Jews, Muslims find common ground

Two immigrants from Arab countries share stories of persecution.

See Page 2

Brandeis takes on the world

At his inauguration, President Frederick Lawrence emphasizes international ties and defends the value of a liberal arts education.

See Page 3

Congregation’s final Shabbat

The Tainer Bais Midrash will hold its last service next week, closing a chapter of Hasidic history in Boston.

See Page 5

Losing pounds, making peace

Israeli and Palestinian women bond in a weight-loss support group. Their story is told in the documentary “A Slim Peace.”

See Page 11

Parents, read all about it

Five from Massachusetts are among honorees in the Sydney Taylor Awards, recognizing the best in Jewish children’s literature.

See Page 25

The Israel-Massachusetts connection

Meeting Peres moves Patrick most

By Leah Burrows

In his whirlwind trip to Israel, Governor Deval Patrick visited three cities, met two prime ministers, and one president and attended more than 20 meetings, conferences and forums with politicians, scientists, CEOs and students. There were press conferences and town hall meetings, meet-and-greets and photo-ops; tours and power lunches.

But of all the encounters over those five days last month, it was an hour long session with an 87-year-old man that left the deepest impression. Talking with President Shimon Peres, Patrick said, moved him to tears.

The purpose of the trip was to promote economic ties between Israel and Massachusetts. But every now and then, Patrick said, he stopped. He was moved.

Continued on Page 31

Not your traditional ‘Fiddler’

Hit musical is retuned for an all-girl cast from an Orthodox school

By Amy R Handler

Chances are few directors have had to grapple with all the challenges Ariel Bavly faced when she presented “Fiddler on the Roof.”

Her cast was aged 6-13 – and all 15 of them were girls.

The script had to be altered out of respect for the actresses’ Orthodox and Conservative backgrounds. No daughter would be marrying outside the faith in this “Fiddler.” Some traditions just can’t be broken.

Furthermore, Bavly had never directed a show before. Then again, how many 12-year-olds have?

A congregant at Temple Emanuel in Newton, Bavly directed and produced the 1964 Jerry Bock-Sheldon Harnick musical as a project for her bat mitzvah.

That bat mitzvah took place last Saturday. The show took place the next day, before a large audience at Gann Academy in Waltham.

Continued on Page 31

Mini-Knesset debate at Brandeis

By Leah Burrows

The diversity, conflict and humor of Israeli politics was on full display at Brandeis University when six members of the Knesset – two from each major party – took the stage to field student questions on topics from J Street to the Loyalty Oath to tolerance.

This program was created to educate Israeli leaders of the complexity and breadth of the American Jewish community. Ruderman, president of the Ruderman Family Foundation, told an audience of 200 stu-

Continued on Page 7

Marathon makes Pesach more of a runaround

By Elise Kigner

The day of the first seder is a busy one for everyone, but the Davids are planning a schedule like no other.

Around 6 a.m. Amit and Adi David will leave their Brookline home for Hopkinton, run the 26.2 miles of the Boston marathon, then dash home to host a seder for 50 people. Fortunately for them, everyone is pitching in with the cooking.

“It is very clear to everyone in that group that we’re not available that day,” said David, 41, who works as a military officer in Israel. “We just have to get back home and everything will be organized.”

The Israeli family is in the United States for a year while Amit participates in the Wexner Fellowships at Harvard University. Monday night, the Davids will host six of the families in the fellowship, which teaches public administration to Israelis in the public sector.

Continued on Page 6
Israelis spar at Brandeis ‘town hall’

Continued from Page 1

dents, faculty and community members Monday night.

The visiting politicians got a taste of that complexity during the town-hall style meeting when a group of students from the Brandeis chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace protested Knesset member Avi Dichter — a ruckus reported in the Israeli press.

Dichter, a member of the Kadima Party, is the former head of the Israeli security agency Shin Bet. He had come under scrutiny by some organizations for actions during the Second Intifada, including the assassination of a high-ranking Hamas terrorist that also resulted in the death of 15 people, including nine children. Shouting “war criminal,” and “we’ll see you in the Hague,” referring to the international criminal court, the handful of students was escorted from the building.

In an interview after the event, Dichter downplayed the protest. “We expected some kind of reaction,” he said. “But I wouldn’t say it was a significant protest against me. As head of Shin Bet, they call crimes against humanity, but I’ve been fighting terrorists for 40 years.”

The other Israeli MKs were Labor’s Eitan Cabel and Daniel Ben Simon, a former Haaretz reporter; Kadima’s Ronit Tirosh, who sits on the Committee of Education; Likud’s Tzipi Hotovely, the youngest member of the Knesset at 32; and Carmel Shama-Hacohen, chairman of Finance Committee.

The members arrived in the States on Sunday and by Monday were already learning lessons from American Jewish life.

Ben Simon told an anecdote about having dinner in the kosher section of a Brandeis dining hall. After the meal, which included meat, Ben Simon requested ice cream. He approached the rabbi overseeing the section, asking him where he could find ice cream. The rabbi escorted him to the stand.

“In Israel he would be executed for that,” Ben Simon said, jokingly. “Because in the Israeli way you cannot be both: religious and democratic state” and the religious and secular.

Further right on the spectrum, Hotovely of Likud said she supported the committee’s inquiry. There is a legitimacy of all opinions from left and right — this is what democracy is all about,” she said. “But there is a big problem when an organization like J Street delegitimizes Israel’s ability to defend itself. This is Israel’s most basic right, and I expect all of you to stand with Israel and to say those people, those actors that are not letting us who we are, should be excused out of the political game.”

Other sources of contention were the proposed Loyalty Oath requiring new citizens of Israel to pledge allegiance to a “Jewish, democratic state” and the Nabka law, which bans towns or city states from being activated by the fall of the wall. Among the Palestinians calling the creation of Israel.

Ben Simon told the audience he had voted against the Nabka law. “Because [your boss] told you to,” Tirosh retorted.

“Democracy must defend itself,” said Hotovely, who supported the Nabka law. “If you don’t do that, you get Germany in the 1930s, and you get Hitler controlling your country.”

The Knesset members did find something to agree on when a student asked when the government would pass a constitution.

Although mandated in its declaration of independence, Israel has yet to adopt a constitution — primarily because of conflicts between religious and secular principles.

“As long as there is no separation between state and religion, we will have this problem,” Tirosh said.

“Maybe, one day, when the messiah comes, we will have a constitution” said Cabel of Labor, only half-joking about the difficulties of bridging the religious and secular.

The event’s moderator, Ilan Troen, director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, praised the debate among the politicians. “There are differences, and there ought to be differences,” said Troen. “In Israel one makes a joyful noise unto the Lord, and that joyful noise is not a quiet one.”

He likened Israeli politics to the miracle of the burning bush.

“The task of the people up here tonight — with their differences and great commonality — is to live in one of the most intense places in the world and not get consumed and not consume each other.”

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From left at Brandeis forum: Avi Dichter, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, Ronit Tirosh, Tzipi Hotovely, Daniel Ben Simon and Eitan Cabel

Continued from Page 1

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