

IN THE NEWS

Israeli forces pound Gaza Strip

Israeli artillery pounded the Gaza Strip as part of a targeting of suspected launch sites of rocket attacks against Israel.

The army, navy and air force all took part in the weekend assault, which came after rocket attacks into Israel from Gaza intensified last week.

Despite the attack, Palestinians fired six Kassams into the Negev on Saturday, Israeli media reported. No one was injured in those attacks.

U.S. bans Hamas contacts

U.S. officials are banned from contacting Palestinian Authority officials associated in any way with Hamas.

Contacts with officials associated with the office of P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, are permitted, as are contacts with the PLO.

The PLO and Abbas are affiliated with the relatively moderate Fatah Party, and the allowance extends to PLO representatives in Washington. The ban took effect last week, the same week that Hamas assumed governance, two months after the terrorist group's election.

The United States had considered contact with non-Hamas officials associated with the government, but ultimately those officials fell under the ban.

Canada cuts off assistance to P.A.

Canada halted aid to the Palestinian Authority until the new Hamas-led government renounces terrorism and recognizes Israel.

The Israeli Embassy in Ottawa applauded the move, which has made Canada the first donor country to halt aid to the Palestinians. Canada provides some U.S. \$21.5 million to the Palestinian Authority each year.

Mahmoud Zahar, the new P.A. foreign minister, downplayed Ottawa's decision, saying it "was not of great consequence."

WORLD REPORT

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Many studies, but one goal: How to reach today's young Jews?

By SUE FISHKOFF

OAKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — Brandeis University just released a new study of Jewish college students. It found that they're proud to be Jewish, largely unaffiliated, attracted to Jewish culture more than religion, like diversity, and don't feel strong ties to Israel or Jewish federations.

Reboot, a nonprofit that promotes creative Jewish initiatives, just did a study of the same age group, and found that they're proud to be Jewish, avoid institutional affiliation, are interested in Jewish culture and have diverse allegiances.

Sociologist Steven Cohen of Hebrew Union College-New York did a similar study, as did Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, and they both found... guess what? Young Jews are proud, unaffiliated, pro-culture, pro-diversity and anti-tribal.

The last few months have seen a flood of studies of Gen-Y Jews — young people aged 18-25 — all trying to map their sense of Jewish identity, affiliation patterns, needs, hopes, beliefs and behaviors.

Why is everyone looking at the same population? And is all this work necessary, or a duplication of effort?

First, there are the numbers: almost half a million Jewish college students, the future of this country's Jewish community.

The very few studies on record, particularly the 1990 and 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Surveys, indicate that large numbers of young Jews aren't going to synagogue, joining Jewish organizations, marrying other Jews or giving money to

Israel or Jewish charities.

They're opting out, which has led to great hand-wringing and head-shaking on the part of American Jewish officials.

Yet the new studies show an up-and-coming generation that is proud of its Jewish identity and culturally creative, is coming up with new methods of religious expression and feels part of a global community linked by Jewish Web sites and blogs.

■
Researchers say it's cause for cautious celebration.

"There has been a general angst about the Jewish future for the past two decades, a continuity crisis," says Roger Bennett, senior vice president at the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, which sponsored the March 2006 Reboot study, "Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam: Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices."

Describing his study's findings as "very positive," Bennett says, "I hope this study assuages almost all the fear. There's plenty to be optimistic about."

"Jewish culture is booming," declares a fall 2005 study on Gen-Y Jewish culture and identity conducted by Steven Cohen and Ari Kelman for the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. "Rarely have younger American Jews had such a variety of opportunities to explore and express their Jewish identities outside the traditional venues of synagogues and JCCs."

The question for Jewish funders and organizations is what they're going to do with the information, Bennett says.

Jonathan Sarna, a professor of Ameri-

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ *The last few months have seen a flood of studies about Gen-Y Jews*

Continued from page 1

can Jewish history at Brandeis University, says that what the new studies reveal about the Jewish community is interesting.

While Jewish leaders in the late 1960s and early '70s were "very unhappy about developments in the youth culture, and took a long time to reconcile themselves to it," today's Jewish leadership "is inquisitive, wants to know more," he says. That's "a measure of how much we've learned."

Even while the older generation "may be shocked at things like Heeb," an irreverent youth magazine, it "sees that something is going on and is paying attention," says Sarna, a member of JTA's board of directors.

But if all these new studies are yielding pretty much the same information, are they useful? Yes, researchers insist. First, each study asks slightly different questions, reflecting the particular needs of the sponsoring organization.

For example, Hillel's study was prompted largely by one figure from the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey, which showed that two-thirds of Jewish college students don't attend Hillel activities, says Julian Sandler, chair of the group's strategic planning committee. Hillel will release its long-awaited study of Jewish college students in late May.

The statistic in question "troubled us immensely," Sandler says. Hillel engaged in two years of research "to try to understand what it is that today's Jewish students are interested in, what's relevant to them, to inform ourselves and determine

how we can address their needs in a more effective way."

Hillel already has put some of that information to work. One of the central findings of its study is that young Jews have "a strong desire to find out more about their Jewishness, especially from an ethnic perspective," which can "be manifested in multiple ways."

One popular way is through tzedek, or social justice work. To that end, Hillel last month sent hundreds of students on a spring break trip to the Gulf Coast to help rebuild after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "Tzedek will be a major emphasis" of Hillel programming in the future, Sandler says.

That fact that these studies are coming up with similar results may mean that researchers are on the right track, Sandler adds.

Amy Sales, co-author of "Particularism in the University: Realities and Opportunities for Jewish Life on Campus," a new study by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis, says her data, collected in 2003, helps the people funding campus activities to use their dollars more effectively.

She says the Avi Chai Foundation, which funded her study, "wondered what's going on at college beyond birthright," a program that sends college-aged Jews on free Israel trips. "What else could be done? What kinds of interventions could make a difference?"

Her study found, among other things, that Jewish college students are interested in Jewish studies, want events that have a Jewish "flavor" but are open to non-Jews, and need help in finding meaningful, compelling ways to engage in Jewish life.

She and co-author Leonard Saxe used that information to propose that Hillel customize its programs for each campus and de-

velop better relationships with university administrations, other campus groups and local Jewish communities, creating "Jewish-friendly campuses" rather than focusing on simply reaching as many Jewish students as possible.

In fact, Hillel is doing just that, incoming President Wayne Firestone says. The group is convening a Washington summit May 21-23 to bring together funders, university administrators and Jewish organizational heads to talk about how to improve working relationships on campus, the first time such a targeted meeting has been held.

Researchers from all the studies agree that today's young Jews can be a willing and energetic audience if the organized Jewish community steps up to the plate in time, and with a message that is relevant.

"They are looking for a positive Jewish experience, and every Jewish institution that answers that and puts its faith in young people will have a rosy future," Bennett says. "Any funder that wishes to innovate is going to prosper."

There has been a general angst about the Jewish future for the past two decades.

Roger Bennett

Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies

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Auschwitz was German, Poland says

PRAGUE (JTA) — Poland wants UNESCO to change the way it describes Auschwitz to emphasize that Nazis, not Poles, ran the death camp.

Poland's culture minister asked the U.N.'s cultural and educational arm to change the designation from "Auschwitz Concentration Camp" to "Former Nazi German Concentration Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau."

Poles want future generations to un-

derstand that the death camps were the work of Germans, not Poles, Culture Minister Jan Kasprzyk said. "In the years after the war, the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was definitively associated with the criminal activities of the national socialist Nazi regime in Germany," he said.

But for younger generations, he added, "especially abroad, that association is not universal."

U.S. Jews dodge embargo for Cuban community

By LARRY LUXNER

MIAMI (JTA) — The B'nai B'rith Cuban Jewish Relief Project has become one of the best-known U.S. religious humanitarian groups working in Cuba today.

Its driving force is Stanley Cohen, who has been to Cuba 27 times since establishing the project in 1995.

"Our mission was clear: we wanted to help the Cuban Jewish population survive and grow strong," Cohen said. "In the first couple of years our goal was to understand the difficulties facing the community. How could the needs of the community be met when little to no

money was available, and the average salary of Cubans is below \$20 per month?

"The three synagogues in Havana were in disrepair, and then as now there were no rabbis to lead or teach," he continued.

"There was no hope of raising money from within the Jewish community."

On the other hand, in 1991 the Castro regime relaxed its opposition to religious practice, and Jews began returning to their roots.

While the island's 1,500 or so Jews are no wealthier than anyone else in Cuba, they do enjoy certain advantages. One is access to kosher meat, which is guaranteed by the government despite its hostility toward Israel.

Another is the deep interest American Jews have taken in Cuba, through efforts by B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and similar groups.

"In a program that continues to this day, the JDC provides religious teachers from Argentina — usually a young couple — for periods of approximately two years, to assist the community with Jewish ritual and tradition," Cohen said. "These teachers are based at the main synagogue in Havana, Beth Shalom, and make periodic trips to the synagogues in Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba."

By 1999, Beth Shalom, also known as the Patronato, had been repaired, and many Jews, along with non-Jewish spouses who had converted, began participating for the first time.

In addition, the Orthodox synagogue in Old Havana, Congregacion Adat Israel, has been completely renovated, as has the Centro Sefaradi synagogue in Vedado.

In 2000, B'nai B'rith shipped a container of new medical textbooks worth \$500,000 to the University of Havana's medical school. Due to the embargo, the books couldn't be shipped to Cuba directly, so they traveled from Pittsburgh to Baltimore to Antwerp, Belgium, and finally to Havana.

The organization also paid to have 280 new wheelchairs shipped from China to Cuba, where they were distributed to hospitals and clinics.

In 2001, B'nai B'rith started its Tzedakah Project with 20 elderly beneficiaries.

"In Cuba, retired persons receive pensions of \$10 per month, along with a small food allowance. The Tzedakah Project provides each retiree with an additional \$10 a month, bringing their income in line with the average Cuban income. We now have 55 people receiving assistance through this program," Cohen said. "We are also happy to report that as of this date, 86 children are enrolled in Jewish religious school in Havana."

According to Cohen, B'nai B'rith Cuba Maimonides Lodge, which for years was inactive, has become the most important Jewish organization in Cuba today, with 85 members.

"Our funding of their activities has encouraged the lodge to be active in all facets of community life," he said, adding that a monthly community newspaper, *Fragmentos*, is now published in Spanish.

B'nai B'rith's most recent mission to Cuba was Dec. 7-15, 2005; it included 25 participants from the United States and two from Israel. During the mission, Pittsburgh synagogue Adat Shalom and the Noznisky family of Union, N.J., each donated a Torah to the isolated Jewish communities of Camaguey and Santa Clara.

"Most of the Cuban attendees had never touched a Torah or even been close to a Torah before," Cohen said. "The ceremony was extremely emotional because it had been many years since a Torah had been presented to the Cuban Jewish community. The Torahs were hand-carried from their respective cities and one of them even had a seat on the plane."

In addition, the group brought over 400 pounds of Jewish religious objects, medicines and humanitarian supplies, as well as monetary donations to all the synagogues.

The group flew direct on a charter flight from Miami approved by the U.S. Treasury.

"I believe that what we have accomplished in Cuba can be taken to other countries with small Jewish populations to help them survive," Cohen said. ■

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

The group brought 400 pounds of Judaica, medicine and humanitarian supplies.

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ Rabbi Arthur Waskow debuts a new version of his 1968 "Freedom Seder," which introduced a new Jewish liberation theology in the wake of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King. African Americans and Muslim Americans will join him at Busboys and Poets, a Washington cafe.

■ Twenty Reform Jews from across the country — including several influential congregational rabbis and lay leaders — will spend four days in New Orleans on a fact-finding mission to build continued Reform movement support for the New Orleans Jewish community in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Some 75 percent of New Orleans Jews were Reform Jews, the movement says.

■ The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issues its conclusions regarding allegations of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism at U.S. college campuses.

WEDNESDAY

■ Richard Breitman of American University delivers the annual Ina Levine lecture at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The lecture is titled, "Prelude to Catastrophe? The Roosevelt Administration and the Nazi Assault on the Jews, 1938-1939."

SUNDAY

■ Let My People Sing, a nine-day Passover celebration uniting Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups in Greater Los Angeles, kicks off with Faith Jam '06, a multi-religious prayer service, comedy and music show. The program opens with Havdalah and a Muslim evening prayer service, and is being held at the Islamic Center of Southern California, the first time that a major L.A. Jewish event will be hosted by a Muslim institution. More information is available at letmypeoplesing.com.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Israel imposes closure on Nablus

Israel imposed a closure around Nablus following a terrorist attack.

The closure around the West Bank city came after a Palestinian terrorist killed four Israelis in the West Bank on March 30.

The suicide attacker is believed to have been disguised as an Orthodox Jew.

Israel's president discusses next government

Israeli President Moshe Katsav began discussions on who should be asked to form Israel's next government.

Ehud Olmert, the leader of the Kadima Party, is expected to be asked to form the coalition. Kadima won the largest number of seats, 29, in the March 28 election. But Amir Peretz of Labor, which won the second-largest number of seats, reportedly asked Katsav on Sunday that he be given the first chance at forming a coalition based on domestic priorities.

Eitan has Pollard document, spy's wife says

The head of Israel's Pensioners Party has a document that could win Jonathan Pollard's release, according to the wife of the convicted spy. Rafi Eitan "has in his personal possession a document, a major bargaining chip in negotiations for Jonathan's release," Esther Pollard wrote March 30 in the online version of Ma'ariv. "He has held the only copy of it for 21 years. The recovery of this document would be invaluable to the Americans, as it would permit them to finally wrap up the case once and for all."

Eitan was the Mossad official who handled Pollard 20 years ago, before the former U.S. Navy analyst pleaded guilty to spying for Israel and was sentenced to life.

Former U.S. intelligence officials who support Pollard's life sentence cite as one justification Israel's failure to return all the documents he stole, a charge Israel vehemently denies. Eitan shocked Israel by winning seven seats in last week's elections, running on a pensioners' rights platform.

Israel: Suicide bombing prevented

Israeli police said they prevented a suicide bombing. A police spokeswoman said a car with two Palestinians in it was stopped from entering the town of Beit She'an on Sunday. The police action came after information was received that a suicide bombing was planned in the area.

NORTH AMERICA

Jewish funders meet

Some 300 Jewish leaders and philanthropists gathered in Denver on Sunday for the annual Jewish Funders Network conference.

"Plug and Play Judaism: Identity and Community in the Global Era," which will focus on challenges philanthropists face in an environment where individuals and communities are redefining the Jewish experience, runs through Tuesday.

WORLD

Publisher of Israel lobby piece defends article

The editor who published a controversial article on the pro-Israel lobby in the United States defended her decision to publish the piece.

"I don't want David Duke to endorse the article," the London Review of Books' Mary-Kay Wilmers, who is Jewish, told the London Observer last Friday.

"It makes me very uncomfortable. But when I reread the piece, I did not see anything that I felt should not have been said."

The report was written by John Mearsheimer, a political science professor at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt, an international affairs professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

The report accuses pro-Israel groups of skewing U.S. policy, and suggests that supporters of Israel pushed the United States into war with Iraq.

Harvard has since distanced itself from the article, which has received widespread criticism for being anti-Semitic and for being unscholarly.

Czechs: Holocaust compensation complete

The Czech Republic announced that it had finished compensating individual Holocaust victims.

The Foundation Fund for Holocaust Victims paid out \$4.23 million over the past five years to 516 people who requested compensation.

Another \$8 million still in the fund is aimed at restoring monuments and supporting cultural and educational projects.

"Czech society is thus redressing, at least symbolically, property wrongs that were afflicted on our countrymen in the process of Aryanization of Jewish property in 1938-1945," said Milan Konrad of the foundation, which was set up by the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities with government support.

Research may open up wartime case

Polish prosecutors may reopen a World War II-era case after an Israeli said he tracked down one of the men who allegedly murdered his family.

Roni Lerner told Israel on Sunday that he had posed as a historian to find Josef Radczuk, 92, last year.

Lerner says Radczuk helped him find the bodies of his grandmother and five of her children, who were killed in 1943 after they escaped a train that was headed for the Majdanek death camp.

Lerner was scheduled to head to Poland on Sunday to exhume the bodies and bring them to Israel for burial.

Forum to examine pope visit

A conference in Rome this week marks the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to the city's synagogue.

John Paul, who died April 2, 2005, made fostering relations with Jews a cornerstone of his papacy.

On April 13, 1986, he became the first pope to visit a synagogue. During that visit, he was embraced by Rome's chief rabbi and called Jews the "elder brothers" of Christians.

"When the Pope Went to the Synagogue," slated to take place Tuesday and Wednesday, examines the troubled history of Jewish-Catholic relations and the legacy of John Paul's visit.

Auschwitz escapee dies

Rudolf Vrba, one of five Jews who escaped Auschwitz, died March 27 in Vancouver at the age of 82.

Along with fellow prisoner Alfred Wetzler, Vrba escaped Auschwitz by hiding for three days in a pile of lumber near the camp's fence, using tobacco and gasoline to keep the camp's guard dogs away.

They later escaped to Slovakia. Twenty years after World War II, Vrba immigrated to Canada, where he became a professor of pharmacology.

He is survived by his wife, Robin, his daughter, Zuzana, and two grandchildren.