephen Hoffman, the president and CEO of the UJC said he believed the federations would come through and fulfill their commitment despite the challenges of fund raising during an economic downturn.

“We believe the federations are willing to continue to pay at about the rate that they are now paying. We believe that the Jewish Agency, who is our partner, is prepared to make a greater investment in the

program,” he said.

Hoffman said that in a bid to lower costs, some federation officials have suggested participants pay for at least a portion of the trip.

Proponents of the program say that though it is costly, birthright is the best possible way to invest in the future of Diaspora-Israel relations and inspire young Jews to become active with their Jewish communities back home.

Many young Jews get their first real sense of Jewish peoplehood and pride on birthright, they say.

“I think strategically, without a strong bond to the Jewish people in the future, the Jewish state will be weakened,” Mark said. “It's the beginning of a lifelong journey that starts here.”

Program officials also argue that birthright is a boon for the Israeli economy, since it has helped boost Israel's tourist industry to the tune of some \$90 million since the program's launch.

Birthright has become the largest foreign tourism operator in the

country since the start of the intifada, bolstering business for hotels, bus companies and tour guides, birthright officials maintained. Furthermore, they said, many birthright alumni return to Israel for extended stays.

In Tel Aviv, the group of Americans and Israeli students visited the Hall of Independence, where David Ben-Gurion declared the birth of the state of Israel in May 1948.

Sitting on wooden chairs similar to those hastily borrowed from the cafes of Tel Aviv for the occasion more than half a century ago, the birthright participants listen to the crackly recording of Ben-Gurion's voice declaring that the Jewish state be called Israel.

“You are living again our history,” the museum guide tells the group. “By learning our history, you are visiting home.”

“There is such an energy here,” observes Alissa Boguslaw, 18, a freshman at the University of Minnesota and a native of St. Louis. “I can't wait to come back.”

(JTA staff writer Rachel Pomerance in New York contributed to this report.)

Birthright officials say the program bolsters Israel's economy by way of tourist dollars.

Criticism mounts ahead of Falash Mura hearing

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — The plane landed at Ben-Gurion Airport shortly after midnight and the Ethiopian passengers filled the plane's doorway, lining up to make their way down the stairs and set foot in their new home.

The planeload of immigrants, which arrived in Israel on Tuesday, was the latest in a steady trickle of Falash Mura making their way from Africa to the Promised Land.

But their comrades back home are still waiting for that trickle to turn into the wave promised nearly a year ago by the Israeli government.

In Israel, criticism about the planned transfer of the Falash Mura community — and the long delay — is mounting.

The Falash Mura are Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors converted to Christianity, many under coercion, but who recently have reverted to Jewish practices.

Opponents of their immigration are asking whether the flow of Ethiopians will ever stop and how Israel will finance the transfer and absorption of the Falash Mura community. An estimated 20,000 Falash Mura remain in Ethiopia.

Next month's scheduled hearing of a petition against the government by Falash Mura activists, and last week's visit to Ethiopia by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, have put the controversy back in the spotlight.

In Ethiopia last week, Shalom toured the Falash Mura community and told people there that he wanted to see them in Israel.

Observers cautioned not to read too much into Shalom's comments, saying the main purpose of the visit was to bolster ties between Israel and the Ethiopian government. The Foreign Ministry had no immediate comment on the trip.

On Feb. 12, Israel's High Court of Justice will hold its second round of hearings on a petition Falash Mura activists filed against the government for allegedly unnecessarily delaying implementation of last year's decision to bring the Falash Mura en masse to Israel.

"We say it's a very clear government decision," said Omri Kaufman, who is handling the case pro bono for a Tel Aviv law firm. "They need to carry it out and not to find reasons not to do it."

There has been a lot of talk but no real action since the petition was filed, he said.

Many Falash Mura in Israel accuse the government of dragging its feet since a landmark Cabinet decision last February to bring all the Falash Mura to Israel, but other Ethiopian-Israeli Jews still have doubts about the Falash Mura's Jewish credentials — even though Israel's Chief Rabbinate and the three main religious denominations have said they're Jews.

Some Ethiopian-Israeli Jews say many professing to be Falash Mura are fraudulently claiming Jewish heritage to escape Ethiopia's crushing poverty.

"We are the Jews who observed our heritage for 2,000 years, and now another group comes and says they are not Jews but want to become Jews," said Dani Adeno, an Ethiopian-Israeli journalist and filmmaker. "I believe that 70 percent, maybe more, have no connection to Judaism."

Because the Falash Mura could not initially prove they had Jewish origins, Israel did not allow them to join the mass airlifts of 1984 and 1991.

Since 1998, some 20,000 Falash Mura have left their rural homes and moved close to urban compounds run by Jewish groups in Addis Ababa and Gondar in hopes of immigrating to Israel.

According to a census conducted by groups advocating their immigration, some 26,000 are able to prove maternal Jewish roots and therefore fit the current Israeli government criteria to move to Israel.

But critics say there's no guarantee that this would be the final number, and fear that many more may try to immigrate.

Despite last year's Cabinet decision, the pace of 300 arrivals a month has not picked up. Those who have come were admitted under the Law of Entry, which allows immigration for humanitarian and family unification purposes.

In recent years, some 11,000 Falash Mura have immigrated and reunited

with their families, according to Israel's Ministry of Absorption.

Absorption Minister Tsipi Livni has said publicly that the Falash Mura can't be brought en masse without proper plans and funds for their absorption, estimated at \$100,000 per person over a lifetime.

In October, leaders of the North American Jewish federation system met with Interior Minister Avraham Poraz and other officials to discuss the funding of absorption. Several proposals were discussed, but no final agreement was reached.

Poraz, who is responsible for implementing last year's decision and who has been criticized for foot-dragging by Falash Mura advocates, has voiced similar concerns.

Among the government's critics is Avraham Neguse, executive director of South Wing to Zion, an Israeli advocacy group for Falash Mura. "Putting economic considerations before saving Jews is a crime against Zionism," he said. "We are demanding the government give answers."

Falash Mura advocates say the famine in Ethiopia requires immediate action. Neguse said Falash Mura community leaders in Ethiopia told him that 40 people have died from famine-related illnesses while waiting to come to Israel.

But officials from the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee — which run the compounds in Ethiopia — defended the health standards for the waiting Falash Mura.

"This medical program ascertains that the health status of the Falash Mura is superb compared to their fellow countrymen, and meets Western standards," said Amir Shaviv, JDC's assistant executive vice president.

Neguse said the government's financial concerns are hypocritical. "It is very, very difficult to imagine why, when they are begging other Jews to come from countries like Russia, America and Argentina, they are raising the question of money for the Ethiopian Jews. I have no doubt there is discrimination," Neguse said.

The Finance Ministry has said that absorption costs for the Falash Mura are exorbitant because of the deep cultural and economic gaps the Ethiopians must overcome to acclimate in Israel.

Ethiopian immigrants typically stay longer in absorption centers than other immigrants, and often go on to live in public housing.

'Putting economic considerations before saving Jews is a crime against Zionism.'

Avraham Neguse
South Wing to Zion

Debate welcomed at education forum

By ANDREW MORRIS

LONDON (JTA) — Two Jews, three opinions.

That old adage may explain a lot about communal strife, but for a precious few days in the English Midlands, a multitude of Jewish opinions were welcomed at an educational conference that is a paragon of communal harmony.

Now in its 23rd year, the Limmud Conference is Europe's largest and perhaps the Jewish world's most influential educational event, attracting more than 2,300 participants and 370 speakers from across the globe.

Remarkably, for an international residential conference of such scale and depth, all but one of its organizers are volunteers.

Limmud, which means learning in Hebrew, is a name that for many in the Jewish and non-Jewish educational world has become synonymous with an inclusive, bottom-up approach to education.

"It's all about the grass roots. Hierarchies just don't exist," explained Clive Lawton, Limmud's executive director and co-founder.

A highly respected educator and occasionally controversial community spokesman, Lawton volunteers for Limmud both at the conference and throughout the year, when the organization organizes smaller educational and social events.

Lawton says Jewish educators in North America can learn from Limmud as a model for a "Festival of Learning."

"For once, I think Europe is taking the lead in Jewish education, and North America has a lot of catching up to do to adapt from a top-heavy structure of learning," Lawton said.

"We let the participants decide what they want to do. We have no ideological or political position, apart from 'It's good for Jews to learn.'"

Over four days in late December at Nottingham University's campus — which Limmudniks take over, dormitories, classrooms and all — singles, couples and families were all given the opportunity to explore diverse facets of Jewish life and tradition.

The approach of "learning for the people by the people" results in a dizzying array of sessions and speakers, ranging from bull sessions about passages from

the Zohar to the rabbinical response to the Internet.

Agenda appears to be a dirty word at Limmud.

With more than 900 sessions — on topics ranging from Jewish law's perspective on organ donation to Israeli politics — the conference caters even to the most esoteric interests.

Listening to the excited chatter at the kibbutz-style meals, where participants, speakers and organizers sit, gossip and debate together, participants seemed to be getting caught up in the buzz.

"Just went to a fascinating shiur," or lecture, "on God's covenant with Abraham — but have got to rush, want to get a good seat for the Sephardi cooking workshop," one participant said hurriedly to another in a typical mealtime exchange.

Such is the range of age, nationality and denomination at the conference that it's nearly impossible to define the typical Limmudnik.

"That's the key to Limmud's success: It's determinedly pluralistic," said Daniel Silverstein, a conference participant, performer and volunteer.

Silverstein, director of Culanu Center, a cultural and social center at Cambridge University, sings the praises of the conference's philosophy — literally.

After spending much of the day helping to look after the many young children at the conference, Silverstein joyously rapped about Jewish pride with Emunah, a group that plays hip-hop and drum-and-bass music for Limmud's late-night audiences.

"What's really amazing is that friends of mine who are not religious came to the conference, and they got as much out of it as my Orthodox friends," Silverstein said. "I challenge anybody not to find some Jewish inspiration here."

So confident are Limmud's volunteers that participants will gain from the conference that the organization promises in its mission statement, "Wherever you find yourself, Limmud will take you one step further on your Jewish journey."

More than half of those who attend

the conference or other Limmud events — held in the United Kingdom, Holland and Israel, and soon in Toronto and New York — end up returning.

The speakers range from thinkers such as Rabbi Norman Lamm, the Torah scholar and chancellor of New York's Yeshiva University, and Rabbi Natan Lopes Cardozo, to Nimrod Barkan, the senior policy adviser of Israel's Foreign Ministry, and Jennifer Bleyer, founder of the alternative Jewish magazine Heeb.

The conference also offered an entire day focused on the Jewish community's relations with the Islamic world.

Prominent European Muslim figures came to debate and share jokes with Jewish members of panel discussions and seminars.

Even controversial views — such as the Muslim perception of Israel — were treated with respect.

For the Muslim speakers, many of whom brought young families, the opportunity to meet and eat together left a lasting impression.

"We feel welcomed and know we are among good friends," said Fuad Nahdi, editor of Q-News, an influential London-based Muslim magazine.

Bused from one campus building to another, conference participants said they felt as if they were in a high-energy cocoon.

"You know, I have no idea what's happening in the outside world," an Israeli professor told an American colleague on the way to one session. "And frankly, I don't want to."

No one seemed to mind that there was not a television or a newspaper — apart from the London Jewish Chronicle — to be found on campus.

By the end of the conference, which fell on New Year's Day, participants exuded a sense of achievement, both as individuals and a community.

"I've never been so excited to be Jewish," said Wendy Bergman, a grandmother from the tiny Jewish community of Newcastle in northern England. "I'm somewhere between the higher ground and the clouds."

British Jewish educators are taking the lead in innovation, an organizer says.

FIRST PERSON

Blacks should join Jews in fighting anti-Semitic uptick

By RABBI MARC SCHNEIER
AND RUSSELL SIMMONS

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Jewish people are under attack.

Horrific expressions of anti-Semitism are spreading across the United States and the world.

These attacks, both verbal and physical, are occurring at all levels of society, from the highest ranks of government to individuals on the street.

This January, as we honor the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., we ask blacks to embrace his legacy and to join Jews in defeating the injustice of anti-Semitism.

Even as King struggled to achieve equality for black Americans, he did not hesitate to express total disdain for anti-Semitism, especially when it reared its ugly face in his own community.

King championed the civil rights of Jews, spoke out for the human rights of Soviet Jews and reminded the world of those Jews who gave their lives for the civil rights movement.

■

The Jewish community cannot alone fight the battle against anti-Semitism. Blacks and Jews have a long history of working together to effect social change.

King said, "In the struggle for human rights, as well as in the struggle for the upward march of our civilization, we have deep need for the partnership, fellowship and courage of our Jewish brother."

Now the Jewish community needs the partnership, fellowship and courage of black Americans. A recent national poll by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding found that 77 percent of blacks and 73 percent of Jews agree that they should work together on civil rights.

Were King alive today, he would speak out vociferously against this new wave of anti-Semitism. We appeal to black Americans to stand in solidarity with their Jewish brothers and sisters who face the scourge and evils of anti-Semitism. ■

Rabbi Marc Schneier is president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding; Russell Simmons is the group's chairman.

Peace line hopes to build empathy, support

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — When fellow soldiers reached David Damelin's body, they found the Israeli army's code of ethics in his pocket.

The 29-year-old from Kibbutz Meitzar was a reserve lieutenant in the Israel Defense Forces who was manning a road-block near the Jewish West Bank town of Ofra when a Palestinian sniper killed him and nine others in March 2002.

A Tel Aviv University graduate student and peace activist, Damelin staunchly opposed Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and he was deeply concerned about how soldiers behaved.

But he reported for reserve duty because he did not want to "set a bad example" for the undergraduates he was teaching, says his mother, Robi Damelin.

After her son's death, Damelin, 60, an ex-South African, quit her public-relations job and joined 500 other Israelis and Palestinians who had lost family members to violence. In October 2002, the Forum for Bereaved Families and the Parents Circle, which promote Israeli-Palestinian peace, launched Hello Shalom-Hello Salaam, a telephone hot line for coexistence.

The idea grew out of a wrong number. An Israeli, Natalia Wieseltier, meant to call a friend's mobile phone, but instead dialed a Palestinian man named Jihad, which means holy war in Arabic.

His phone recorded her number and he called back, leading to more conversations and meetings. Ultimately, Wieseltier approached the peace groups with the idea of instituting the Israeli-Palestinian line.

Callers to the free service can listen to a selection of voice messages and decide whom they want to contact.

So far, 600,000 Israeli and Palestinian callers have hooked up, Damelin says, and some talks have sparked face-to-face meetings.

She says "slightly more" Palestinians have called than Israelis, but the difference is not significant.

"Obviously, not every conversation is

gentle and loving. The only rule is that you listen," she says. "Israeli leaders keep saying there is no one to talk to, and we wanted to show that's not true."

Damelin and a Palestinian counterpart visited New York this week to launch an extension of the peace line, called "Hello, Peace," in the United States.

They hope the U.S. line will help defray the costs of running the Israel-based service and will promote coexistence.

Callers to 1-900-ATPEACE pay a \$1-per-minute, tax-deductible fee to contact an Israeli or Palestinian for what Damelin calls "first-hand information" about their lives.

Rather than rely on media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "we want people to get real stories of joy and suffering," she says.

So far, the peace groups have secured official endorsements from Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Rabbi Paul

Menitoff, executive vice-president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform rabbinical union; and Rabbi Amy Small, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, founder of the American Sufi Muslim Association Society, and Daoud Assad, president of the U.S.-based Council of Mosques, also agreed to make calls to the peace line.

Epstein pledged to call an Israeli when he uses the service.

The stories of some Hello, Peace advocates might inspire empathy and support.

Ghazi Munir Hussein Brigieth, 42, from the West Bank village of Beit Omar outside Hebron, says his brother, Yousef Abu Awwad, 32, was stopped by an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint outside the village in November 2000.

When he asked why he was being stopped, Awwad was shot in the head at close range, Brigieth says.

Brigieth, an electrician, joined the Israeli-Palestinian group "to prevent death ... for other families, it doesn't matter whether Israeli or Palestinian," he says. ■

'We want people to get real stories.'

Robi Damelin
Peace line activist

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Hate letters hit British lawmakers

British Jewish lawmakers were targets of a hate-mail campaign. London police started investigating the hate mail after some Jewish members of Parliament received at least 10 letters from an obscure neo-Nazi group calling itself the Aryan Martyrs Brigade. Asian and black lawmakers and those representing large Jewish constituencies also have been targeted.

Jewish oilmen under pressure

Russia has issued search warrants for two Jewish co-owners of the Yukos oil giant.

Leonid Nevzlin and Vladimir Dubov are wanted on charges of tax evasion and theft of state property, a source with Russia's Interior Ministry told the Interfax news agency on Thursday. Yukos' director, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, has been held in prison since last October pending investigation on similar charges, which are seen as politically motivated.

According to an unnamed ministry source, Nevzlin is wanted for his alleged failure to pay more than \$900,000 in taxes in 1999-2000. Nevzlin, the former president of the Russian Jewish Congress, left for Israel early last fall amid the rising pressure on Yukos. He received Israeli citizenship last November. Dubov also is believed to be living in Israel.

Gefilte fish and chips

Fish and chips, the quintessential British dish, has partial Jewish roots, according to a recent study. The dish has its roots in gefilte fish brought to Britain in the 19th century by Ashkenazi Jews, according to a professor at Leicester De Montford University, Panikos Panayi.

NORTH AMERICA

Lawmaker: Don't punish Israel travelers

A New York state legislator wants to stop companies from refusing life-insurance policies to those who travel to Israel.

The speaker of the New York Assembly, Sheldon Silver, introduced a bill Thursday that would prevent insurance companies in the state from using previous travel to Israel or other nations on a State Department travel advisory list as a basis for denying life insurance.

Silver's move, backed by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and other Jewish groups, comes after a JTA report that several insurers are denying life insurance either to those who have traveled to Israel recently or, in most cases, to those who plan to go there.

McKinney considering rematch

Former U.S. Rep. Cynthia McKinney is expected to run for her old congressional seat. McKinney is considering a run for her former seat, now held by Rep. Denise Majette (D-Ga.), who defeated McKinney in 2002.

Majette's victory was aided by donations from pro-Israel activists concerned about McKinney's voting record on the Middle East. Jewish fund-raisers said Thursday they would work to get Majette re-elected.

Activist: Poverty needs attention

The United States still struggles with discrimination and poverty, a former Jewish community lobbyist said. Diana Aviv, who was the top Washington lobbyist for the United Jewish Communities until last year, accepted a Reform movement human-rights award and spoke at a commemoration Wednesday of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birth-

day, hosted by the Israeli Embassy in Washington. "We ought to be dissatisfied that there are 40 million people in this country living in poverty, and that a quarter of them are children," said Aviv, who now lobbies for a range of non-profit groups.

Memphis loves Israel

Memphis gave a rousing rally for Israel this week. The crowd of 1,500 — including Jews and non-Jews — attended Monday night's rally at which Memphis' mayor presented Natan Sharansky, Israel's minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, with a key to the city.

Earlier that day in Memphis, Sharansky spoke to a group of 35 interfaith leaders committed to sole Israeli control over Jerusalem.

"God in the Bible made very clear that the Jewish people have an eternal covenant with the land of Israel forever. Jerusalem is not up for negotiation with anyone at anytime in the future," John Hagee, pastor of a 17,000-member Texan church, told Memphis' Commercial Appeal after the meeting. "There are 70 million evangelical Christians in this country, and we are sending the message to all politicians running for office that Israel is not a 'take-it-or-leave-it' issue. It is a 'make-it-or-break-it' issue."

Rabbi protests at Israeli Embassy

An American rabbi used the Israeli Embassy's Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration to protest Israel's arrest of a colleague.

Arthur Waskow of Philadelphia said Israel's commemoration of the civil-rights leader's birthday on Wednesday — the same day that the trial of Rabbi Arik Ascherman began in Israel — "stuck in my craw." Ascherman is on trial for blocking Israeli bulldozers sent to demolish illegally built Palestinian homes in the West Bank. Waskow disrupted the ceremony with a speech comparing Ascherman to King.

Representatives of the Reform movement and Israeli Ambassador Daniel Ayalon remained silent while Waskow spoke. Afterward, Ayalon said Ascherman was on trial for violating Israeli law.

'Jesus' film gets wide release

Mel Gibson's controversial film on the killing of Jesus will open next month in 2,000 theaters. "The Passion of Christ," which has had difficulty finding a distributor, will be independently released, according to a spokesman for Gibson.

Gibson belongs to an offshoot of Roman Catholicism that rejects all modern Church teachings, including the papal repudiation of the edict that Jews historically are responsible for killing Jesus.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel still wary of Libya missiles

Libya is still on Israel's missile watch list.

An Israeli team in Washington to talk about the latest successful test of the Arrow anti-missile system said Israel had not removed Libya from its "threat board," which also includes Iran and Syria.

Arieh Herzog, Israel's top missile defense official, said Wednesday that Israel was heartened by Libya's pledge to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, but until such action is verified, he would regard Libya as a threat.

The United States and Israel co-fund the Arrow program, which was on alert during the recent Iraq war.

Fourth bombing victim ID'd

The name of the fourth victim of Wednesday's suicide bombing was identified. Security guard Gal Shapira, 28, an immigrant from Belarus, had lived in Ashkelon. All four victims of the bombing were buried Thursday.