

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Prague Jews ask for help

Jewish leaders in Prague launched an appeal for aid after floods caused an estimated \$4 million worth of damage to Jewish holy sites. [Page 3]

Report: Terrorists, boy killed

Two armed terrorists and a 5-year-old Palestinian boy reportedly were killed Thursday in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian sources told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that Israeli troops shot at the boy without provocation, and also seriously wounded his grandfather and another man. Israel said Israeli tanks returned fire after Palestinian gunmen shot at them. It said it was investigating whether there had been any deaths in the incident.

Israel Radio reported that Israeli troops also killed two Palestinians Thursday night near the Kissufim Crossing leading from the Gaza Strip into Israel. The two had a bomb, grenades and guns.

Sharon to spend Sept. 11 in L.A.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will attend a Los Angeles vigil on the one-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Sharon will visit Miami earlier in the week to attend a pro-Israel rally and meet with Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, a Republican and brother of the president. The meeting has raised eyebrows because of the upcoming gubernatorial race in Florida and the impact of Jewish voters there. Sharon's visit to the United States will not include a trip to Washington or New York, Israeli officials said.

U.S. blocks Iranian-born Israelis

Four Israelis were temporarily refused entry to the United States because they were born in Iran. Since Sept. 11, a minimum three-week waiting period has been instituted for Israelis born in a Muslim country. The Israeli government views the practice as justifiable and nondiscriminatory.

Mark Regev, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, noted that the two governments are working together to find procedures to make the visa process for Israelis easier.

"It's obvious that an Israeli Jew who served in the Israeli army, the chances of his being involved in Islamic fundamentalism are very low," he said.

Jewish groups feeling the pinch after post-9/11 hikes in insurance

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Beefing up security in the aftermath of Sept. 11 isn't the only new hurdle for American Jewish institutions.

Jewish institutions are struggling with new insurance rates — 50 percent increases or more in some cases — that threaten to consume critical funds. At the same time, these institutions — including federations, Jewish community centers, synagogues and organizations — are fighting to maintain their protection in case of a terrorist attack.

"This is a major crisis for our system," said Diana Aviv, vice president of public policy for the United Jewish Communities.

The situation is the result of major changes in the insurance industry, which suffered staggering losses from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Insurance companies have distributed those costs to their clients, and are also cutting back on providing the terror coverage they once routinely did.

In the few states, including New York, that prohibit companies from excluding terrorism coverage, it is proving even more difficult to find companies to insure the institutions.

But the question among Jewish organizational leaders is whether they are being unfairly targeted.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, sent letters to the White House and congressional leaders Tuesday to urge examination of the issue.

"In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, many non-profit organizations have also been dramatically affected by increased premiums, but we are also concerned that Jewish community institutions might be unfairly singled out for increased risk of a terrorist attack," Foxman wrote.

The insurance industry rejects that notion. Rates are going up for everyone, according to P.J. Crowley, vice president of the Insurance Information Institute, a nonprofit group sponsored by the insurance industry.

"Are Jewish groups being singled out? No," he said. "But insurers are being selective in providing coverage."

Insurers have to go on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they can provide coverage, he said. High-profile organizations in major metropolitan areas will find it difficult to get terrorism coverage, and it will be extremely expensive, said Crowley.

"Almost everything" is a potential risk for being a terrorist target, including prominent Jewish buildings, said Gary Karr, spokesman for the American Insurance Association. Insurers have little to go on to determine risk factor, Karr said, except for the examples of Sept. 11 and government warnings.

Indeed, the FBI issued widely publicized warnings to Jewish institutions earlier this year. The FBI alerted Jewish leaders in May that U.S. forces uncovered Al-Qaida documents listing 12 Jewish organizations as potential targets.

Then the FBI issued another warning in late June that Al-Qaida might attack Jewish institutions with gas trucks, a warning that followed an attack on a Tunisian synagogue that killed 16 and injured 20. Al-Qaida later claimed responsibility for the attack.

While groups responded with extra vigilance, Jewish leaders downplayed both threats, calling evidence vague, outdated and uncorroborated.

Meanwhile, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are negotiating a compromise bill that would ensure that groups could attain affordable terrorism insurance coverage. Insurance coverage for commercial property was increasing at 15

MIDEAST FOCUS

Hamas vows to avenge killing

Hamas vowed to avenge the killing of a senior militant who allegedly planned to destroy a high-rise building in Israel. Israeli troops killed Nasser Jerar, who also helped recruit suicide bombers, in an operation near Nablus on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem says Israeli soldiers used a Palestinian teenager as a human shield during the attack that killed Jerar. "I'm not sure that this stands up to the law, but there is the consideration that we have to prevent a large terror attack, and it's clear which consideration wins in this situation," Cabinet minister Ephraim Sneh told Israel's Army Radio.

P.A. sets up holding company

A holding company has been established to oversee all Palestinian Authority funds, complying with a major U.S. demand for reform, the P.A. finance minister said. Salam Fayed's remarks came as Israeli and Palestinian officials continued high-level talks Thursday. Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer was due to meet with the Palestinian Authority interior minister and other officials.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres held talks with Palestinian officials on efforts to ease sanctions on the Palestinians.

Palestinians march for Saddam

Hundreds of Palestinians demonstrated in the Gaza Strip in favor of Saddam Hussein and against the United States and Israel. Chanting "Dear Saddam, bomb Tel Aviv," some of the demonstrators in the Rafah refugee camp, a frequent flashpoint of conflict during the past two years, carried machine guns and smeared black paint on their faces to look like soldiers.

Iraqi President Hussein has sent millions of dollars to families of Palestinian suicide bombers during the two-year-old intifada.

percent the year before Sept. 11, but is up 30 percent on average since then, Crowley said. He said it is not unusual for some premiums to go up at least 50 percent.

The New York State Insurance Department, a regulatory agency, has begun a review to investigate any discriminatory behavior against Jewish groups in New York, according to Gregory Serio, the department's superintendent. The department has scheduled a meeting with Jewish organizations at the end of the month.

Jewish groups often fit into high-risk categories for insurance carriers, such as landmark sites or places of public assembly, Serio said.

Still, he said, "if there are risks to Jewish groups or Jewish facilities, we need to make sure the company's responses are reasonable. Insurance law just doesn't allow insurance companies to walk away from their obligations."

But across the country, community leaders are feeling the pinch.

Insurance rates nearly doubled for the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles when it renewed its policy shortly after Sept. 11. This year, it will be even worse, according to Jack Klein, executive vice president and chief operating officer.

The UJA-Federation of New York and its 44 beneficiary agencies in the area have also seen their insurance rates skyrocket.

The group's general liability rates soared 65 percent, from \$2.4 million to at least \$4.8 million, and property insurance shot up from \$870,000 to \$1.7 million, said John Ruskay, executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York.

Those costs could have significant ramifications for the services and programs that the federation provides.

The UJC, the umbrella group for North American federations, confirmed that insurance hikes have afflicted many of its member federations. At a UJC meeting earlier this week in which 22 federations in the Southeast were represented, some federations "indicated that they had experienced a significant increase in insurance costs related to safety and security issues," said Barry Swartz, vice president of consulting for the UJC.

Programs are not being cut, but in order for organizations to afford their insurance coverage, they are pressured to reduce their programs in some way and it's not possible to serve as many people, said Aviv of the UJC.

The increased cost of insurance meant Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, an 1,800-family congregation on the Upper West Side of New York, had to "put off hiring some new people" and it "hurt us generally in expanding all of our programs," according to Ron Seitenbach, the synagogue's director of finance and administration.

Mike Scheinblum, a volunteer risk manager for the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, called the premium increases "passive discrimination" against Jewish groups.

He was quoted by The Associated Press as saying, "The word 'Jewish' is an unwelcome word in the world of insurance today."

While concerned about the high insurance rates, most Jewish leaders aren't crying discrimination.

"To the best of my knowledge," the inflated rates are "not directed at Jewish institutions," Foxman told JTA. All public institutions are facing higher insurance costs, he said.

According to Ruskay, "We have been informed by numerous experts in risk management and insurance that this is industry-wide and particularly significant in the New York area since 9/11."

But he added, "I have not yet seen a careful study which has made that comparative assessment."

Michael Tarnoff, chief financial officer of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago — which held onto its terrorism coverage with a rate increase of 20 percent — agreed with his colleagues. "In my view, I think it's unlikely that Jewish organizations were affected disproportionately," he said, referring to Jewish and non-Jewish organizations that have borne the brunt of the insurance crisis.

Indeed, health and human service providers of the Lutheran Services in America are scrambling to determine how to keep insurance coverage and save programs.

"They have seen huge rises in premiums," said Jill Schumann, the group's president and CEO. "They face hard choices." □

(JTA correspondent Sharon Samber in Washington contributed to this report.)



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JEWISH WORLD

N.Y. City Council: Boot out P.A.

New York's City Council overwhelmingly approved a resolution Thursday to shut down the Palestinian mission to the United Nations in Manhattan. Because the City Council lacks the authority to close the office, the bill calls on President Bush to work with the United Nations to do so — which many insiders deem highly unlikely. Still, "it's a major victory," said Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns — Amcha, which lobbied for the bill's passage.

The bill says the office should be closed because the Palestinian Authority's support for terrorist groups threatens the safety of New Yorkers. Amcha plans to file a lawsuit to close down the office, Herzfeld said.

Work on Shoah memorial delayed

Work on Germany's Holocaust memorial was postponed due to irregularities in the bidding process, according to Berlin officials. Construction was slated to begin in September. It took more than 10 years of debate before the German Parliament approved the proposed memorial in the summer of 1999.

Extremist wants charges pressed

A Lithuanian extremist asked Lithuania to press criminal charges against Nazi-hunter Efraim Zuroff.

In a letter to the Lithuanian prosecutor general, extremist politician Salius Ozelis wrote that the \$10,000 award Zuroff's Simon Wiesenthal Center recently offered for information about Nazi war criminals "incites ethnic discord and offends the people of Lithuania."

Meanwhile, Lithuanian officials may soon bring criminal charges against Ozelis for allegedly committing several anti-Semitic acts.

Russians protest broadcast

A group of prominent Russians protested an anti-Semitic broadcast on Moscow television.

The late July broadcast on Moscow's Channel 3 claimed that recent anti-Semitic incidents in Russia play into hands of Jews, and that Jews themselves generate the phenomenon. The authors of the open letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, sent Thursday, expressed their surprise at the fact that the Press Ministry did not produce any reaction to the obviously provocative program.

Rabbi who scolded pope dies

Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, who challenged Pope John Paul II to confront Jewish issues, died Saturday in Great Neck, N.Y., at 85. Speaking in 1987 in Miami with the pope in the audience, Waxman called for the Vatican to pay more attention to Christian anti-Semitism, relations with Israel, and pain over the pope's meeting with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim.

Prague's Jews look for help after floods harm shuls, museum

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — Jewish leaders in Prague have launched an international appeal for aid after floods caused an estimated \$4 million in damage to Jewish holy sites.

Volunteers have worked around the clock since Monday, sandbagging synagogues and other Jewish sites in a desperate attempt to keep away the waters from the worst floods to hit the city in more than 100 years.

While giant steel barriers on the banks of the Vltava River prevented flooding over land, water seeped through underground channels into the city's historic Jewish Quarter.

Jewish officials discovered Wednesday night that the Old-New Synagogue had taken in four feet of water, covering pews and damaging the building.

The Pinkas Synagogue also was hit, with water levels inside the building reaching nearly 7 feet and damaging some of the 80,000 handwritten inscriptions of the names of Czech Holocaust victims.

Jewish officials, who had moved all Jewish artifacts including Torah scrolls from the sites before the flood waters hit, were shocked by the damage.

"There has been serious damage to some of Prague's Jewish treasures," said Tomas Jelinek, the chairman of the city's Jewish community. But "in a sense, we are grateful because the damage could have been much worse if the river Vltava's banks had burst."

The Jewish Museum was also badly hit by underground flooding, which bubbled up through the city's sewers.

Officials succeeded in moving precious Jewish artifacts such as Torah shields, pointers, manuscripts and rare books to higher levels before the floods, but the building is likely to be without electricity for up to four weeks after the generator was submerged in water.

The museum's air-conditioning system also has been knocked out, threatening damage to rare manuscripts and books over the next few weeks.

"This is a very serious blow," said Leo Pavlat, the museum's director. "It is hard to see seven years of work in building up the museum be affected so quickly."

The disaster could not have come at a worse time for museum officials, who have had to cancel several exhibitions across the Jewish Quarter at the peak of the tourist season.

It faces losses amounting to thousands of dollars in ticket sales.

"We are suffering huge losses because August is the best month of the year for us," Pavlat said. "We are not subsidized by the state and rely on entry fees to fund our activities."

The waters began to recede Thursday.

Pavlat warned that a plan to reconstruct the former Smichov Synagogue in Prague, to house archives and precious objects, now was threatened. "We are going to have to look at our budget," he said. "We had wanted to start on the Smichov project at the beginning of the new year, but I'm afraid that may not now be possible."

In Germany, the flooding has left much of Dresden under water, but the city's new synagogue so far has been spared, according to a spokesperson for the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

Roman Koenig, president of the Dresden Jewish community, reported via the Berlin-based Central Council of German Jewry that representatives were checking daily on all elderly and disabled members of the community.

While some had to evacuate their homes, all were safe as of Aug. 15, when the Elbe River peaked.

The Jewish community in Dresden has slightly more than 1,000 members.

Contact with the community remained sporadic due to loss of electricity, as computers could not be used and cell phones could not be recharged.

The Dresden train station was severely flooded, putting an end to train traffic in and out of the city.

Venues normally protected by alarm systems were under increased police guard, the council spokesperson said. "A good friend of mine lives a few hundred meters from the synagogue and is totally under water and can't be reached," he said. □

Ukrainian Jews claim victory after Jews for Jesus given boot

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA)—Local authorities in Ukraine have kicked Jews for Jesus off the street — and Jewish activists are at least partly responsible for the ban.

The ban on the proselytizing campaign organized by the missionary group and a local Protestant church came after fierce protests by the Jewish community in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk, although Jewish activists deny they asked the authorities to halt the campaign.

Just the same, the activists said the Dnepropetrovsk ban is the first battle they have won in the former Soviet Union, where in some places more Jews may be involved in Jews for Jesus events than in Jewish activities.

Officials cited technical breaches for their action, saying Jews for Jesus had not received approval for the campaign, which officials considered a mass religious event.

Even as Jews for Jesus halted the campaign, the group insisted that handing out leaflets and speaking to individual passers-by is not a mass event that would require official approval.

The Ukrainian chapter of the San Francisco-based organization accused the authorities and Jewish anti-missionary activists of violating Jews for Jesus' right to religious freedom. The group said the ban resulted from the Jewish community's pressure.

Students of a local yeshiva and members of a secular Jewish youth club, sporting T-shirts reading "Stop Missionaries," followed Christian activists and attempted to give out their own fliers to people who had received Jews for Jesus leaflets.

In the 20 days that the campaign lasted until the ban, Jewish activists gave out 36,000 anti-missionary fliers, according to Alexander Lakshin, head of the Moscow-based Magen anti-missionary organization.

Magen — Hebrew for "shield" — is a small operation established last year that is backed by the New York-based George Rohr Family Foundation.

The Jews for Jesus Web site claims that the group "distributed more than 370,000 pamphlets and prayed with 96 Jewish people and 196 non-Jews to receive the Lord."

A total of 2,100 people gave their names to receive missionary literature in the mail, according to the site.

Lakshin said the group's figures are grossly exaggerated. Still, he admits that many Jews did speak to the missionaries and were lured into reciting the "prayer of repentance," without being told that the missionaries consider this equivalent to baptism.

"What they tell people is misleading," Lakshin explains. "They never speak of Christianity or baptism when talking to a new person. They rather use Jewish terms and symbols and speak of themselves as Jews, not Christians."

The campaign and the response resulted in scattered violence, which each side said the other provoked.

"We are always reactive and never proactive," Lakshin said.

The opposition to the missionaries in Dnepropetrovsk received wide public attention and even national television coverage, which broadcast an interview with the city's chief rabbi.

"The press and television coverage was pretty much sympathetic to the Jewish community," said Boris Shavlov, a spokesman

for the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish Community Center. The city has one of the best-organized Jewish communities in Ukraine.

In addition to canceling the street campaign, local authorities revoked their earlier decision to show a Jews for Jesus television production, "Survivors' Stories," which carries accounts of Holocaust survivors who have converted to Christianity.

The Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, Ukraine's two largest faiths, also spoke against the Jews for Jesus campaign.

Orthodox priests have their own reason for concern. Many of those who give their names and addresses to the street preachers are Orthodox Christians, and Jews for Jesus passes the lists of non-Jews to their partner Protestant churches, which seek to convert them. □

Third Israeli is booted from plane; 'it's not an epidemic,' official says

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The airlines are not singling out Israelis as security risks, Israeli officials say, despite several recent incidents in which Israeli representatives were removed from airplanes for security reasons.

"It's really not something that has become an epidemic at all," said Adina Kay, a spokeswoman at the Israeli Consulate in New York.

In the latest incident last Friday, Israel's deputy foreign minister, Rabbi Michael Melchior, and an aide were asked to leave a Comair flight from Cincinnati to Toronto that they had just boarded.

According to airline and Israeli officials, Melchior's aide was traveling with a weapon, but lacked the paperwork to carry a firearm on board. When the pilot raised concerns, Melchior and the aide were taken off the plane and placed on a later flight.

Kay called the incident a "case of miscommunication that was eventually resolved."

A spokeswoman for Comair, a Delta Airlines subsidiary, had no additional comment.

Last month, Israel's consul general in New York, Alon Pinkas, was prevented from boarding a National Airlines plane in San Francisco when the pilot said he did not want a dignitary on his flight for safety reasons.

Municipal and airline officials tried to sway the pilot, but he did not relent. Pinkas and his wife were forced to find another way back to New York. Shortly afterward, Pinkas told the New York media that he did not believe he was targeted because of anti-Semitism or an anti-Israel bias.

A security guard for Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres also was removed from a U.S. flight recently because of security concerns. Despite these incidents, Israeli officials say they don't sense a backlash against Israelis traveling on U.S. airlines.

Instead, they see the incidents as isolated results of the expanded security procedures all Americans are facing in light of the Sept. 11 terror attacks. Many Arab passengers also say they have been targeted for searches since Sept. 11.

The link between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and terrorism — not to mention the July 4 shooting at El Al's ticket counter in Los Angeles International Airport — could make fellow travelers and crew members wary of flying with Israeli officials. □