

IN THE NEWS

Sharon denies more withdrawals

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon denied a report that he plans further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank.

Yediot Achronot, citing top Jerusalem officials, said last Friday that after the summer withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, Israel will withdraw from other areas of the latter territory and demarcate a border around major settlement blocs there.

The Palestinian Authority responded by accusing the Sharon government of poor faith in implementing the U.S.-led peace "road map," which envisions a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank.

Sharon denied the Yediot report Sunday.

Israeli envoy to see Pollard

Israel's ambassador to the United States will visit Jonathan Pollard, a diplomatic first that the convicted spy has been seeking for years.

In the United States last week for a summit with President Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told Ambassador Daniel Ayalon to arrange the visit with Pollard, a former Navy analyst sentenced in 1987 to life in prison for spying for Israel.

The visit could come within weeks, an Israeli official told JTA. Ayalon would check Pollard's conditions and other "humanitarian concerns," the official said.

The topic of Pollard did not come up in Sharon's conversations with Bush, senior Israeli officials said.

Hate mail targets Jews

Dozens of Jewish residents, businesses and synagogues in the Los Angeles area have been baraged by hate mail in recent weeks.

The FBI, U.S. Postal Service and Los Angeles police are investigating the large manila envelopes, some of which had "Die Jews Die" scrawled on the outside.

WORLD REPORT

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New institute aims to move Jewish demographics way ahead

By RICHARD ASINOF

BOSTON (JTA) — How many Jewish children are enrolled in Jewish preschools? How many Jewish preschools are there in America? How many Jewish families include newborns?

Surprisingly, according to Rabbi David Gedzelman, executive director of the Jewish Life Network in New York, there are no accurate numbers that measure these demographic trends.

For philanthropists, federations and Jewish communal organizations, quantifying these trends is not just an academic exercise. The ability to reverse the decline in the American Jewish population, many community leaders believe, may hinge in large part on the success of Jewish education programs targeted at young children.

But which programs work? Which reach their audience? And why?

To remedy what he sees as a lack of good data, philanthropist Michael Steinhardt and his Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation have joined forces with Brandeis University to create the Steinhardt Social Research Institute.

Under the direction of Leonard Saxe, head of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis and backed by Steinhardt's initial \$12 million gift, organizers hope that the institute, which will open officially in September, will become the premier site for collection and analysis of statistical data about American Jews, cornering the market on the country's Jewish demographics.

"The amount of data that doesn't exist is astounding," Steinhardt told JTA in an interview. "The Jewish community is in the 19th century in terms of data, and the quality of the data that does exist is poor."

When the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey was released more than a year late in September 2003, it was dogged by controversy over both methodology and lost data. The actual data sample was based on telephone interviews with 4,523 people, representing a 28 percent response rate.

According to the study's findings, during the previous decade Jewish population had declined from 5.5 million to 5.2 million; intermarriage was on the rise, with 47 percent of Jews choosing a non-Jewish partner since 1996; and about

4.3 million Jews were active "Jewishly."

But some researchers questioned both the numbers' reliability and the assumptions made about those numbers. Further, the methodology used for the 2000-2001 study was different than the methodology used for the 1990 study, creating problems in data comparisons.

In response to questions on the issue, Glenn Rosenkrantz, UJC's director of media affairs, gave the following statement: "United Jewish Communities commends Michael Steinhardt for his generous support of so many causes and initiatives designed to benefit the Jewish community. If this new effort helps all of us in the communal world better understand the challenges we face in building Jewish community and continuity, then we will all benefit."

Saxe, the institute's director, who began

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *Pushing the envelope when it comes to Jewish demographics*

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his career as a scientist with the U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, told JTA that all the data will be accessible and all the methodologies transparent.

At first the focus will be on gathering basic data about the size and characteristics of the American Jewish community, but Saxe emphasized that the new Steinhardt Institute at Brandeis will be more than just a repository for information.

"We will be out there, asking questions, and developing new methodologies," he said. "We're going to have the opportunity to synthesize, analyze and collect our own data, to try to understand better the American Jewish community."

Saxe also firmly believes that the methodologies must change. In the past, he said, many studies often collected dozens and dozens of lists of people who had some contact with Jewish philanthropic and cultural organizations. "What happens," he asked again, "if you add lists from organizations, say, that promote Jewish dating?"

The result, he said, is that you might reach many more Jews. The people answering the survey vehicle from, say, JDate, may not be people who donate to the local federation.

Saxe is working with Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies in its 10-year study mapping the local Jewish community. He has incorporated many of his improvements in methodology in

that study. He also has developed what he calls a new "response vehicle" that he hopes will become the model for other community studies around the country.

No firm date has been set for the release, but it is expected to be completed in the fall.

Saxe acknowledged that the world of social research in the Jewish community is a "dance between scholars, researchers, policy-makers and the people making decisions."

It's also about creating context, not just numbers, he said. "The pattern of education associated with different levels of engagement is one of the most important questions about the American Jewish community we don't know. We're going to help find the answers."

The connection between Brandeis and the Jewish Life Network — and between Steinhardt and Saxe — grew in part out of a research project Saxe conducted for Birthright Israel, the program that sends young Jews on a free 10-day trip to Israel, according to Gedzelman of the Jewish Life Network.

Waxing philosophical, Gedzelman spoke of figuring out the "calculus" between the revival and decline of the American Jewish community. "There's a race between the various interventions that have brought about the renewal in the Jewish community, and the macro decline in the numbers of overall Jews," he said.

The new institute, he continued, can help the Jewish community make wiser

investments with its resources so "the renaissance overtakes the decline."

On a practical level, the value of demographic and market research is underscored by the work of Yosef Abramowitz and his Jewish Family & Life's launch of a new magazine, JViVe, targeted at Jewish teens. The new publication has a circulation of 15,000 and another 30,000 teens use the Web site.

Before JViVe was launched, market research determined how many Jewish 12- to 16-year-olds there are, and mapped their geographic distribution. Abramowitz then conducted focus groups with teens who had had a bar or bat mitzvah and then "disappeared" from engagement with the Jewish community.

Only then, Abramowitz said, "did we build our marketing and rollout plans, knowing how much money we needed to raise and how to use it in the most effective ways."

Abramowitz welcomed the new research institute as a valuable tool in helping to revitalize Jewish life. "If the Jewish community and Jewish philanthropists are serious about revitalizing Jewish life, that means our best endeavors have to be built to scale up to reach the critical mass in each demographic segment," he said.

"You can't manage what you can't measure," the CEO of Jewish Family & Life continued. "We need detailed information, not just absolute numbers, on geography, social habits, spending habits and identity." ■

**Jewish demographics
is a 'dance' among
various constituencies.**

Leonard Saxe

Director, Brandeis' Cohen Center

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Group endorses Jerusalem gay pride

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Reform movement expressed support for an international gay pride festival in Jerusalem.

The Union for Reform Judaism last Friday described the controversial Jerusalem Worldpride 2005 festival, scheduled for this summer, as a "celebration of diversity, tolerance and human dignity," and said there was no more fitting place to hold the event than Israel's capital.

"We are saddened by the reaction of some religious leaders who are using this opportunity to disseminate fear, hatred, and homophobia," Reform leaders said in a statement.

"The attempt to exclude gays and lesbians from the holy city of Jerusalem offends us as Jews, just as the use of religion to demonize gays and lesbians should offend all people of faith." ■

In FSU, Jewish students bring religion home

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

DNEPROPETROVSK, Ukraine (JTA) — The decision to send children to Jewish schools sometimes causes problems for Jewish families in the former Soviet Union.

"Our family isn't traditional, and the only Jewish school we have here is a religious one," says Anna, a Jewish community worker in Dnepropetrovsk, echoing a common concern of many Jews here who feel a cultural link to Judaism but not a religious one.

TEACHING FOR THE FUTURE

THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

■ David Welch, the top State Department official dealing with the Middle East, and Elliott Abrams, President Bush's top adviser on the region, arrive Monday in Israel to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Their meetings will follow this week's summit between Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and ahead of an as yet unscheduled visit by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Meanwhile, Yossi Bachar, the director general of the Israeli Treasury, arrives in Washington on Monday to discuss U.S. financial assistance to help absorb settlers evacuated during the withdrawal.

■ Elton John is the featured performer at a benefit for the International Sephardic Educational Foundation in New York City. The foundation helps promote educational opportunities for gifted, poor youth in Israel.

WEDNESDAY

■ B'nai B'rith International hosts a breakfast Wednesday on Capitol Hill for congressmen. B'nai B'rith leaders and members will ask legislators about domestic and international issues of concern to the group.

■ Demonstrations will be held around the world for two days as part of the "Born to Freedom" campaign, which seeks information on the whereabouts of missing Israeli air force navigator Ron Arad, and Israeli MIAs and Jews held hostage in Iran. The demonstrations will take place simultaneously in front of Iranian Embassies in London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Amsterdam and Stockholm, and outside U.N. offices in New York and Geneva.

FRIDAY

■ The Milwaukee Symphony presents a two-day premiere of a symphony by Israeli composer Gil Shohat. "Songs for Bathsheba" is a 90-minute oratorio based on Psalm 51, features approximately 100 orchestra members and 175 chorus members.

Anna, who asked that her last name not be used, had to make a difficult decision a few years ago over whether to send her then-6-year-old daughter to the local Jewish school.

"Yes, the kids in school are secular, but I'm not sure to what extent we as parents are ready to accept everything kids receive in this school," she says.

In the end, Anna decided not to send her child to a Jewish school because she was uncomfortable with the level of Jewishness the school taught.

Anna's dilemma is not the only one that Jewish schools can pose for parents in the former Soviet Union.

For other parents, the issue becomes changing their own lifestyles to adapt to what their children are learning in school. Some seem ready — if a bit reluctant — to do so.

"One day my son came back from school and said from now on he would eat only kosher food," says the mother of a student from St. Petersburg. "Of course I was shocked. We never had anything like this in our family. Even my grandfather, who was born in the 19th century, never did anything Jewish — not to mention eating kosher."

The mother, who asked not to be identified, says she is preoccupied with practical questions such as where to get her son kosher food, which isn't readily available in the former Soviet Union, even in larger

communities like St. Petersburg.

"Twice a month I go to the synagogue to buy a chicken for him," the woman says. "My son has changed a lot in this school. I can't say I'm unhappy, but what if one day he decides to become a rabbi or something like that?"

Other parents whose children adopt some level of Jewish observance while attending Jewish school are more ready to accept the change.

"My parents looked with interest at what was happening to me," says Eliyahu Fidel, a graduate of Pri Yitzhak, a St. Petersburg Jewish boys school, who now lives on his own. "They're not helping me, but they're not against it."

Fidel, who was in one of Pri Yitzhak's first graduating classes in the mid-1990s, now is a tutor at the school.

"The school has come to our homes. I wear a kippah at home," says Andrei Yegorov, a Pri Yitzhak

student who like many others in religious schools here received a Jewish name — Natan — when he was circumcised as a student.

Asya, a teenager at a Moscow Jewish school, says she celebrates all Jewish holidays but usually does so at the home of a classmate whose father is a rabbi.

"My parents are not against it, but I can't do it at home properly and my parents aren't eager to participate," Asya says. "Sometimes I can see they feel relaxed when I'm doing this elsewhere." ■

Some Jewish parents are uneasy when their children become more religious.

Israeli festival opens in Ukraine

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — A festival of Israeli culture has opened in Ukraine.

The six-week-long event known as the Days of Israeli Culture in Ukraine, will run through June 2.

It is the most widespread celebration of Israeli culture in Ukraine, Naomi Ben-Ami, Israel's ambassador in Kiev, said at the April 12 opening ceremony.

The festival will include various Israeli exhibitions, theatrical performances, concerts and film showings to be held in Kiev,

Kharkov, Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, Lvov and Chernovtsy with the aim of promoting Israeli culture and Israeli-Ukrainian relations.

The event is being organized by the Israeli Embassy in Ukraine in cooperation with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Israeli Cultural Center in Kiev and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee with the assistance of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Bloomberg blasts Lenora Fulani

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg distanced himself from anti-Semitic remarks by a New York politician.

Bloomberg said last Friday that he finds the remarks by Lenora Fulani, who recently affirmed comments that Jews "had to sell their souls" for the State of Israel and had become "mass murderers of people of color" to keep it, to be "phenomenally offensive."

Fulani also has been accused of labeling Zionism as "Jewish corporate nationalism."

Fulani is one of the leaders of New York's Independence Party, which backed Bloomberg when he was elected mayor in 2001.

Bloomberg, who is Jewish, is running for re-election this year.

L.A. Jewish issue fizzles out

Jewish leaders in Los Angeles said they now believe the city's mayor is not responsible for forging their names on cards endorsing his re-election.

The leaders had previously blamed James Hahn for the cards, but now say they believe some Jewish volunteers were responsible.

The cards ran as ads in local Jewish newspapers. Hahn faces a tough race in the May 17 runoff against Antonio Villaraigosa.

ADL expresses concerns to congressman

The Anti-Defamation League sent a letter to the U.S. Senate majority leader criticizing his intention to appear on a TV show that portrays the debate over filibusters as "against people of faith."

Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) is expected to appear on an April 24 telecast by the Family Research Council, urging an end to the filibuster rule in the consideration of federal judges.

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, said it was unacceptable to play the religious card in the debate.

"The heated debate regarding the status of the filibuster in the United States Senate is a quintessentially political contest, not a religious struggle," Foxman said in the letter. "Nor should it be portrayed as such."

The Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism issued a statement echoing Foxman's message.

Canada ups investment in human rights museum

Canada's government confirmed it has approved a total investment of up to \$100 million to the Canadian Museum of Human Rights.

The investment in the museum, slated for Winnipeg, includes the \$30 million allocated to the project in 2003.

The museum was the idea of the late Jewish media mogul Israel Asper.

The Asper family owns CanWest Global Communications Corp., the parent company of several daily newspapers including the National Post as well as the Global Television Network.

MIDDLE EAST

Dress rehearsal for Gaza withdrawal

The Israeli army carried out "virtual withdrawals" from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank.

Top brass convened in Tel Aviv on Sunday to test various computer-generated scenarios designed to anticipate events that could arise during the withdrawals scheduled to begin July 20.

Among worst-case scenarios were Palestinian attacks on troops and settlers and refusals by soldiers to obey evacuation orders.

Israeli police are expected to conduct a similar exercise later this week.

Back to Egypt

Thousands of Israelis flocked to Sinai despite a government-issued terror alert.

The Taba crossing to the Israeli-Egyptian border was choked with vacationers Sunday. Authorities estimated that more than 15,000 Israelis could spend the Passover holiday on Sinai's beaches.

The travel comes despite an advisory by the Prime Minister's Office that Egypt is among 12 Muslim countries where Israelis risk being attacked by terrorists. Last year, 12 Israelis were killed in bombings that targeted Sinai resorts.

Hotels along the beaches reported 70 percent occupancy this year, down from the sold-out crowds during previous years, an indication that some Israelis may be taking the terror alert seriously.

Gesture to Jordan

Israel announced it would release nine Jordanian security prisoners.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Cabinet approved the release Sunday as part of efforts to improve relations with Amman.

"I am very pleased that we can make this gesture to honor the king of Jordan," Trade Minister Ehud Olmert told reporters.

The Jordanians slated to go free, most likely on Wednesday, were jailed on terror-related charges but not convicted of attacks that caused Israeli casualties.

WORLD

French cemetery vandalized

A Jewish cemetery in Avignon, France was vandalized April 16.

The Star of David that hung on a pillar at the entrance to the cemetery was partially wrenched off, and racist slogans were scrawled on the window of the information desk, among other damage discovered by a rabbi.

Indonesians rally against Israel

More than 10,000 people attended anti-Israel rallies in Indonesia.

Sunday's rallies came days before African and Asian leaders are slated to meet in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta to discuss aid for the Palestinians, Reuters reported.

Speakers at the largest rally, held in Jakarta, called on the United States to end its support for Israel.

Neo-Nazis countered in Germany

German police arrested nearly 20 people after a neo-Nazi march was met with a counterdemonstration.

The arrests occurred Saturday after some 300 people rallied in the city of Erfurt in reaction to a neo-Nazi march of 60, The Associated Press reported.

There were no clashes between the two groups. Counterdemonstrators rallied against neo-Nazis in at least two other cities.

Hungarians get Holocaust memorial

Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany inaugurated a new memorial to Holocaust victims in Budapest.

Sculptor Gyula Pauer's work, dedicated Saturday, consists of 60 pairs of shoes cast in iron, a reference to the shoes of some of the thousands of victims shot into the river by the Arrow Cross, the Nazis' Hungarian allies during World War II.

Saturday, April 16, was national Holocaust Memorial Day in Hungary, commemorating the date on which the ghettoization of Jews in the countryside began in 1944.

Also Saturday, some 200 Hungarians marched outside the German Embassy in Budapest in support of Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel, who is jailed in Germany while he awaits charges for allegedly spreading hate.