

IN THE NEWS

**Arafat firm on
'right of return'**

Yasser Arafat reaffirmed the Palestinian demand for a "right of return," saying Washington was wrong to back Israel on the issue.

"Our destiny is to defend our land, our holy shrines and the right of the refugees to return to their homeland," the Palestinian Authority president said in a live television address Thursday, referring to Arabs who fled during Israel's 1948 War of Independence.

On Wednesday, President Bush said these refugees and their descendants should be resettled in a future Palestinian state rather than in Israel.

Arafat attacked Washington's stand. "The fanatical Israeli rulers are wrong, and so are those who support them — and you know who I mean," Arafat said, referring to the Bush administration.

**Kerry upbeat
on Sharon plan**

Sen. John Kerry expressed qualified support for Ariel Sharon's plan for unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

"I think that could be a positive step," the Massachusetts senator and Democratic candidate for president said Thursday.

**Holocaust center
opens in Hungary**

Israel's president stressed Hungarian participation in the Holocaust at the opening of the country's first-ever Holocaust center. Moshe Katsav praised the new museum, saying Thursday it would serve as a symbol of Hungary's readiness to accept responsibility for the extermination of more than half a million Jews.

Two days earlier, Hungarian authorities arrested three Arabs suspected of plotting to blow up either the new facility or the Jewish museum in the complex encompassing Budapest's main synagogue.

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WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG



U.S. Department of Defense

A U.S. soldier stands guard inside the Iraqi Civil Defence Corp. compound in Fallujah in February.

Looking at growing chaos in Iraq, Israeli experts ponder the lessons

By **LESLIE SUSSER**

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As Shi'ite and Sunni resistance to the American presence in Iraq intensifies, Israel's defense establishment is worried that an American withdrawal under fire could have devastating consequences for the battles against weapons of mass destruction and global terrorism.

And Israel could be one of the big losers. Israeli officials believe a loss of American deterrence would encourage Iran to continue its nuclear weapons program and its support for terrorism, could lead to a

hardening of Syrian and Palestinian attitudes against accommodation with Israel and could spark more Palestinian and other terrorism directed against Israeli targets.

Without American deterrence and a pro-Western Iraq, the officials say, Israel might have to rethink its attitude on key issues like the concessions it can afford to make to the Palestinians, its readiness for a land war on its eastern front and the size of its defense budget.

But there is an opposing, minority view in Israeli academic and intelligence circles: The quicker the Americans leave, this view

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**NEWS
ANALYSIS**

■ Looking at growing chaos in Iraq, Israeli experts ponder the lessons

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holds, the quicker the Iraqis will have to get their act together. And once they do, they will not necessarily pose a threat to Israel or the West.

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz summoned a meeting in early April of Israeli intelligence services and other branches to discuss the implications for Israel of the unrest in Iraq. Some of the analyses were bleak.

When the United States launched a war on Saddam Hussein's regime in March 2003, Israeli military planners hoped for several significant gains.

Saddam's defeat and the destruction of the Iraqi war machine would remove the threat of hundreds of Iraqi and Syrian tanks rumbling across the desert to threaten Israel's eastern border, officials believed.

They also hoped for a domino effect that would lead Syria and the Palestinians to seek accommodation with Israel, countries like Iran and Libya to rethink their nuclear weapons programs and terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad to exercise restraint.

■
In the first year after the war, some of that seemed to be happening. Now some Israeli intelligence analysts fear a reversal of these processes, with all the attendant dangers for Israel.

In the meeting with Mofaz, there was a general consensus that if American deterrence in the region is weakened, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic

Jihad all will be encouraged to mount or incite even more terrorism against Israel.

Some officers expressed fear of possible Iranian intervention in southern Iraq on the side of the Shi'ites, if the situation degenerates into war between the Sunni and Shi'ite populations after a hasty American withdrawal.

That could lead to a radical Shi'ite regime in Iraq, similar to the one in Iran. If such a radical Iraq were to emerge, some officers suggested, Israel might have to reconsider the huge cuts in the size of its tank forces that it planned after the destruction of Saddam's army last year.

That could impact the key defense budget, which was slashed last year and again this year as part of a general government austerity program.

A loss of American prestige in the region, some officials said, also could impact countries with pro-American regimes, like Egypt and Jordan.

It also might mean that American guarantees to Israel in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would carry less weight.

In general, American attempts to stabilize the Middle East would suffer a huge setback, with potentially harsh consequences for Israel and the West.

■
The two main goals of the U.S.-led war — curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in rogue countries such as Iran and striking a blow against global terrorists such as Al-Qaida — could be reversed.

In an interview with the Yediot Achroton newspaper, Mofaz echoed these concerns.

"America's success in Iraq is essential for world peace," he declared. "If the Americans manage to stabilize the situation in Iraq — and we in Israel believe they will — that will have a positive impact on the Middle East as a whole, on the world oil market and on the prestige of the international community."

But, he cautioned, "if the Americans are forced to withdraw in the wake of terrorist pressure, a new and dangerous model of Arab regime will be created. The axis of evil will lift its head, and it could threaten world peace."

Some Middle East experts in Israeli academia and the military take a more sanguine view, however.

They argue that if the Americans withdraw soon after the handover of power to the Iraqi Provisional Council, scheduled for June 30, Iraq's Sunnis and

Shi'ites would reach a modus vivendi on shared rule to keep the country from plunging into chaos.

They ask: Would a new Iraqi regime — even if radical Shi'ites are a dominant part of it — adopt a provocative, anti-Western stance after what happened to Saddam?

If they did, who would rearm them? And without sizable quantities of sophisticated weaponry, how could they threaten Israel or the western world?

Surely, these experts reason, any new Iraqi regime would prefer to tap America's willingness to reconstruct Iraq and allow oil revenues to create a basis for new prosperity.

They argue that an orderly American withdrawal, announced well in advance, would do more for American prestige in the area than an ill-fated attempt to crush the dissident Iraqi militias.

But this is a minority view in Israel, and similar predictions of rational Arab moderation — such as the thinking that led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority — have proven wrong in the past.

Most members of the government, the defense establishment and the intelligence community believe America should maintain its military presence in Iraq in an effort to create a Western-leaning regime there, and through it a new and more stable Middle East.

When President Bush says, "America will stay the course," they take heart. ■

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

Israeli intelligence officials agreed that if American deterrence in the region is weakened, then Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas all will be encouraged to mount even more terrorism against Israel.

WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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After threats in Europe, U.S. Jews assess security

By JOE BERKOFISKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — New reports of terrorist threats against Jewish institutions in Europe underscore the need for American Jewish institutions to get serious about security.

Officials behind a new threat alert system say plots discovered this week against Jewish targets in Hungary and Spain emphasize the need for American Jews to be prepared.

"We have a serious enemy that has threatened to attack us, he has attacked us all over the world, we know he has the capability, and we're at the top of his enemies list," said Steven Pomerantz, a retired FBI deputy director and former chief of counterterrorism.

In January, Pomerantz joined the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Jewish Committee and the United Jewish Communities network of Jewish federations to launch the Secure Community Alert Network.

Dubbed SCAN, the system sets in place a management team of 10 permanent organizations and three rotating groups that will evaluate threats and send its assessments

to an outside firm based in Tennessee, Dialogic Communication Corp. Dialogic will then alert national Jewish groups, who decide how to contact local offices.

While the system has yet to be tested, the UJC's president and CEO, Stephen Hoffman, said the reports of potential attacks in Europe highlight its necessity.

"I just see it as a confirmation of why we made the decision to move ahead with SCAN," Hoffman said.

Hoffman's comment came as CIA Director George Tenet on Wednesday told a congressional panel investigating the Sept. 11 attacks that it will take five more years for the United States to beef up its intelligence agencies enough to combat Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

SCAN was initially funded with a \$25,000 donation, but Hoffman said a donor has provided funding "in the six figures" to beef up the system to train Jewish federations and associated institutions to defend themselves against terrorism.

It's difficult to gauge how ready American Jewry is for a potential terrorist attack because officials say no one has

conducted a formal review or study of community readiness.

Security at most synagogues varies according to the building's location and size, officials say. Some more visible shuls have installed metal detectors, security cameras and station guards, while others have erected traffic barriers, reinforced windows, minimized the number of entrances and used door buzzers.

So far, few concrete threats have surfaced. In early Janu-

ary, a Reform synagogue, Temple Emanuel of Westfield, N.J., closed its doors for a day and a half after the FBI received a fax with an unspecified threat.

Meanwhile, news of potential attacks on European Jewish institutions does "affect the climate in which we are working," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

"Everything is important," Hoenlein said of the European threats. "But I don't want to exaggerate the significance of any single report. So far we have not had any specific threats here in the United States." ■

Is U.S. Jewry
safe from
terrorism?

Mubarak meets Jewish leaders, but questions remain

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — It was supposed to be a chance for Egypt's president to promote his country's commitment to peace and tolerance. But not everyone came away convinced.

Following his meeting with President Bush on Monday, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak met with 22 American Jewish leaders Wednesday in Houston.

The meeting came following a request from Mubarak to the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. JCPA convened leaders of groups like Hadassah, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, American Jewish Committee, Americans for Peace Now and representatives of local communities for the hour-long meeting.

Not everyone bought Mubarak's portrayal of Egypt as an exemplar of moderation that is committed to regional peace, but they still found the meeting useful.

In today's polarized political climate,

"wherever there can be voices of moderation and moves that encourage simple dialogue they should be embraced," said Hannah Rosenthal, JCPA's executive director.

Mubarak asked for the meeting because he wanted to portray his position vis-a-vis Israel, Rosenthal said, and "wants us to raise the questions that are on our minds." ■

There were plenty of questions.

Jewish leaders pressed Mubarak to fight anti-Semitism in Egypt and elsewhere in Arabia, nurture the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and help secure Gaza after a planned Israeli withdrawal.

The meeting wasn't the first time Mubarak has met with U.S. Jewish leaders; in fact, it's a regular occurrence.

Mubarak said a stronger economy would help the Middle East, and asked the leaders to "encourage the United States on economic plans and trade agreements," Rosenthal said.

Since the United States brokered the 1979 Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel, it has given some \$2 billion a year to Egypt, making it the second-largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel.

Wednesdays' meeting was part of a flurry of diplomatic developments with Egypt surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza.

In his meetings with Jewish leaders, Mubarak said Egypt would not provide troops to aid an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza but would train Palestinian Authority police for the task. He also said a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza would lead to chaos, and that he would support a withdrawal only if it came in coordination with the Palestinian Authority.

Mubarak said he planned to combat anti-Semitism, and that democracy in Egypt was a "work in progress," Rosenthal said.

Jewish leaders praised Mubarak's initiative in calling the meeting. ■

Anne Frank exhibit holds lessons for Ukraine

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

ODESSA, Ukraine (JTA) — An Anne Frank exhibit currently touring Ukraine is bringing children to tears.

"People should realize that hatred leads nowhere," says Sasha Domovskaya, 13, at an exhibition on teaching tolerance that opened in this Ukrainian port city in March for the 75th anniversary of Anne Frank's birthday.

The exhibition, titled "Anne Frank: A History for Today," is a project of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, which is constantly touring various countries in the world.

A Dutch Jewish girl, Anne spent 25 months in hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam before she was betrayed and deported to Auschwitz. She was sent later to Bergen-Belsen, where she died in the spring of 1945.

The Ukrainian tour this year — supported by the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine — includes a dozen cities, from the capital Kiev to some smaller communities in the southwest of the country.

The exhibition in Odessa took place at the exhibition hall of a group called The Future, a local charity organization that helps disabled children.

The exhibition consists of large displays about Anne and others telling the fate of young Ukrainian victims of the Holocaust.

This Ukrainian part of the exhibition tells about the Jewish children who died in the wartime Babi Yar massacre in Kiev and in other massacres in Ukraine.

Exhibits include photos of the victims, documents and excerpts from their letters.

Some of those who attended the recent opening of the Odessa exhibition said they were disappointed that no representative of the city joined educators, well-known local intellectuals and members of the Jewish community for the ceremony.

The exhibition in Odessa is intended for schoolchildren, the organizers said. It is expected that more than 2,000 students will see it during its monthlong run.

Ahead of the opening of the exhibi-



Vladimir Matveyev

A Ukrainian student visits the an Anne Frank exhibit March 1, 2004, in Odessa, Ukraine.

tion, the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, a leading Holocaust research group, organized a series of training sessions and peer-to-peer workshops for high school students.

The center selected a group of 16 Odessa high school students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to be trained as tour guides.

"Anne Frank was a girl just like us. As the guides we can speak the language, which is more understandable for the children of our age," said Alisa Pivovarchik, 15, one of the guides.

Yulia Smilyanskaya, a researcher with the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies who worked with the group

of student guides, said, "The children trained as guides can better understand their own history and the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine. They will tell their peers what they learned here. Ultimately, these children will come to realize that our life is so fragile."

On a recent weekday, the students' faces got serious as they toured the exhibition.

Some had tears in their eyes.

"People should remember this terrible tragedy. There are still certain feelings of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in the society we live in," said Dmytro Bohomolov, 15. "Here in Odessa, we come across manifestations of racism in the attitudes toward blacks."

"The exhibition is very impressive. It is important to show it to as many students as possible," said Eleonora Pavliukova, teacher at an Odessa high school.

"I am going to invite my colleagues to come to this exhibition together with their students."

Some of the visitors could easily relate their own wartime experiences to the fate of the most famous child victim of the Holocaust.

"In Anne Frank I see myself, my fate. During the war I was evacuated and found myself in an orphanage. I was a 12-year-old boy when I became a prisoner in a concentration camp, which I survived only by miracle," said Dmitriy Gutakhov, the non-Jewish chairman of the Odessa-based group Ukraine-Israel, which promotes ties between the two countries.

"This exhibition is held at the right time. It is a reminder for those who propagate anti-Semitism in Ukraine," he said, referring to some anti-Semitic publications that recently generated headlines in the national media.

The exhibition is 'a reminder for those who propagate anti-Semitism in Ukraine.'

Dmitriy Gutakhov

Chairman of Ukraine-Israel group

Debate erupts over marking of Yom Hashoah

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — At a small, suburban New Jersey synagogue next week, a pair of Holocaust survivors will pray, Bar Mitzvah children will recite the poem "Butterfly" by a teenage death-camp inmate and a choir will sing the El Maleh Rachamim blessing of God's compassion.

Jeff Marder, a keyboardist for Cirque Du Soleil in Las Vegas, also will premier new music at the unusual April 19 event called "Never Forget" that Beth Haverim, a Reform synagogue in Mahwah, and Ramapo College's nearby Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies have commissioned to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day, or Yom Hashoah.

"There is a sense that first-hand witnesses to the Shoah are fewer and fewer every year, and it becomes important that we find new ways to remember," says Beth Haverim's rabbi, Joel Mosbacher.

"Never Forget" joins scores of new productions across the denominational spectrum creating new liturgy to mark Yom Hashoah, which falls this year on April 18.

Nationwide, synagogues are staging events featuring candle lighting, reciting the names of Holocaust victims, watching videos of survivors' accounts, conducting Shoah seders and reading prayer books such as the Conservative movement's new Megillat Hashoah.

The efforts are fueling a growing debate about how the relatively new Yom Hashoah should be ritualized, or whether the holiday should be folded into others.

"It will take another 100 years before we know for sure, but the growth of Yom Hashoah is the trend," says Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, president of the Jewish Life Network and founding president of CLAL — The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Among the leading advocates for new Yom Hashoah observance is Menachem Rosensaft of New York, founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. As the son of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen survivors who lost their entire families, Rosensaft insists that Holocaust remembrance "is not just an obligation for those with a direct, familial link with the dead."

"This was the greatest tragedy in post-biblical Jewish history," he says. As survivors vanish, the next generations "are in a

position to ensure that the remembrance of Holocaust victims will be a permanent, separate part of the Jewish national consciousness."

Rosensaft means to draw a distinction from those who maintain that Jews should remember the Holocaust on Tisha B'Av. That day was set to lament the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, and the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and subsequent Jewish tragedies as well.

Among those who advocate adding the Holocaust to the list of misfortunes commemorated on Tisha B'Av is Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Schorsch once wrote that Yom Hashoah, as well as the marking of Kristallnacht on Nov. 9, are events that are "ritually and spiritually impoverished."

"One of the reasons Yom Hashoah has not penetrated the Jewish consciousness is that it has not taken a liturgical form," he says. "It is rarely a religious day in the synagogue — and it is the synagogue, through ritual, that succeeds in perpetuating Jewish values."

The debate echoes arguments that surfaced in Israel in the early 1950s, when the young state sought ways to mark the still-fresh Holocaust.

Some fervently Orthodox leaders of the time said that general prayers of kaddish, or mourning, should take place on the 10th of Tevet, which marks the start of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.

But in 1951 Israel's Knesset made Yom Hashoah a legal holiday, and eventually Israelis began observing the day with sirens that bring the nation to a standstill.

Efforts to ritualize the holiday have ebbed and flowed, though none have become universal. In 1988, the Reform movement published "Six Days of Destruction" by Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel and Rabbi Albert Friedlander. The book wove survivor stories with the six days of creation.

Meanwhile, the public, non-sectarian ritualizing of Yom Hashoah also grew. In 1980 Congress passed legislation creating the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, whose role was

to coordinate a national service during a week of remembrance.

The question boils down to this: Should Tisha B'Av and Yom Hashoah become one holiday?

That service, which includes the lighting of a six-branched menorah and a processional by a U.S. Army band carrying flags of the 36 divisions that liberated the concentration camps, takes place in the Capitol rotunda.

Other public events at military bases and state capitals have grown. Last

year, for the first time, all 50 U.S. states marked the holiday, museum spokesman Arthur Berger says.

Yet the question of how Jews should religiously remember the Holocaust continues to spark debate.

Rabbi Stephen Tucker, of Temple Ramat Zion in Northridge, Calif., says his Conservative synagogue has read from Megillat Hashoah, the new Conservative prayer book that has sold more than 10,000 copies so far.

Despite his opposition to a separate commemoration of Yom Hashoah, Schorsch calls Megillat Hashoah "the first great liturgical articulation of the calamity of the Holocaust."

Others maintain that the synagogue may be the wrong place to observe the holiday.

Rabbi David Nelson, director of the Jewish Life Connection for the Bergen County Y-Jewish Community Center in Washington Township, N.J., says that three of the four new sacred days in the Jewish calendar — Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron (Israel's Day of Remembrance for fallen soldiers), Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) and Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) — are largely ignored outside the Jewish state.

Nelson sponsored a forum on "re-imagining the Holocaust" this week at the Bergen County Y-JCC to examine the debate around Yom Hashoah rituals.

"The real challenge is, how should this holiday be observed privately?" says Nelson, a Reform-trained rabbi who considers himself post-denominational. "Normal Jews are not historians, but they are storytellers. The question is, how will we ritualize the salient points of the folk memory of the Holocaust?" he asks.

In Europe, 'Passion' breaks box-office records

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — The current issue of the Italian movie magazine Ciak uses two vivid, full-page images to encapsulate the uproar over "The Passion of the Christ," Mel Gibson's controversial crucifixion epic that opened across Europe ahead of Easter.

The front cover features an inspirational close-up of actor Jim Caviezel in the role of Jesus. Bloody, battered and wearing a crown of thorns, he appears lost in pain and prayer as he embraces the cross.

But Ciak's last page is something very different.

A bitter drawing by political cartoonist Stefano Disegni shows a vast crowd of emaciated prisoners massed behind the barbed wire fence of a Nazi death camp. Their heads are shaven and they wear the yellow Star of David, and behind them a huge chimney belches smoke.

"Thank you, Mel," they say in big letters.

Prominent among the prisoners stands Jesus himself, wearing a loin cloth and a crown of thorns.

"I am here," he says. "Beware of vulgar imitations."

Heralded by months of unrelenting publicity, "The Passion" opened in Europe to a volatile — and not unexpected — mix of praise, condemnation and controversy that in many ways mirrors that in North America, where the film opened Feb. 25.

Boosted by the media buzz, "The Passion" broke box office records across the continent and sparked high-profile debate in local magazines, newspapers, Web sites and talk shows.

In Italy, "The Passion" opened on nearly 700 screens April 7, just two days before Good Friday — the day on which Christians believe Jesus was crucified. Unlike in the United States and some other countries, there was no age restriction for viewers.

Tickets sold out at many cinemas, and the film posted a record opening-day take of about \$1.5 million — more than 60 percent of the total take for all movies shown around Italy that day.

In Croatia, where the movie opened earlier this month, it also set an all-time record for opening weekend attendance. In Britain it took in more than \$3 million on its opening weekend, setting a record for a subtitled film.

Despite the packed theaters, response to the film from critics, clergy and the public was mixed.

"The Passion," wrote Ciak, "illustrates how faith can be both 'a blockbuster and a lethal weapon.'"

Jewish leaders slammed the movie as anti-Semitic and warned that Gibson's unflattering portrayal of ancient Jews could reignite traditional anti-Semitism at a time of international tension that already has seen a spike of anti-Jewish violence in Europe.

In Naples, in fact, posters bearing an anti-Semitic message and a picture of Caviezel as Jesus appeared on walls after the movie opened. They were signed by previously unknown organizations that police said appeared linked to the extreme right.

"The posters don't surprise us," a spokesman for the Italy-Israel Association told reporters. "It was a given that this film, with its morbid and insistent representation of violence, would have rekindled sentiments of prejudice and hatred."

Critics, including some clergy, blasted the movie's graphic violence as well as its potential anti-Jewish impact.

"The Passion" is a "sadistic, pornographic, blasphemous horror show" and "the most anti-Semitic film in the history of the cinema," fumed Furio Colombo, editor of the Italian leftist daily L'Unita.

Spain's ABC newspaper also compared it to pornography.

Gibson and others involved in the film deny any anti-Semitic intent.

Many Catholic clergy, including some senior Vatican officials, gave "The Passion" a rapturous response and encouraged the faithful to see the film. They praised it for its hard-hitting depiction of Jesus' torment, saying the violence could be redemptive.

"I personally did not find anything anti-Semitic," Monsignor John Foley, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Social Communications, told reporters ahead of the film's official opening.

"I found the film very impressive, very moving," he said. "Even with its terrible violence, I thought to myself, 'This is the

price of our sinfulness ... I am to blame for the death of Christ, not any particular group.'"

The Vatican has not issued a formal comment on the movie, but Caviezel, a devout Catholic, had an audience last month with Pope John Paul II, who had seen the film earlier.

Many Catholic believers said they were deeply inspired by Gibson's depiction of a story so fundamental to Christian belief.

The weekly newspaper the Irish Catholic called it "a great movie ... bloody and beautiful at the same time."

Protestant clergy and laypeople, however, were much less touched.

"It's downright gruesome. It made me want to throw up," Gunnar Staalsett, the Lutheran bishop of Oslo, said on Norwegian television.

In Germany, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders issued a joint statement warning that the film could fan anti-Semitism.

In France, Roman Catholic bishops took the unusual step of officially denouncing "The Passion" as a distortion of Christian teaching that "could be used to support anti-Semitic opinions."

The movie's opening in France coincided with the release in Strasbourg of a European Union report detailing a sharp rise in anti-Semitic violence in Europe. In a rare statement, the French Bishops Conference said that "the face of Christ shows through less than the obsessions of our times — the dread of evil, fascination with violence and the search for the guilty."

French reviewers gave the movie a thumbs-down as bad cinema.

There was concern, too, about the film's potential impact among Europe's millions of Muslims. The film already has opened to full houses in several Arab countries, at a time when anti-Semitism is surging throughout the Arab world.

After Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat saw the film, a spokesman compared the suffering of Jesus to that of the Palestinians.

"The Palestinians are still daily being exposed to the kind of pain Jesus was exposed to during his crucifixion," Nabil Abu Rudeineh said in a statement.

Critics are panning the film, but moviegoers don't seem to care.

FIRST PERSON

An immigrant to Israel, on the left in U.S., shifts right

By JONATHAN UDREN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Ever since I can remember registering my first political thought, I've considered myself a proud lefty.

As my college career progressed, my left-wing political slant became more pronounced, and I often could be found preaching about the beauty of state-subsidized health care or the pitfalls of rampant consumerism.

When I graduated and moved to New York City, my near-socialist values found a happy home at a left-wing Jewish non-profit organization.

We raised money for such causes as a living wage bill, equal education for minorities and inner-city community organizing projects.

Since moving to Israel, however, a strange transformation has occurred: I now find myself as far to the right in Israeli politics as I was to the left in the American arena.

Evacuate Gaza? It's as much part of the Land of Israel as Tel Aviv! Give the West Bank over to terrorists? Are you kidding? Look at what's happened to the guns that we gave after Oslo!

Recently my political stance has flipped so far to the right that I had to look in the mirror and ask myself, "What happened to your die-hard love for the left?"

The funny thing is that I don't feel like I've gone through some kind of political metamorphosis. I still take the same stance about those American liberal issues that I worked for in New York.

It's not so much that I've changed, but the issues around me have all changed: Israel is a different political landscape, and the issues here have taken my politics in a new direction.

The difference is simple. In the United States, the left and the right are divided by money matters. Here the left and right are divided on matters of the heart.

The issues tend to pull at my heart strings more than a living wage bill ever did.

Broadening outreach efforts, Hillel seeks Georgia 'Superstar'

By RACHEL POMERANCE

ATLANTA (JTA) — Inside the frame of a mock TV set, three African-Americans, an Asian-American and a Jew squeezed each other's hands nervously as they stood on stage before 1,000 people.

The group of Georgia college students braced to hear which of the five finalists would be crowned "Campus Superstar," capping a nearly two-month vocal competition run by Hillels of Georgia.

The fund-raiser, simulating the hit show "American Idol," was an attempt not only to brand a concept but to refashion an organization that caters almost exclusively to Jewish students.

The novel approach was a way to raise Hillel's profile on campus and update its image among college students — and attract unaffiliated Jewish students in the process.

Hundreds of students turned out to watch or try out for the competition, which awarded the winner — Andra London, the Jewish finalist and a Hillel activist at Atlanta's Emory University — \$5,000.

She also will get to sing this spring at "Music Midtown," Atlanta's premier pop music festival, and to perform the national anthem at an Atlanta Falcons football game.

Hillel expects to make more than \$100,000 from the contest, more than three times as much as it has earned from any other special event in recent years.

After 11 finalists performed at an Atlanta auditorium April 1, the field was narrowed to five by a panel that included industry giants like Paul Worley, a country producer who has worked with the Dixie Chicks; and Steve Koonin, an executive vice president of TBS Superstation and Turner Network Television.

The audience then chose the winner.

The event was a public relations bonanza for Hillel in the local community and among its donor base.

It showcased the energy and possibilities of campus life, as well as Hillel's pioneering programming, said Jacob

Schreiber, executive director of Hillels of Georgia.

"This is where you take a risk to do a program that's so outrageous in scope — that's what has excited this community," he said. "Now when they think of Hillel, they're going to think exciting, cutting edge, big."

On stage, a Coca-Cola-sponsored "Red Room" — a lounge-like talk show held inside a giant mock television — was used for pre-performance chats between the singers and the master of ceremonies, local sports radio host Steak Shapiro.

"Join the Jewish Bulldog nation!" Missy Ball urged, referring to the mascot of the University of Georgia, where she is Hillel president.

Much of the audience was Jewish, but even the non-Jewish participants didn't seem to mind the Jewish overtones of the event.

In introducing the judges, for example, Shapiro presented "another one of the goyim" as a "big macher."

Han Oh, an Emory senior and one of the five finalists, said he appreciated Hillel's open-mindedness.

"I definitely felt comfortable," he said.

Nicole Boddington, a Brooklyn native who belted out a Toni Braxton tune, said she was honored to be surrounded by so much talent in the experience.

Asked whether being Jewish added any pressure to the situation, she said religion wasn't discussed. In fact, said the marketing major, who hopes to be signed as a professional singer, she wasn't sure anyone even knew she was Jewish.

London is the chair of arts and culture at Emory's Hillel.

While she's already in the fold, she said, the event's hipness will make other students "want more to be part of the jumpover" to Hillel.

That's precisely the idea.

According to Jeff Rubin, spokesman for the national Hillel organization, "Superstar" was one of a handful of Hillel programs around the country "that lower the threshold of Jewish backgrounds for everyone to participate."

'Join the Jewish Bulldog nation!'

Missy Ball
President, University of
Georgia Hillel

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

E.U. mixed on Gaza plan

The European Union cautiously backed Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

In a statement released Thursday shortly after the Israeli prime minister's meeting with President Bush, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said he welcomed the proposals as "an opportunity to restart the implementation of the 'road map' " peace plan. However, Solana also reiterated the E.U. position that the bloc "would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties."

In talks Wednesday with Sharon in Washington, Bush said it is "unrealistic" to expect Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders on the West Bank.

AMIA case in jeopardy

An Argentine court dismissed two prosecutors in the trial of police officers accused of helping bomb a Jewish community center in 1994.

Announced Tuesday, just weeks before the trial is due to end, the decision could imperil the case. Three judges said prosecutors Eamon Mullen and Jose Barbaccia were not impartial because they were aware of a \$400,000 bribe paid by the investigative judge on the case, Juan Jose Galeano, to car mechanic.

Carlos Telleldin to secure his accusation against the former police officers.

The court dismissed Galeano over the bribe last December. Following the decision, lawyers for the AMIA community center, the DAIA Jewish political umbrella group and victims' relatives said they would consider withdrawing as plaintiffs.

A relative of one of the 85 victims, Sergio Burstein, told local media, "This is gross. If they continue like this, they will end saying there was no bombing, no explosion, no nothing."

MIDDLE EAST

Bombing foiled

A Palestinian woman was captured before she could carry out a bombing in the West Bank.

Israeli security officials said soldiers, acting on intelligence warnings of an impending suicide bombing, intercepted the woman outside the settlement city of Ariel on Thursday night and found a bomb in her handbag.

Settlements and satellites

Israel reportedly will supply the United States with satellite pictures of settlements slated for evacuation and timetables for their removal. Israel's Channel Two television said aides to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon made the pledge in a gesture of good faith after he won President Bush's support for his unilateral withdrawal.

Settlement funds stopped

Israel's attorney general halted funding for settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Justice Ministry said Thursday that Menachem Mazuz issued the order to the Construction and Housing Ministry based on concerns that some of the funds were being used to build illegal settlement outposts. The decision drew ire from settler groups.

Tunnel discovered in Gaza

Israeli forces on a tunnel-hunting mission in the Gaza Strip clashed with Palestinian gunmen. The Israeli army said its forces

discovered an access point to an arms-smuggling tunnel buried 18 feet underground during the Thursday morning raid on the Rafah refugee camp. The raid sparked gunfights with Rafah gunmen; at least 20 Palestinians were wounded.

Bulldozers to Israel OK'd

Caterpillar shareholders rejected a proposal that would have asked the company to stop selling bulldozers to the Israeli army. The measure, which was prompted by Israel's use of the bulldozers to raze the homes of suspected Palestinian terrorists, overwhelmingly was defeated at the shareholders' meeting Wednesday in Chicago.

Diplomat: Israel embraces gays

Israel has made great strides in gay and lesbian rights, an Israeli diplomat told U.S. activists.

Israel's consul general in New York, Alon Pinkas, said in a statement that Israel has abolished laws against sodomy, included sexual orientation in sexual harassment legislation and eliminated discrimination in the military. "Israel is currently in the forefront of countries granting gays' and lesbians' freedoms," Pinkas said in a statement.

More than 100 people attended the event, held at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center and sponsored by a New York City synagogue and Jerusalem Open House, an Israeli gay rights group. Jerusalem Open House will hold the second World-Pride gay festival, under the theme "Love Without Borders," next year in Jerusalem.

NORTH AMERICA

College students blast speaker

More than 1,000 Emory University students say their commencement speaker is an anti-Semite.

The students and some academic staff have signed an online petition accusing Mary Robinson, the former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, of being anti-Semitic and fomenting hostility toward Israel. They called on the university to remove her as commencement speaker in the May 10 ceremony.

Under Robinson's stewardship, the 2001 U.N. World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, became an outpouring of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric, and many Jewish leaders charge Robinson with anti-Israel bias. According to the Irish Times, Emory University said it was unaware of the Durban controversy when it invited Robinson, but said the former Irish president has condemned anti-Semitism and religious intolerance.

Former guard loses citizenship

A New Jersey man lost his citizenship because he lied about his activities as a concentration camp guard during World War II. A judge ruled Wednesday against Andrew Kuras, who served at Trawniki and other camps.

Never too late for a prom

A middle school in New Jersey hosted 200 Holocaust survivors at its prom. Eighth-graders at Milburn Middle School planned Wednesday's multigenerational dance after taking a Holocaust studies class and hearing one survivor's firsthand account.

A new Sabbath queen

Madonna will not play on Friday nights during her upcoming tour, which includes Israel. The move by the singer comes as her interest in Kabbalah appears to be broadening. Though Madonna is not Jewish, "she is observing Shabbat on Friday evenings," her longtime publicist, Liz Rosenberg, told New York magazine.