

IN THE NEWS

Hamas resolution passes voice vote

A congressional resolution that warns of policy consequences if Hamas joins the Palestinian Authority government passed on a voice vote.

The resolution, supported by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and opposed by Americans for Peace Now, passed late Wednesday night, but according to a parliamentary procedure it must undergo a roll call. Such procedures usually are called to get a record of each member's vote.

Bush postpones Israel Embassy move

President Bush extended for another six months an act of Congress that would move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Bush promised during his 2000 campaign to move the embassy immediately, but he has used a national security exemption every six months to delay the move.

The concern is that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital would upset the Arab world.

"My administration remains committed to beginning the process of moving our embassy to Jerusalem," Bush said Wednesday in issuing the order.

President Clinton also used the national security exemption.

Israeli official sued in Washington

A former Israeli military chief of staff was sued over his alleged role in the killing of more than 100 Lebanese civilians in 1996.

Someone tried to hand Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon an envelope Thursday at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he is a fellow.

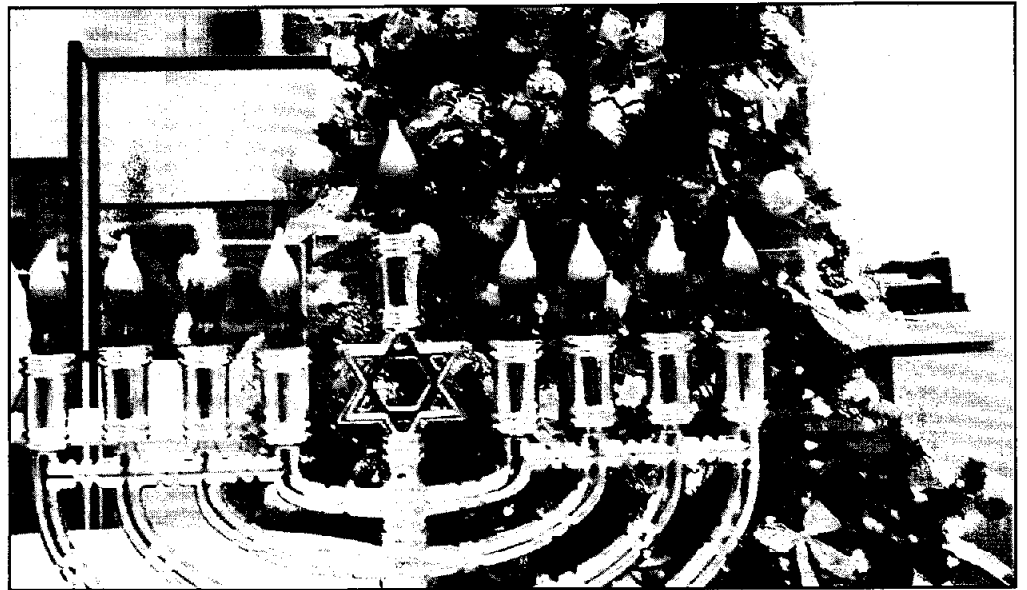
Ya'alon, scheduled to join a panel about the attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, did not want to accept the papers and let the envelope drop to the floor.

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WORLD REPORT

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Chanan Tigay

This display in the window of a New York bank balances a Christmas tree with a menorah.

As Christmas struggle intensifies, American Jews fear the Grinch role

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The sound of angry Christians railing against the marginalization of Christmas has become the new tune of this holiday season.

Across the country, from department stores to town halls, battle lines have been drawn over how to mark the winter holidays.

Led by evangelical groups, who say the holiday's religious significance is being ignored, some Christians are fighting back. They're threatening to sue school districts that have banned the singing of Christmas carols and other places where "Happy Holidays" has replaced "Merry Christmas" as the preferred greeting of the

season.

Evangelical leaders don't cast the Jewish community as the Scrooge, yet efforts to highlight Christian themes and celebrations at Christmas historically have come at the expense of religious diversity and tolerance — and Jewish leaders fear that stressing Christmas' religious significance could highlight Jews' minority status in the United States.

"It is not a movement prompted by an animus against Jews or the Jewish community," said Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who in recent months has taken the lead in warning about growing evangelical influence in the United States. "But the unintended consequence is that

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ *An expression of faith or a last-ditch effort to keep America Christian?*

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Jews may be blamed for it.”

Much of what evangelicals criticize consists of efforts to include religious minorities in holiday celebrations, say Jewish community leaders, who fear that adding more religious expression in schools and government could make Jews feel like second-class citizens.

Rabbi Leah Richman of Pottsville, Pa., received angry letters and phone calls when she called for the removal of a nativity scene in her town square.

“The non-Jewish people in the area are very interested in promoting Christmas and they believe that church and state should be more mingled,” Richman said. “They’re taking my stand as being anti-tolerance and anti-diversity, because I’m not tolerant of their nativity scene.”

Instead of opposing the nativity scene, some respondents said Richman should place a menorah nearby. Indeed, much of the evangelical community’s argument has rested on a call for more celebrations of both Christmas and Chanukah, part of a call for a return to “Judeo-Christian values.”

“It just seems to me that what we ought to be aiming for in America is recognizing everyone’s traditions, rather than melding traditions into a homogenized whatever,” Gary Bauer, the president of American Values, told JTA.

Richman declined to help the local library put up a menorah display, instead suggesting an educational program on holidays.

The onslaught of Christmas decora-

tions and programming for years has been a source of quiet frustration for American Jews, but decisions about how to handle it have varied. Some Jewish groups have worked to ensure that religious Christmas displays don’t enter the public square, while others — predominantly the Chabad movement — sought equal treatment for menorahs and other Chanukah decorations.

The inclusion of Chanukah, and then the African-American holiday of Kwanzaa, has forced retailers and municipalities to seek more generic and inclusive ways of acknowledging all faiths. That has led to claims that Christianity has been taken out of Christmas celebrations.

The city of Boston renamed a tree in Boston Common a “holiday tree.” Target, the giant retailer, was criticized for airing commercials in December that did not specifically mention Christmas.

Even Pope Benedict XVI has weighed in, declaring Sunday that a “commercial pollution” of Christmas could alter the holiday’s true meaning. He suggested families erect nativity scenes in their homes.

The pro-Christmas movement comes at a time of growing evangelical political strength, giving their message increased weight and attention. Evangelicals have fought this year against efforts to remove proselytizing from the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., and for the teaching of “intelligent design” in public schools. Nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court have been weighed in part on their church attendance and their public proclamations of faith.

“They’ve come to feel a certain strength in their position in America and in the public that they didn’t feel under President Clinton,” said Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, chairman of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. “They feel they can flex their muscles more if their rights as a majority are being abridged for the sake of political correctness.”

Even the White House has been chastised this year for writing “Best wishes for the holiday season” on its annual Christmas cards. Last year’s cards also re-

ferred to the “holiday season” rather than Christmas, and both years’ cards included a quote from Psalms. Those who see a decrease in Christmas observance, including media figures like Bill O’Reilly and John Gibson, both of the Fox News Channel, claim Christmas is being excluded from seasonal decorations in an attempt to be sensitive to minorities.

“It’s mostly guilt-ridden Christians,” Gibson, the author of “The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday is

Worse Than You Thought,” told JTA.

Self-styled defenders of the faith refer darkly to “militant secularists.”

“The Jews I know are not offended by the words, ‘Merry Christmas,’” Bauer said. “The controversy doesn’t seem to be coming from believing Jews.”

But Christian leaders often accuse Hollywood, the media and the American Civil Liberties Union of taking the religion out of Christmas — and all three groups are seen as run by Jews, Foxman said.

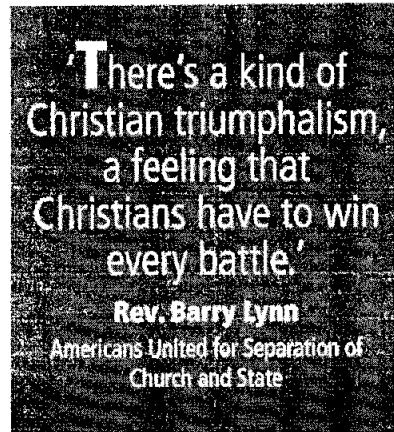
Eckstein warned of a backlash if Jews are seen as being on the front lines.

Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, has been cast as the lead opponent of Christmas celebrations. He said evangelical leaders are trying to place Christianity above other religions.

“There’s a kind of Christian triumphalism, a feeling that Christians have to win every battle,” said Lynn, who spoke to JTA by telephone while shopping for Christmas presents. “There is a fear that other religions are going to be treated the same as Christmas, and that means Christmas won’t have its special place five weeks of the year.”

Foxman called a meeting last week of American Jewish leaders to gauge common ground on the fight against Christian influence. Many observant Jews support public proclamations of faith, believing religion in the public square will boost observance in general.

Yet the Jewish leaders who attended Foxman’s meeting were united in opposing overt proselytizing of the sort reported at the Air Force Academy.



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Saudi prince's gifts raise eyebrows

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Harvard and Georgetown universities both say a Saudi prince attached no strings when he gave them \$20 million gifts — but at a time that Arab influence in American classrooms is coming under scrutiny, some observers are taking a wait-and-see approach.

“We realize that this is a sensitive topic, but the purpose of this gift is to support the study of Islam as a religious and cultural tradition, which is a significant factor in today’s world,” Harvard spokeswoman Sarah Friedell said.

The schools announced earlier this week that Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz al-Saud had made the contributions to further Islamic studies at both institutions, which were planning to rename centers after the prince.

A recent JTA investigation linked bin Talal with a group producing teaching materials for American public school students.

The materials contain content that is pro-Islamic, anti-American, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish.

In 2001, the prince donated \$10 million to a fund for the families of uniformed workers who died in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani refused the money after learning that bin Talal had tried to link the attacks to U.S. support for Israel.

Some observers of academia are wondering if the gifts to Harvard and Georgetown may be the latest in a series of attempts by the Saudis and other Arab countries to influence how the Middle East is taught in U.S. schools.

“Of course that’s the concern, and it’s not an unreal concern,” said Marc Stern, general counsel for the American Jewish Congress. “But you can’t assume that the universities improperly sold out for money. Because it comes from an Arab or Muslim source, you can’t assume that there’s something untoward about it.”

According to federal law, the schools are required to file papers disclosing the amount and date of foreign donations as well as a description of any conditions or restrictions on the gifts. AJCongress will check the forms once they’re filed, Stern said.

Though the money was designated for

Islamic studies, both Georgetown and Harvard say the prince has no say in the hiring of professors or in curriculum.

“The funds are designated, but there are no strings attached,” said Erik Smulson, assistant vice president for communications at Georgetown. “Georgetown University has final say on how the gift will be used, consistent with its mission.”

Harvard, too, said the prince will not be involved in hiring decisions.

“Consistent with university policy, recognizing the paramount importance of academic freedom in fact and in appearance, the donor will have no input whatsoever over appointment decisions,” Friedell said.

But it’s not the prince and his money per se that concern Daniel Pipes, founder and director of the Middle East Forum, a Philadelphia think tank. The forum runs Campus Watch, which reviews and critiques Middle East studies on American campuses.

Pipes frets about the “virtual monopoly” that he says academics espousing anti-American and anti-Israel points of view hold on university positions.

The donations are “pushing an open door, because the academics who are dealing with Islamic studies are, in general, already quite willing to go along with the Saudi outlook,” he said.

Concerned about the perceived anti-Israel tilt in academia, some universities have received gifts to ensure that Israel studies are taught at U.S. colleges as well.

UCLA’s International Institute announced last year that it was launching an Israel studies program, which its creators said would be the first teaching, research and community program at an American university focusing solely on the Jewish state in its multiple facets.

In 2002, the Helen Diller Family Fund committed \$5 million to the Jewish studies program at the University of California at Berkeley, to bring an Israeli professor to the university each year.

While those programs will ensure that Israel receives serious academic study, however, they don’t necessarily teach from a pro-Israel perspective.

Georgetown will use bin Talal’s gift to bolster its Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, to be renamed the HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. The funds will endow three faculty chairs, expand programs and scholar-

ships and improve library facilities.

Harvard said it would create a new Islamic studies program, increasing faculty in areas such as the history of science and adding new area studies.

“For a university with global aspirations, it is critical that Harvard have a strong program on Islam that is worldwide and interdisciplinary in scope,” said Harvard University Provost Steven Hyman, who will coordinate the program’s implementation.

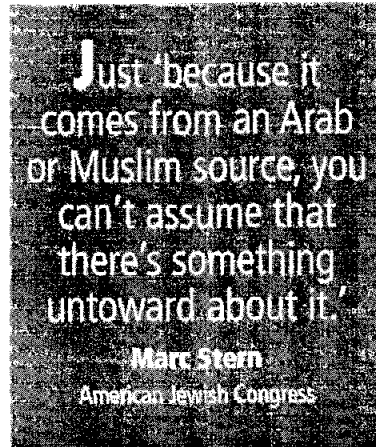
This is not the first time a Saudi Arabian has given money to an American university: Last year, for example, media reports had an unidentified Saudi giving Columbia University \$250,000.

In 2003, Rachel Fish, then a graduate student in Harvard’s Divinity School, campaigned successfully for the school to return a \$2.5-million donation from United Arab Emirates President Sheik Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, who had backed an Abu Dhabi-based think-tank that sponsored anti-Semitic and anti-American speakers.

As for bin Talal’s gift, Fish, now director of campus strategy at Boston’s David Project, hopes Harvard will select new faculty carefully.

“I think what would be a true test for both Harvard and Georgetown would be who they decide to hire for these professorships,” she said. “Students deserve to learn about Islam, but they must allow objective scholarship and questioning within the tradition of Islam.”

Bin Talal’s is the second-largest single gift in Georgetown’s history, and is among the 25 largest gifts made to Harvard.



Menorah displays show acceptance of Chabad

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ten years ago, the American Jewish Congress sued the city of Beverly Hills, Calif., to block the local Chabad house from erecting a 27-foot menorah in a public park near City Hall.

Displaying the menorah — a Jewish religious symbol — on public property, the AJCongress argued, was unconstitutional.

The district court granted summary judgment in favor of the city, allowing Chabad to put up the large candelabra. A three-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals later reversed the decision.

When it comes to displaying menorahs in public places, what a difference a decade makes.

This Chanukah, Chabad-Lubavitch plans to light more than 11,000 large public menorahs, from Bangkok to Miami Beach.

Those lighting the Chanukah candles won't come strictly from the ranks of America's Chabad chasidim; leaders of Jewish organizations across the spectrum, eager to take part in the public celebration of the Festival of Lights, will also be lighting Chabad's candles.

The growing acceptance of the Chabad menorahs is just one example of a broader trend: As Chabad spreads throughout the United States and the world, America's mainstream Jewish community is increasingly willing to embrace the movement, whereas in the past many Jewish organizations preferred to keep it at arms length.

"I think there's less fear and more openness on the parts of both Chabad and the broader community to support all who can reach and touch Jews," says John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of the UJA-Federation of New York. "That translates at the moment less programmatically and more in terms of communication and tone. It will be very interesting to see how this proceeds in the future."

Chabad, though, says the recent past offers some indication of how far things have come — and where they may be headed.

"Chabad has not changed that much in a generation," says Rabbi Levi Shemtov, director of the Washington office of the American Friends of Lubavitch. "The organized Jewish community has gone from being indifferent or harsh to being much more welcoming."

Rabbi Berel Shemtov, who has been director of Chabad-Lubavitch in Michigan for some five decades, has had front-row seats to the long progression.

"Fifty years ago, to build a Conservative or Reform temple, you were able to get millions of dollars. For Chabad this would not be possible," he says. "Today, Chabad is getting bigger support than the others. People realize how important Chabad is."

Chabad insiders and observers cite several developments that highlight the change:

- Jewish federations around the country are funding Chabad projects, inviting Chabad rabbis to sit on their boards and committees and including Chabad synagogues in their listings of local places to pray.

- With each passing year, more U.S. Chabad houses become dues-based congregations — like most mainstream Jewish congregations — running on membership payments rather than simply on donations.

- Most Jewish groups no longer sue to prevent Chabad from erecting public menorahs.

- Chabad continues to secure support from Jews outside the movement, even non-Orthodox Jews like Harvard law school professor Alan Dershowitz.

Dershowitz said he was dubious when he heard several years ago that Chabad intended to open a center at Harvard.

"My idea was: Siberia — that's nothing; Central Africa — that's a breeze. Chabad at Harvard? Impossible," Dershowitz said last month at Chabad's annual convention of emissaries in New York.

"How could that ever happen? Kids come to Harvard to rebel against their parents, to rebel against religion, to look for other ways, to look for more liberal attitudes. Could Chabad possibly ever succeed at Harvard?"

But succeed it has, Dershowitz says, quickly becoming a thriving center for Jewish students to meet, eat, discuss — but not necessarily to pray.

This past Rosh Hashanah, Phil Kaplan and his surfing buddies attended services at a Chabad shul in Orange County, Calif.

Kaplan, at 39 years old a major giver to the Jewish Federation of Orange County and the vice president of its annual campaign, is not a particularly observant Jew — but he prays with Chabad and gives them money.

"It seems like a lot more of the people we know are attending services with Chabad. I'm talking about mainstream people; I barely know any Orthodox people," Kaplan says. "In my opinion, it's because Chabad is very open and accessible. Despite the fact that the practice here is Orthodox, they make Judaism very accessible. With Chabad you can find your level and there's encouragement."

Many of Chabad's new programs are being underwritten by George Rohr, a modern Orthodox businessman and philanthropist from New York.

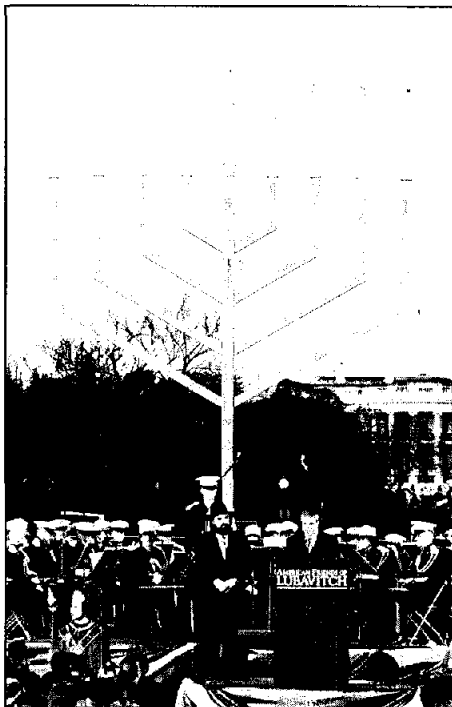
The movement says its annual budget comes in at more than \$1 billion, much of it raised by emissaries in the field for their own programming.

Those familiar with Chabad cite several reasons for its growing acceptance in America.

First, Chabad has made extraordinary efforts to reach out to Jews of every stripe, some of whom have grown to embrace the movement.

"In the market of outreach, Chabad looms large," says Samuel Heilman, a so-

FOCUS ON ISSUES



Chabad.org

A Chabad menorah is lit during a ceremony in front of the White House in this file photo.

ciology professor at Queens College.

Dancing rabbis on Chabad fund-raising telethons have given the movement a public face, as have the movement's mitzvah mobiles and the army of young Chabadniks who spend days out on city sidewalks asking passers-by if they'd like to put on tefillin or sit in a mobile sukkah and shake a lulav.

In addition, when Chabad emissaries land in a new place, they quickly make contact with local Jewish newspapers to introduce themselves and pitch stories. Over the years, Passover and Chanukah stories about Chabad have become the norm in many such papers, introducing Jews around the country to the movement.

Chabad has made efforts to gain a foothold in areas where more mainstream Jewish organizations have typically reigned, areas like college campuses. Chabad now has about 100 emissaries at U.S. colleges and universities.

The major player in Jewish campus life has long been Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

When Chabad came on the campus scene, the two groups were often seen as rivals vying for the allegiance of the same students.

But today, Chabad "is definitely being embraced by Hillel," says Avraham Infeld, Hillel president.

"Hillel has a commitment to ensure that more and more students have meaningful Jewish experiences," Infeld says. "Chabad is one of those agents on campus that provide meaningful Jewish experiences. To us they are a partner not a competitor. We don't agree ideologically on everything, but we have high respect for them and their work."

Still others say that Chabad's growth has coincided with a general resurgence in the Orthodox community.

"I think that Chabad and much of Orthodoxy have come of age," Heilman says. "Orthodoxy in general is much more a part of the discussion. Within that, there's been a recognition that Orthodoxy is not just one thing."

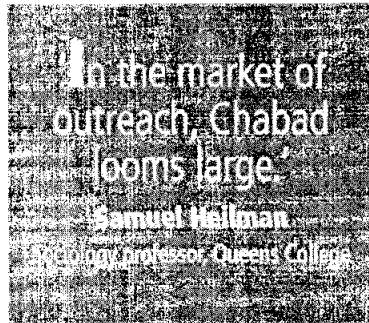
Part of the reason Jewish groups were wary of Chabad was the impression that the movement was not out simply to offer Jews positive Jewish experiences, but

wanted to make unobservant Jews Chabad adherents. Chabad rejects this notion, although its officials do acknowledge that they wouldn't mind if those who come in contact with them take on more Jewish rituals.

Also dogging Chabad throughout the years has been strident opposition to the movement's messianist wing, whose adherents believe that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the movement's charismatic leader who died 11 years ago, is the messiah.

The prevalence of such messianists is the subject of debate: Some Chabad opponents say that the majority of Chabad Chasidim are messianists in this vein. Top Chabad officials insist it's a dwindling minority.

David Berger, a history professor at Brooklyn College, says Chabad's spread is



an "acute danger to authentic Judaism."

The author of "The Rebbe, The Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference," Berger says the messianism means that "some of the core beliefs of the Jewish religion have been abolished" and that the "theological distinctions between Judaism and Christianity have been erased. I consider this to be a historic catastrophe."

But Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, a leading figure in the worldwide Chabad movement, dismisses such arguments, insisting that the level of messianism in Chabad is "very overstated."

"It's just used by some people to confuse others," he says.

Meanwhile, as Chabad begins to prepare its enormous menorahs for display, Krinsky boasts of Chabad's successes.

"I think Chanukah has become one of the most widely celebrated holidays by Jews in the world today — probably singularly because of the Chabad effort," he says.

Chabad's man in D.C. a hit

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Rabbi Levi Shemtov, Chabad's representative in Washington, bears certain similarities to the menorah whose lighting he engineers each year on the White House lawn: big, warm, and impossible to ignore.

What makes Shemtov remarkable is that in his 12 years of dealing with the world's most powerful power brokers, few seem to consider him overbearing.

"We have nothing in common except love of Judaism and love of politics — and it's not the same Judaism and not the same politics — but we're still very good friends," said Steve Rabinowitz, a former Clinton administration official and a longtime consultant to the Reform and Conservative movements.

Shemtov's Washington profile is a clear mark of Chabad's transformation in the past three decades from an insular Chasidic sect to a player working the Jewish spectrum.

Shemtov has parlayed goodwill into a powerful voice for Chabad's interests — not all of which meet universal Jewish approval — especially in lobbying for Chabad's entry in force into vulnerable Jewish communities in Europe and Asia.

Shemtov has assiduously cultivated Washington-based diplomats from those regions. A Washington ambassadorship often is a stepping stone to a top job at

the Foreign Ministry in the diplomats' home countries, so the ties Shemtov cultivates translate into greater influence for Chabad abroad.

At one recent event Shemtov hosted, a U.S. diplomat whispered to a German newcomer in Washington's diplomatic corps, "Do you know Rabbi Shemtov?"

"No," said the German, "but I intend to."

The American nodded. "Rabbi Shemtov knows everyone."

It's not an advantage that Shemtov's competitors enjoy, but at least in Washington, they cede the territory to him.

In the former Soviet Union, Chabad has "a presence on the ground in a way that no one else does," said one lobbyist who works the same officials as Shemtov.

Not long ago, Shemtov pressed hard for a meeting between Chabad emissaries and State Department officers to discuss religious freedom in the FSU. The diplomats realized they were hearing new information and, one by one, pulled out their notebooks.

Mark Levin, the executive director for NCSJ, a group that works on behalf of all the Jewish streams in the FSU, says Shemtov's advocacy has never rubbed him the wrong way.

"I don't know anyone who doesn't like him," Levin said. — RON KAMPEAS

Israeli school blazes trail for Ethiopians

By BRETT KLINE

YEMIN ORDE, Israel (JTA) — Grima waited seven years in a refugee camp in Addis Ababa to come to Israel.

Now the 16-year-old looks around the campus of the Yemin Orde Youth Village, sitting on 70 acres of hilly, wooded grounds south of Haifa.

"This is like paradise," he says. "All the kids in the camp know about this school. Everyone wants to come here."

In Israel only a year, Grima barely speaks English but insists on trying. His big smile shows off bright, white teeth, with the beginning of a moustache on his upper lip.

Grima's determination to speak English is typical of most of the 450 students at Yemin Orde, but especially the 250 or so Ethiopians: They're eager to learn, disciplined and grateful.

Some came to Israel without their parents, while others have mothers and fathers living in poor districts of working-class towns such as Kiryat Malachi.

The parents speak little or no Hebrew, have little formal education and stand little chance of advancing economically in Israel. In much of the Ethiopian community, parents' authority over their children has broken down, and some kids go bad.

For the students at Yemin Orde, however, it's another story.

"We have incredible success with the Ethiopians," says Susan Weigel, Yemin Orde's outreach director. "We deal only with new immigrants here, but among those people the Ethiopians have been the most challenging group to integrate in the history of the school, and perhaps in the history of Israel. From here, most go on to the army and then to university, paid for by the state. From there, they become leaders in their community."

Israel's first Ethiopian lawyer, for example, is a Yemin Orde graduate.

The school is named after Orde Charles Wingate, a British army captain who organized the Jewish Night Brigade, a counter-insurgency strike forces in the 1930s, and trained future Israel Defense Forces leaders such as Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan.

There are 20-25 students in a class, compared to an average of 40 students per class in other Israeli schools. Subjects are the

same as in regular schools, and students are prepared so they can take university matriculation exams.

"Some Ethiopians cannot read or write in any language when they come here," says Schlomo Leibovitz, the school's deputy director. "Believe it or not, some do not know how to use a pencil.

"The Russians also have problems — some come from orphanages, and we deal with criminal behavior and alcohol and drug abuse in some cases," he says. "But they're not lacking in education. The Ethiopians come from another world."

Fasico and Bayeche are walking with other Ethiopians to the dining hall for lunch. The boys and girls mix freely, chatting in Amharic with Hebrew words thrown in. Inside the dining hall, the Ethiopians and Russian students tend to sit at separate tables.

Fasico came to Israel with his parents 15 months ago. They live in Beersheba, but he is thrilled to be in Yemin Orde.

"I love studying English and math, and I'll go to university," he says in halting English. "I don't miss Ethiopia, only some of my relatives there."

Many of the Ethiopian girls still have wide crosses tattooed on their foreheads and necks, signs of their background in the Falash Mura community. The Falash Mura are descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, but later converted back to Judaism.

"We're trying to develop a system to remove the crosses surgically," Leibovitz explains. "Crosses are not exactly a favorite tattoo in Israel."

The boys wear yarmulkes. The school, run by the Jewish Agency for Israel from its inception in 1953 until the Education Ministry took over in 1996, is considered a pluralistic religious institution, though many of the students are not halachically Jewish. Students begin the day in synagogue, but can choose not to attend.

"We know that most of our students will not be religious later on, but we give them some basics and tradition," Weigel says. "This is part of what we call the 'drip-irrigation' system for their brains

— the ideas and the education seep in bit by bit. On the emotional side, we tell them we will always be here for you, you are going to be OK."

Tamar Silberberg, 23, the daughter of Friends of Yemin Orde chairman Paul Silberberg, recently visited the school. Friends of Yemin Orde, based in

Washington, raises about \$2 million a year for the school, about 30 percent of its operating budget.

"This village gives these young people the chance to have access to the good things that people such as myself have had my whole life," she says.

"We make up for the unfairness they have experienced in their lives," she says. "For us in the States, this is not about politics and the right or left in Israel: It's about values, the same values my parents raised me with."

Local youths from nearby Israeli Arab villages participate regularly in after-school programs. The school has 10 foreign programs, including one in an African-American community in Baltimore.

Some 35 youngsters from Brazil spend a year here, taking classes in Portuguese that follow the Brazilian public-school curriculum, plus Hebrew. Weigel says about 75 percent of the Brazilians make aliyah.

The school doesn't have an auditorium or football field, but it does have excellent computer facilities. On many afternoons, all of the school's approximately 70 computers are being used by students for homework, technical lessons, games or e-mail.

Haim Peri, the school's director since 1979, is seen by Israeli education officials and some members of the Ethiopian community as a visionary.

"In Kiryat Malachi, the Yemin Orde graduates are the leaders of the Ethiopian community," notes Gidon Ayeche, a captain in the Israeli army whose mother served as the first Ethiopian assistant mayor of an Israeli town before being forced to step down earlier this year.

"They have more than brains — they have hearts and values also," he says. "They have good jobs in the army and they're teachers. We wrote to Dr. Peri to thank him and his staff."



FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

CHANUKAH FEATURE

Chismukkah time is here once again

By JANE ULMAN

■ NCINO, Calif. (JTA) — On Dec. 25, Rod Shapiro and Pat Wong will exchange Christmas and Chanukah gifts spread under a seven-foot Christmas tree.

The interfaith couple in their late 50s, married three years, will light the menorah in the evening and invite friends to stop by their Long Beach, Calif., home.

Welcome to Chismukkah 2005, a holiday that offers greeting cards featuring a reindeer with menorah antlers, recipes for Gefilte Goose and Kris Kringle Kugel in "The Merry Mish Mash Holiday Cookbook," Christmas-tree ornaments decorated with Stars of David, a children's book called "Blintzes for Blitzen" and gift wrap adorned with matzah-ball snowmen.

For Shapiro, who describes himself as culturally Jewish, Chismukkah is a light-hearted solution to the familial conflicts that interfaith couples often face.

"Personally, I think that more and more people should embrace their similarities and tolerate their differences, and Chismukkah is a holiday that allows couples to do that," he said.

For others who won't be wishing their interfaith family and friends a Merry Mazel Tov, Chismukkah is a superficial and commercial pseudo-holiday that presents multiple problems. It's compounded this year by the fact that Chanukah and Christmas coincide on the secular calendar.

Chismukkah created enough of a stir last year that the independent Catholic League and the New York Board of Rabbis issued a joint statement condemning it as shameful plagiarism and an insult to both Christians and Jews. The two groups likely will issue another statement this year.

The melding and mingling of customs is nothing new. Historians trace it back to Christians in the first century CE who still considered themselves Jews. And interfaith couples for ages have been quietly celebrating both holidays.

Meanwhile, the number of interfaith families continues to increase. The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 counts 5.2 million Jews in the United States, with 47 percent of those, since 1996, marrying non-Jewish spouses.

Rome's Jewish museum reopens

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — The snappy slogan of Rome's new Jewish Museum says it all: "Ancient History, All New."

Technically, the recently opened museum is an expanded and updated version of the original Jewish museum, which was founded in 1959 to display the community's priceless collection of textiles, ritual objects and carvings.

In reality, however, the new museum is a radically different facility in scope, concept and underlying philosophy.

The more than \$2 million renovation was funded by the European Union, the Italian Culture Ministry, the Rome Municipality and the Province of Lazio, as well as private donors.

No longer a static display of Judaica, the museum instead uses ritual objects, photographs, documents, family stories and other material to narrate the history, customs and traditions of Europe's oldest continuous Jewish community.

As such, it forms a public affirmation for Jews and non-Jews alike of more than 2,000 years of Jewish presence and influence in the Eternal City.

"It is a very Roman museum," said the museum's director and chief curator, Daniela Di Castro.

"It is important not to forget that Jewish history is not just the history of the Jews," she said. "Throughout the museum, we always try to tell this history in context, alongside the history of other Jewish communities and also alongside the history, art, customs and folklore of Rome itself."

■ People who visited the old Jewish museum will scarcely recognize the new one.

For decades, the community's collection of opulent synagogue textiles and beautifully wrought ritual objects was crowded into dingy cases in a couple of cramped rooms in the complex housing the city's main synagogue.

Little historical information or other background material was provided. Visitors were not encouraged to view the museum on their own: They had to be guided by a member of the museum staff to learn about the objects on display.

In addition, there were few modern preservation methods in place to protect fragile objects. One of the senior museum staffers was even known to sit chain-smoking at a desk in the very heart of the exhibition space.

■ The new museum is still located in the synagogue complex that towers above the Tiber River, but it now occupies a series of large, vaulted and climate-controlled halls in the basement.

Each hall is devoted to a specific theme or time period, and the ritual objects, paintings, textiles and other items are arranged to illustrate them. Wall panels and captions for individual objects provide a wealth of historic and descriptive information.

Jews first came to Rome in the second century BCE when Judah Maccabee dispatched them as ambassadors in an attempt to forge an alliance against Antiochus IV.

Prisoners sent back by victorious Roman armies in Judea swelled the community, particularly after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and numerous synagogues as well as catacomb Jewish

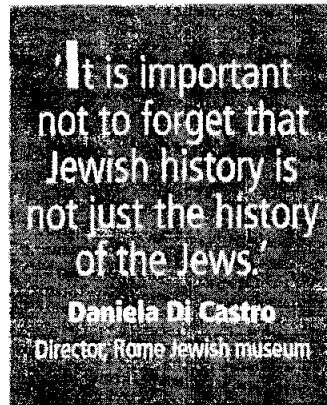
cemeteries were found in ancient Rome.

The community flourished in the Middle Ages, but in 1555 Pope Paul IV segregated Jews in a Ghetto, where they were forced to live until the gates were definitively opened in 1870.

In 1943, the Nazis deported about 2,000 Roman Jews to Auschwitz. Today, with some 12,000-15,000 members, Rome's Jewish community is the largest in Italy: A continuously playing video in the museum uses interviews, film clips and documentation to depict modern Jewish life.

"This museum is an integral part of a vital organism in which, despite all the difficulties, Jewish life and culture continue to be produced," Rome Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni said during the museum's opening ceremony.

Most of the material in the museum comes from the ghetto period. Living conditions were extremely harsh for most Jews then, but the exquisite Renaissance and Baroque textiles and ornate silver ritual objects also bear witness to a world of grace and opulence.



NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

U.S.-Israel scanner deal signed

The United States and Israel signed a \$50 million agreement to put high-tech scanners at border crossings into Palestinian areas. The money comes out of \$300 million earmarked this year for the Palestinians, aimed at improving Palestinian life now that Israel has withdrawn from the Gaza Strip.

The money will "purchase, deliver and install state-of-the-art scanning devices at crossing points between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza," said a statement this week from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which will administer the money. "The government of Israel commits to effectively operate and maintain the detection equipment, which is to be used exclusively for facilitating the traffic of people and goods at the crossings."

Suicide is top killer of Israeli soldiers

With suicides the top cause of death in Israel's military, the Israeli army will restrict some non-frontline soldiers from carrying weapons. In a report to a Knesset committee on Wednesday, Brig. Gen. Avi Zimer reported that the 33 suicides in 2005 account for half of Israel's military fatalities this year.

While official military statistics are classified, Tel Aviv University's Center for Strategic Studies estimates the Israeli troop count as 186,500 for regular army soldiers. The number of reserves, as estimated in a U.S. State Department report issued in 2000, is 400,000. By comparison, the U.S. Army has reported a lower suicide rate of roughly 12 per 100,000 soldiers, though rates among soldiers assigned to Iraq and Kuwait were higher.

Jail time for plot against rabbi

Israel jailed a Palestinian terrorist who planned to assassinate a leading rabbi.

The Jerusalem District Court on Thursday sentenced the member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to 12 years in prison after he confessed to the plot against Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, chief mentor to the Shas Party. The terrorist, from a neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem, voiced regret.

NORTH AMERICA

Canada pressed on Ahmadinejad

A Jewish group called on the Canadian government to condemn anti-Semitic comments by Iran's president. B'nai Brith Canada asked the government to condemn comments by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and rebuke Iran's representative in Canada.

Congressman: Save the holidays

A Jewish congressman introduced a resolution to protect the symbols of Chanukah, Kwanzaa and Ramadan.

Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) planned to introduce his resolution Thursday evening to counter another resolution, introduced earlier by Rep. Jo Ann Davis (R-Va.), that "recognizes the importance of the symbols and traditions of Christmas" and "strongly disapproves of attempts to ban references to Christmas."

Israel tried to get Davis to amend her resolution when it came to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on Wednesday night, but she refused, citing procedural rules. Israel's resolution replicates Davis' language precisely, except for substituting "Chanukah, Ramadan and Kwanzaa" for Christmas.

After a raucous debate on Davis' resolution Wednesday evening between Democrats — most of them Jews — and Republicans, it

passed on a voice vote, and is undergoing a member-by-member roll call.

JTS gets \$5 million gift

The Jewish Theological Seminary received a \$5 million donation. The gift, made by an anonymous donor, will go to JTS's William Davidson Graduate School of Education.

The seminary, the flagship institution of the Conservative movement, says the school is the largest graduate program of Jewish education in North America.

The funds will go to scholarships.

WORLD

India, Israel resume talks

India and Israel are resuming strategic talks after a four-year hiatus. The talks will resume Jan. 15, motivated by recent overtures to Israel from Pakistan's president, Pervez Musharraf, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

Freud grandson wins Holocaust case

The estate of Sigmund Freud's grandson won a Holocaust-era lawsuit against Swiss banks.

U.S. District Judge Edward Korman on Wednesday ruled that the estate of Anton Walter Freud, who died last year at age 83, would be awarded \$168,000 as part of a payout to 23 claimants.

The payout is part of the \$1.25 billion settlement Swiss banks agreed to in 1998.

Ukrainian party to be banned?

A Ukrainian Jewish leader called for a political party headed by a reputed anti-Semite to be banned from upcoming parliamentary elections.

Vadim Rabinovich, an influential business tycoon and leader of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, appealed Wednesday to the Justice Minister and the Central Election Committee to revoke the registration of the Ukrainian Conservative Party.

The party is headed by Georgy Schokin, president of MAUP, a private Kiev university known for its anti-Semitic activities. Schokin's party was registered last spring, and he announced his intention to run for Parliament in March 2006.

In a letter to Ukrainian officials, Rabinovich said the party should not be allowed to run because its ethnic hate propaganda violates the country's Constitution. Recently, the party's official newspaper, The Ukrainian Conservative, ran a series of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli articles.

Holocaust victims buried

Thirty-four victims of the Holocaust were buried in Germany according to Jewish law. Leading international rabbis conducted Thursday's service.

The skeletons were uncovered recently in a suburb of Stuttgart that was the site of the Echterdingen work camp during World War II.

Vow made on hate literature

The director of the Frankfurt Book Fair pledged that anti-Semitic literature would not be sold at next year's fair.

Juergen Boos' vow came in a meeting last week with leaders of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The move came after a district attorney in Germany launched a probe into charges that Iranian booksellers sold anti-Semitic literature at this year's fair in October.