



Indian Jewish Congregation of USA Newsletter

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Useful Link

jewsofindia.org

The official website of the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA. Here you will find useful information about our organization, our heritage, future plans, and more.

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President's Message (by Romiel Daniel)

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, recalls the victory of militarily weak but spiritually strong Jewish people over the mighty forces of a ruthless enemy that had overrun the Holy Land and threatened to engulf the land and its people in darkness.

The miraculous victory happened more than 2,000 years ago, culminating with the dedication of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem and the rekindling of the Menorah that had been desecrated and extinguished by the enemy. This victory has been celebrated annually ever since during the eight days of Hanukkah by lighting the menorah. The lights of the menorah are a symbol and message of the triumph over oppression, of spirit over matter, of light over darkness.

Our sages said, "A little light expels a lot of darkness." The Hanukkah lights remind us in a most obvious way that illumination begins at home, within oneself and one's family. We should be increasing and intensifying the light of Torah and Mitzvos in the everyday experience, similarly to how the Hanukkah lights are kindled in growing numbers from day to day.

But although illumination begins at home, it does not stop there. When one kindles the Hanukkah lights, they are meant to illuminate the "outside," symbolically alluding to the duty to bring the light also to those who, for one reason or another, still walk in darkness.

We have just seen and heard of the tragic massacre and carnage in Mumbai which started on November 26th 2008, while we were getting ready to start the Thanksgiving holiday. These terrorists, who were hell bent only on killing Jews and others from successful societies, are living in darkness. These are evil forces with no sane objective, only kill for killing's sake. Such people have to be shown the light of good deeds overtaking evil. If this approach does not work, then they should be eliminated.

Hanukkah is the time for all humanity to rise up against such inhumane soulless people and send them into oblivion.

Romiel Daniel, President

Remembrance and Solidarity for the Mumbai Massacre

Speech on December 12, 2008, at Queensborough Community College

I was born in Mumbai, India and I am Jewish, both of which I cherish equally and dearly. Whilst we Jews have lived in India for more than 2,000 years, a life of harmony and co-existence with all faiths, this peaceful existence has been shattered and the rich history has become bloody.

What did the terrorists want? First they wanted to hurt and embarrass India. They wanted to hurt India's economy, jealous of India's growing prosperity. India is a success story with millions of educated forming the backbone of the country. They have been educated at some of the finest educational institutions in the world. In this realm of terror, guilt is not easy to determine and retaliation is even more difficult. So they attacked Indians, Americans, British and others from successful democracies unlike their own societies at hotels, hospitals and railway stations. These were all easy targets for cowards that struck Mumbai to kill people. Can you reason with such madness?

But why strike Chabad House, a modest building housing Rabbi Gavriel Noach Hotzberg, his five months pregnant wife Rivka, two other children, Israeli Bension Kruman, a grandmother Yocheved Orpaz, and Norma Rabinowich. Again, the reason is hatred. Kill the Israelis, attack other Jews. Break the good relations between India and Israel. This building was described by the New York Times as "an accidental hostage scene" and by BBC as an office building.

Having been born and educated in Mumbai, I know that area well. It is not accidental that a nondescript building was found by the terrorists where hostages who became victims were tortured, mutilated and killed. We do not fear these warped terrorists and their masters who will finally fade into oblivion and never remembered.

One of the greatest Emperor of Mysore, Tipu Sultan, was a Muslim governing a large Hindu population with absolute fairness. During the 2nd Mysore war in 1780-1784 against the British East India Company, several prisoners were taken including the Bene Israel (a community I belong to) who were part of the British Army. They would have been put to the sword but were released when Tipu Sultan's mother told her son to spare the lives of the Bene Israel as they are the people of the Book and spoken of in glowing terms in the Koran. Samuel Divekar, who was one of the released prisoners, came back to Bombay, and built a synagogue called Shaar Hashamayim Synagogue (the Gates of Heaven in Hebrew). The synagogue was completed in 1796 and is still being used. It is in the heart of the Muslim area.

We have never had a Holocaust in India. We are proud of that. Three times a day every Jew has a silent prayer where he or she recites, "May all wickedness perish instantly. May all the enemies soon be cut down. O Lord, speedily uproot and crush the arrogant. Cast them down and humble them speedily in our days."

Muslims and Jews believe in the same prophets Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such acts of violence are not prescribed in any holy book.

May the Almighty give strength to all those families who have to bear the loss of their loved ones. We grieve with them.

May the Almighty, who creates peace in His High Heavens, create peace for all of us.

Evening of Remembrance at Queensborough Community College

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, The Queens Jewish Community Council, The Indian Jewish Congregation of USA and other organizations had an Evening of Remembrance in solidarity with Mumbai on Thursday, December 4, 2008 at the Queensborough Community College.

Representatives from the Councils, Chabad Rabbis, Dr. Uma Mysorekar from the Hindu Temple Society, UJA, NY Board of Rabbis, and the Sikh Federation spoke about the carnage which took place starting November 26th and which ended on November 29th, 2008.

The Consul General of Israel very bluntly stated that these terrorists and others like them have to be eliminated. The Consul for Community Affairs from India laid the blame squarely on the doors of Pakistan as it housed these terrorists.

Congressman Anthony Weiner stated that if Pakistan will not do its duty and capture the terrorists and their masters, then the U.S. will have to step in.

Our own Congregation's President, Romiel Daniel, made an impassioned plea to end terrorism not only from India but from the globe. (His speech appears in this newsletter)

The evening ended with a memorandum signed by all the speakers condemning this act of terrorism.

Simchat Torah 2008 (5769)

The Indian Jewish Community in New York celebrated Simchat Torah on October 26th 2008.

The festival "Joy of the Torah" celebrates the completion of Deuteronomy the last of the five books of Moses and immediately starts with the reading of Bereishit, the first book of Moses. This is to indicate that the Torah is a continuous process of religious learning and interpretation.



The evening was celebrated with a lot of prayer, singing and dancing with the Torah. It was attended by members of the Indian Jewish Community and graced by the presence of Dr. A.M. Gondane, Deputy Consul General of India along with his wife Varsha Gondane.

Certificates of appreciation were given to leading members of the community for the hard work and their services rendered to the community to preserve the culture and heritage of the Indian Jews. Raffle prizes include tickets to the Intrepid Museum, Madame Tussauds Wax Museum tickets, New York Water Taxi cruise tickets, Union Square kosher wines, Jewish Museum tickets and many more. A vegetarian dinner catered by Rajbhog foods was enjoyed by all.

Embassy of Israel Launches Its Website and Publications in Hindi and Urdu

The Embassy of Israel in New Delhi, in its unique endeavor to introduce Israel to a larger Indian population, successfully launched its website and publications in two most popular Indian languages—Hindi and Urdu. These new offerings are an attempt to reach out to the Hindi and Urdu speaking population and acquaint them with Israel's vibrant contemporary society, growing economy, rich and diverse culture and much more. The website and publications were launched by the Ambassador of Israel, H.E. Mr. Mark Sofer.

The Hindi version of the website, which has a link to the Urdu website as well, can be visited at www.namasteisrael.com

You may contact the Embassy for their new publication at either of the below addresses: spokesman-assist@newdelhi.mfa.gov.il or by sending your request at their office address—Press Department, Embassy of Israel, 3 Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi—110011.

Torah Decorations Stolen During Simchat Torah

Five Torah crowns and several finials were stolen from a synagogue for Cochin Jews in the town of Nevatim in the Negev, during the Simchat Torah holiday. Among these were 300-year-old crowns that had survived the journey from India to Israel.

"The night watchman called me frantically from the synagogue late last night," the town's security officer told Ynet, Tuesday. "When I arrived, I was appalled. The crowns and finials, made of gold and silver, had been stolen from the synagogue." "These are very precious crowns, they are holy objects and antiques," he explained. "We stood with tears in our eyes, speechless. The money is a negligible issue in this case. These are antique artifacts that were carried all the way from Cochin, in India. It's the holiest of holies," the officer said, describing his and the community's stunned response. Despite the theft, Simchat Torah prayers in the synagogue commenced as planned.

Regional police are investigating the theft. "The perpetrators are outsiders who breached the town fence, stole and left. We are aware of the sensitivity of the issue, but no suspects have yet been arrested," reported regional police chief Ilan Peretz. Regional head councilman Moshe Powell said "this is a terrible crime to commit on Simchat Torah... I am confident that police will do everything to bring the perpetrators to justice."

Source: Jewish Scene

Indian Giant Reliance Enters Israeli Market

Indian energy giant Reliance Industries Ltd. is the latest international player to take an interest in the Israeli energy market. The company has signed an agreement with the Eilat Ashkelon Pipeline Company Ltd. (EAPC) for the storage of fuel at EAPC's terminal in Ashkelon.

Reliance, which owns refineries and gas stations across India, is looking at the option of exporting refined products to Europe via Israel and the Mediterranean Basin. Fuel market sources believe that part of the inventory that Reliance is to store in Ashkelon could also be marketed locally, offering an alternative to purchasing fuel from Oil Refineries Ltd. (TASE:ORL) in Haifa and Paz Ashdod Refinery Ltd. Energy market sources say that local energy companies have also expressed an interest in purchasing fuel from Reliance.

Source: www.globes.co.il

Israel to Roll Out Red Carpet for Indian Jews

Some 200 members of a north-eastern Indian community would be reuniting with their families in Israel soon where a red carpet welcome awaits them.

The members of Bnei Menashe community, who lives in Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram and claim to be one of the lost tribes of Judaism, will be immigrating to Israel after the Israeli government has approved their request.

The members are drawn from fifteen extended families some of whose kin have immigrated to Israel in the past. The new immigrants will arrive in Israel from India in January by a special flight and will be received by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in a festive ceremony at Ben-Gurion Airport, sources in the PM office said.

The Israeli government, especially Interior Minister Meir Sheetrit, had been opposing their immigration to Israel for last three years, saying their "Jewishness was not certain".

Sheetrit, however, relented following a request from cabinet secretary Ovad Yehezkel and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and decided to allow the group to immigrate.

Arrangements for the immigration would be made by the Shavei Israel organisation.

Shavei Israel Chairman, Michael Freund, had recently approached the prime minister and requested for special permission to let 23 Bnei Menashe families to make 'aliyah' (immigration of Jews to Israel).

"The new immigrants will most likely settle in the Galilee, whose lush landscape and pastoral setting resemble the land of their birth," Freund said.

Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Shlomo Amar, has ruled that the Bnei Menashe are of Jewish ancestry but must undergo full conversion to return to the Judaism.

Some 1,500 members of the group have already immigrated and acquired Israeli citizenship after undergoing formal conversion, but another 7,000 are waiting for Israel government's permission to immigrate.

The Bnei Menashe community practices Judaism and claim to be descendants of the tribe of Menashe, which was one of the 10 lost tribes of the kingdom of Israel and was exiled to Assyria in 8th century BC.

Source: PTI, Jerusalem

Upcoming Events

Hanukkah 2008 event with the Consul General of India, Mr. Prabhu Dayal. As in last year's celebration, the Consul General of Israel and other dignitaries are expected to be in attendance.

The program will consist of lighting of the Hanukkah candles, followed by a presentation of Indian classical dances as well as Israeli dances performed by professional dancers.

The program will culminate with an Indian Kosher dinner.

There is no fee to attend this event but seats are limited; therefore early reservations are requested.

Sunday, December 28th, 2008 at 5 p.m.

New India House
2 East 64th Street
New York, NY 10065

Submissions to the Newsletter

We would like all our members to send us articles of interest, birthdates or birth months, wedding anniversaries and any other information of interest to the community. Submissions are subject to editing for clarity and style. Please send newsletter submissions to tapluna@jewsofindia.org or aylon@jewsofindia.org.

To be included in our electronic mailing list, please send your request to: comments@jewsofindia.org