


**IN THE NEWS**
**Clashes in Gaza  
kill 12 Palestinians**

Israeli forces hunting Gaza mortar crews killed at least 12 Palestinians. The dead in Wednesday's incursion into a neighborhood on the outskirts of Gaza City included at least 10 militants, Palestinians said.

Israel said it launched the raid in response to rocket and mortar fire on nearby Jewish towns. Hamas, which lost at least one commander in the clash, vowed revenge. In a separate incident, two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli operation aimed at demolishing tunnels used to smuggle arms over the border from Egypt.

**Vilnai: Labor would  
consider government**

Israel's Labor Party would consider joining Ariel Sharon's government if the prime minister has a plan to return to peace talks.

The declaration Wednesday from Matan Vilnai, a leader of Labor, was the clearest to date that Sharon's ruling Likud Party can count on Labor's support if Sharon goes ahead with his announced plan to uproot most Jewish communities from the Gaza Strip.

Vilnai said he was speaking on the party's behalf in an address to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

**Hillel approves  
a new president**

Hillel's board of directors approved Avraham Infeld as the organization's new president.

Infeld, who for the past nine months has been the interim president of the international campus group, told JTA that he "was torn between the thrill of the appointment and the weight of the undertaking."

The appointment will last at least two years, Infeld said. Infeld had been negotiating with the search committee for the past 10 days. He accepted the position Tuesday but awaited the board's formal approval Wednesday.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Educators, donors come together to produce action plan for teachers

By JOE BERKOFSKY

**F**ORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (JTA) — Joseph Kanfer deftly wrapped wires and affixed pieces of material to a truncated test tube.

Then he glued the Hebrew letter "shin" to the creation, producing a mezuzah.

While the scene resembled a preschool project, it signified much more. Kanfer, former chairman of the Jewish Education Service of North America and a major donor to Jewish educational projects, was taking part in a cutting-edge initiative called Avoda Arts to elevate arts instruction in Jewish schools.

The program so far has produced five Jewish educators and helped dozens of college students create Jewish-themed art works in disciplines ranging from film to sculpture.

"We are absolutely a recruitment process," said Carol Brennglass Spinner, Avoda Arts' executive director.

Such efforts are part of a wider, unprecedented campaign to attract and hold onto Jewish teachers at a time when Jewish education in North America has grown into an estimated \$3 billion enterprise — little of which goes to educator salaries.

Kanfer, whose GOJO Inc. of Akron, Ohio, manufactures PURELL hand cleaner, was participating in an unprecedented summit here this week that brought many of the Jewish philanthropic world's biggest funders into a room with 350 educators, administrators and communal professionals to devise plans to bring new respect and rewards to the Jewish teaching profession.

Such talk of change is hardly new. The

terms "recruitment and retention" have been around since the 1980s, and talk of low teacher pay is hardly news.

But participants insist that the first Jewish Education Leadership Summit will prove a radical departure from the norm.

Sponsored by the Jewish Education Service of North America, the summit included intensive sessions where mega-donors like Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt sat alongside teachers and school administrators and hashed out detailed proposals to recruit and retain a new generation of Jewish teachers.

"What's different about this conference is that there are no talking heads. Whether you represent a \$100 million foundation or you're a teacher on the ground, everyone has a seat at the table," said Laura Lauder of Atherton, Calif., who co-chaired the summit.

Many of the donors involved have contributed millions of dollars to Jewish schools and organizations. But, in another big shift, they now are calling for educators to come up with serious business plans that, as Lauder put it, spell out the "tachlis," or details, of overhauling Jewish education.

"We want plans with measurable outlines that we can be accountable for," said Lauder, who married into the philanthropic Lauder family and is a major donor in her own right.

"It's not doing business as usual," said Arnee Winshall of Boston, another summit co-chair who has contributed significantly to Jewish educational causes. "I'm much more willing to write a larger check when I can see how it's going to make a difference."

Summit organizers say the work they did

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**FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES**

## ■ *Educators and donors come together to articulate action plans for teachers*

*Continued from page 1*

here will meet Winshall's standards. Over the course of the conference, participants hashed out ideas in intensive sessions covering areas from early childhood education to congregational education to day schools.

Hundreds of pages of notes from those meetings will be incorporated in coming months into a larger effort called the Jewish Educator Recruitment/Retention Initiative Action Plan. The idea is to mount a national drive to find and keep top Jewish teachers.

Already, Winshall said, there are pockets of innovation that lead to hope that teachers are getting their due.

Jaynie Schultz, president of the board of the Akiba Academy, a modern Orthodox day school in Dallas, said that four years ago the school began paying salaries that were 95 percent of teacher salaries at the highest-paid non-Jewish suburban schools.

In the four years since, the school has had little trouble hiring top teachers, and few faculty members have left, she said.

Meanwhile, Marc Kramer, executive director of Ravsak, a network of 82 multi-denominational day schools across North America, announced a "substantial" grant from the Avi Chai Foundation to give heads of Jewish day schools' Judaic studies programs a better Jewish education themselves.

Many school chiefs are skilled at administration or fund raising, but personally lack a solid Jewish grounding, he said. The

administrators can attend summer and winter courses and use a new online distance-learning service called JskyWay to enhance their own Jewish education.

"We won't be creating great Talmudic minds, but we can strengthen their capacity to advocate for their schools," Kramer said.

Over the past five years, Helene Tigay, executive director of the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education in Philadelphia, has led a successful drive to recruit teachers for supplemental, or Hebrew, school.

Five years ago, local synagogue schools typically started the school year with about a quarter of teaching positions unfilled due to lack of qualified candidates, Tigay said.

Armed with an initial \$25,000 grant from her local Jewish federation — and now with a three-year, \$100,000 grant from the Covenant Foundation — Tigay launched a catchy ad campaign and compiled a database of more than 100 teachers. She managed to fill the open slots.

She also compiled a manual for recruiting and retaining teachers and helped schools build a vision for their programs.

Now Tigay is ensuring that the new teachers are given counseling, professional workshops, stipends for professional trips and other "in-service" support, she said.

"We've been so successful at recruitment that our focus is now retention," Tigay said.

Others are finding that they need to focus on the less-tangible qualities of Jewish education to win over potential hires.

Helene Kalson Cohen, dean of the

Jewish Academy of Metro Detroit, a multi-denominational school, said she tells candidates that what they get as Jewish educators they won't find in secular or other private schools.

The school offers a "supportive community" with mentoring programs, professional development efforts, and involved and motivated students and parents.

Despite these advancements, many at the conference say it remains to be seen whether a national, unified approach like the Jewish Educator Recruitment/Retention Initiative will make a real difference.

Kalson Cohen, who also is a JESNA board member, said the plan's impact will depend on how it is delivered.

Educators like her are busy professionals who may ignore a massive, national plan that fails to include components that target specific areas in local communities, she warns.

"I almost want to say that I never want to see the whole thing together, otherwise it will be a trophy that will end up on shelves and then it will lose its power," Kalson Cohen said.

Still, much talk at the conference reflected what some hope will be a "tipping point" in Jewish education.

They hope that educators will devise a real action plan that rallies philanthropists.

"The belief and the hope is that this might be one of those moments in time where a number of factors will emerge to allow systemic change to occur," Kalson Cohen said.

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## Israelis, Palestinians and European film

BERLIN (JTA) — In a move meant to promote peace through art, the European Film Academy has decided that it will accept Israelis and Palestinians as members.

Representatives of the two groups celebrated the news, which was announced Tuesday at the Berlin International Film Festival. The move means that both Israelis and Palestinians will be eligible for Europe's equivalent of the Academy Awards.

Humbert Balsan, chairman of the board of the Berlin-based academy, said the move is part of a trend toward embracing "Mediterranean countries who have natural and historical cinema relations with Europe."

"For the first time, Israeli cinema is getting a context," Renen Schorr, founding director of the Sam Spiegel Film & Television School in Jerusalem, told JTA.

Israeli director Amos Gitai said, "Every gesture of creating a stage of cooperation and dialogue will serve as a model."

The decision assumes the eventual existence of an independent Palestinian state — and Marion Doering, director of the European Film Academy, said she was pleased to be out in front on that issue.

There are eight Israeli films in this year's Berlin festival. Festival spokesmen said they didn't know if there were any films by Palestinian directors.

# Conservatives protest Kotel prayer plan

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When Conservative religious leaders gathered here this week for a rabbinical conference, a resolution on Israel's West Bank security fence was expected to generate the most controversy.

But a dispute over prayer at the Western Wall has put religion front and center.

A Conservative rabbi from Texas was detained briefly by Israeli police Tuesday after trying, along with fellow rabbis, to unfurl a banner near the Western Wall reading "The wall belongs to us all."

Rabbi Baruch Zeilicovich, who leads a congregation in Fort Worth, was among some 200 Conservative rabbis from around the world protesting construction that will nearly double the gender-segregated prayer area adjacent to Judaism's holiest site, the Kotel.

Officials said Zeilicovich did not have a permit for the sign.

The Conservative rabbis, in Jerusalem for the annual convention of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly, say the move to extend the gender-segregated prayer area is part of an Orthodox attempt to monopolize Jewish life in Israel.

"It sends a message that Reform, Conservative, and egalitarian groups in general, including Orthodox egalitarian groups, are not welcome anymore," said Paul Arberman, a rabbi in Netanya originally from Brooklyn.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, the rabbi in charge of the Kotel and the administrator of Jewish holy sites, defended his deci-

sion to extend the gender-segregated area, saying it was done to accommodate an increase in worshipers — not as a slight to non-Orthodox religious denominations.

Tourism has decreased in recent years, but the number of worshipers at the Kotel has increased, Rabinowitz said. As many as 5,000 Orthodox Jews come to the Western Wall on Friday nights, he told JTA.

The area adjacent to the wall has been a de facto Orthodox synagogue since Israel took control of Jerusalem's Old City in 1967. The sprawling plaza that lies beyond it has been used as an open space

for other groups to pray, including mixed groups of men and women.

The plaza area will be reduced by the new construction, but it still will be larger than the expanded gender-segregated prayer area.

Many of the Conservative rabbis lead missions from their home congregations to Israel, and a highlight of the missions generally is a prayer service in the plaza area.

Extending the gender-segregated prayer area will aggravate the divide between Israel's Orthodox religious establishment and the more liberal streams of Judaism, some say.

But construction, which began in the last two months, continues. Mounds of earth have been dug up as workers place new tiles in the ground to demarcate the

extended prayer area.

Lawyers for the Conservative movement in Israel complain that there was no consultation process before deciding to go ahead with construction. To date, their queries to government officials on the matter have gone unanswered, they said. Dan Evron, legal counsel for the Conservative movement in Israel, said the movement might soon resort to court action.

Government officials had no immediate reaction.

The current effort to expand the gender-segregated prayer area follows previous attempts in 2000

and 2003. Both attempts were halted after the Conservative movement in Israel petitioned government legal advisers.

The legal advisers in turn told the Ministry of Religious Affairs — which at the time was in charge of issues related to the Western Wall area — that they lacked the authority to make the changes.

The issue is "part of a broader battle being waged in the country regarding the question of is there more than one way to be Jewish in Israel," Evron said.

Rabinowitz, however, took issue with the Conservative rabbis for turning the expansion project into a controversy.

"This is to take a situation that does not intend to offend anyone and turn it into a war," he said.

Conservative leaders accepted an invitation to meet with him next week to discuss the situation, Rabinowitz said. ■

'It sends a message that Reform, Conservative, and egalitarian groups ... are not welcome anymore.'

Rabbi Paul Arberman

## Rabbi Samuel Lerer, 89, converted Mexicans

MEXICO CITY (JTA) — Rabbi Samuel Lerer, who some say converted more people to Judaism than anyone in the past two centuries, has died at age 89.

Lerer, who had retired to San Antonio, Texas, lived in Mexico City from 1968 to 1999 while leading the English-language Beth Israel Community Center in the capital. He died peacefully on Feb. 5.

During that time, the Conservative rabbi reached out to Mexicans who believed they were descended from Spanish Jews forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition.

By his own count, Lerer converted about 3,000 people, mostly in the Mexican cities of Veracruz, Venta Prieta and Puebla. More than 500 of those people since have moved to Israel.

Lerer's liberal views on conversion sometimes drew criticism from the Mexican Jewish establishment.

"There are rabbis who think differently and there are rabbis who think like me," Lerer told JTA four days before his death during an interview in Veracruz, where he had traveled to perform a Bar Mitzvah. "This has been my purpose in life. I have a limited life but whatever I could, I did."

Beth Israel's rabbi and congregants remembered Lerer as an intelligent scholar with a loving heart, an engaging sense of humor and a bright smile.

"All I can say is, 'What a man,'" Rabbi Palti Somerstein, who succeeded Lerer at Beth Israel, told the congregation during services last Friday night. "He gave his love. He gave his life. ■

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Gaza garrison to stay?

Israel may keep a military foothold inside the Gaza Strip following any evacuation of settlements.

Ha'aretz reported Wednesday that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has proposed keeping a garrison in the area of Gush Katif, a beachside Jewish town in Gaza, should Israel go ahead with a plan to remove residents from almost all Gaza settlements.

The Defense Ministry did not immediately comment.

#### Qurei helping build fence?

Palestinian Authority prime minister Ahmed Qurei denied reports that his family's cement company is providing materials to build Israel's West Bank security barrier.

On Tuesday, a Palestinian lawmaker said a P.A. parliamentary committee was investigating whether Palestinian cement companies were providing materials for the fence and for Jewish settlement construction. He said there was evidence the Qurei family's company was among them, Ha'aretz reported.

#### Earthquake in Israel

An eight-second earthquake rattled Israelis and Arabs on Wednesday morning.

The tremor, measuring five on the Richter scale, radiated out from the Dead Sea area and was felt as far away as Lebanon. Damage was minimal. Straddling the Syria-Africa rift, the Holy Land can expect a major earthquake around once a century, seismologists say.

"We have not seen such a strong tremor here in recent years," Infrastructure Minister Yossi Paritzky said.

#### Shalom speaks out on nukes

Silvan Shalom said Israel is "concerned" that Pakistani nuclear technology may have been passed on to dangerous groups.

On a two-day visit to India, the Israeli foreign minister said Tuesday that countries like India, which also has nuclear weapons, should help stop Pakistan from transferring nuclear technology to rogue states and terrorist groups.

### WORLD

#### Maccabiah compensation finalized

An Israeli judge has finalized compensation payment to victims of the 1997 Maccabiah bridge tragedy.

Judge Shmuel Berliner of Haifa District Court this week ordered the Phoenix insurance company to pay the final \$440,000 on 70 claims that amounted to \$15.5 million overall.

Four Australian athletes died when a bridge collapsed that had been built to carry athletes across the polluted waters of the Yarkon River to the opening ceremony of the 1997 Maccabiah competition.

#### Mofaz to Britain

Israel's defense minister began a two-day official visit to the United Kingdom on Wednesday. Shaul Mofaz had meetings scheduled with Britain's defense and foreign secretaries and senior members of the Jewish community. Israeli defense spending in the United Kingdom is likely to figure prominently in the meetings.

#### Australia to condemn anti-Semitism?

A member of Australia's Parliament has introduced a bill officially condemning anti-Semitism.

Peter King, whose Sydney seat of Wentworth is home to many prominent Jews, has asked Parliament to be aware of the lethal

capacity of anti-Semitism to invoke hatred and violence against the country's Jews. The motion will be debated Feb. 16.

#### German Jewish leader to court

The former head of a local German Jewish community is facing money laundering and tax evasion charges.

If convicted, Eli Meir Gampel, 43, the former head of the community in the city of Halle, could face a prison sentence of up to 15 years. He is due to appear in the Halle state courthouse on Thursday, and the trial is scheduled to conclude in June.

Gampel is alleged to have conspired with his brother and several Israeli citizens to change 20 million euros into dollars to hide profits from the sale of illegal anaesthetic drugs in England.

Gampel could not be reached for comment.

#### Arabs scoped Nairobi resort?

Several Arab-looking men may have filmed an Israeli-owned hotel in Kenya three months before a bomb attack there.

On Tuesday, a former hotel mechanic told a Nairobi court about the events before the attack in November 2002 that killed 15 people at the hotel, Reuters reported.

Four Kenyan men are on trial for the murder of 12 Kenyans and three Israelis at the Paradise Hotel, north of the Indian Ocean coastal city of Mombasa. The defendants also are charged with a failed attempt the same day to shoot down an Israeli airliner with a missile.

#### AMIA celebrates

Argentina's main Jewish institution is celebrating its 110th anniversary Wednesday. At an evening meeting with the press and Jewish community leaders, directors of the AMIA community center were slated to announce some major projects for 2004.

This year also will mark the 10-year anniversary of the terrorist bombing at the AMIA that killed 85 people and wounded some 300.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Democrats challenge Powell on fence

U.S. Congressional Democrats are pressing the Bush administration to show greater support for Israel's West Bank security fence.

Democrats challenged Secretary of State Colin Powell's reservations about the barrier in Wednesday hearings at the U.S. House of Representatives on next year's budget.

Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.) said, "Many of my colleagues and I believe that the administration is undermining Israeli efforts to defend itself from terrorist attacks by claiming that the security fence is undermining the peace process."

#### Mass. rabbis back gays

A group of Massachusetts rabbis backed a state court's ruling legalizing gay marriage. In a half-page ad in the Boston Globe, 95 rabbis from the Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements called for the Massachusetts legislature to support the state Supreme Court's ruling that homosexuals have the right to marry.

The \$18,000 ad ran as state lawmakers consider a constitutional amendment banning gay marriages starting in 2006, and reclassifying any gay marriages that take place until then as civil unions.

#### San Francisco leader resigns

The director of San Francisco's Jewish federation resigned.

Sam Salkin, CEO of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, resigned Feb. 5. The creation of the federation's first business plan last November completed his work there, Salkin told JTA.