

IN THE NEWS

Bush to punish Syria

President Bush is ready to announce punitive measures against Syria, possibly as early as Friday, U.S. officials said.

The president is likely to impose economic sanctions on the Arab autocracy, including a ban on oil exploration, in accordance with the Syria Accountability Act.

Syrian ambassador Imad Moustapha said U.S.-based ConocoPhillips, an oil explorer, is the only major U.S. company in the country and that British, French and Russian companies already are bidding to replace its contracts. Moustapha also said Syria-U.S. intelligence exchanges have deteriorated since Bush signed the act in December, because of U.S. "elements who feel uncomfortable with Syria."

Argentine Jews mark bombing anniversary

Argentine Jews gathered to mark the 12th anniversary of the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. Under heavy security, the commemoration began at 2:47 p.m. Wednesday, exactly 12 years after the bomb went off, killing 29 people.

President Nestor Kirchner did not attend the event but many government representatives did, a gesture the Jewish community saw as a sign of the present government's support for the investigation of the embassy bombing and the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center, which killed 85.

Focus on Iranian Jews who vanished

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is launching a campaign to learn the fate of 12 missing Iranian Jews.

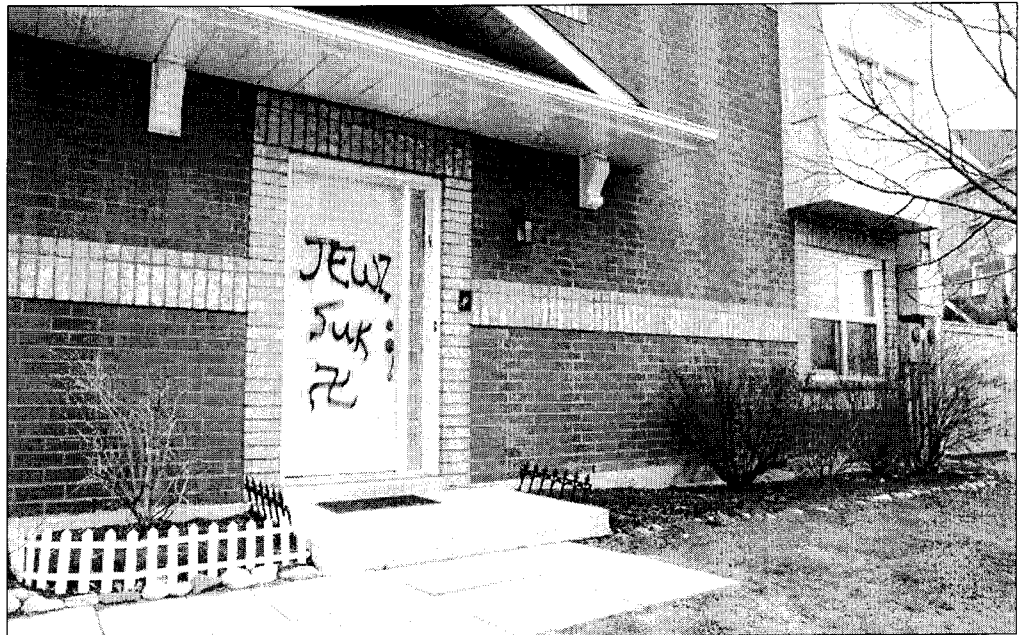
The Los Angeles-based institution will urge U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, and top British and Iranian diplomats to find out details about 12 Jews ages 15-57 who disappeared between 1994 and 1997.

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WORLD REPORT

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Courtesy B'nai Brith Canada

SWASTIKAS IN CANADA

One of several homes vandalized March 16 in a spate of anti-Semitic incidents in the Toronto area.

Most Jews agree with 'under God' as U.S. Supreme Court hears case

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When the words "under God" were first uttered in an American political context, the issue was not a question of church and state, but Christian and Jew.

Abraham Lincoln used the term "under God" at the end of his Gettysburg Address on Nov. 19, 1863, to describe the American nation and the new "birth of freedom" he envisioned as the lasting effect of the Civil War.

Back then, Jews welcomed the term as a sign that they were being included in what

many saw as a Christian society, said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University.

"I do believe that the phrase in the Gettysburg Address is a very important phrase and was meant to be inclusive," Sarna said.

Now, with the U.S. Supreme Court poised to address next week whether a teacher-led Pledge of Allegiance in school is constitutional because of the reference to God, the Jews' historic take on this seemingly common phrase in American public life has become relevant.

It also explains why most Jews — including

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**BEHIND
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HEADLINES**

■ Jews mostly agree with 'under God' as U.S. Supreme Court prepares for case

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much of the organized Jewish community, which often is on the forefront of battles to keep religion out of the public sphere — are not opposed to the pledge.

The case, *Elk Grove School District v. Newdow*, which the court is scheduled to hear March 24, stems from a legal challenge brought by a California father, Michael Newdow, who was born Jewish but is an avowed atheist.

He sued the Sacramento-area school district on behalf of his daughter, arguing that the Pledge of Allegiance said in school was a violation of her constitutional rights.

Setting off a firestorm of controversy, the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in 2002 that the pledge that includes the phrase "One nation, under God" violated the separation of church and state, and therefore could not be mandated in public schools. There has been a hold on the ban ever since, awaiting clarification from the high court.

In the 19th century, at the time of Lincoln's now-famous speech, Sarna said, Jews fought for equal footing. If there was a Protestant chaplain in the military, Jews wanted a Jewish chaplain as well.

"'Under God' considered Jews as insiders, as opposed to a Christian nation," he said. "Jews argued there was a sense of equivalence."

The term "under God" was added by Congress to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 at the insistence of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal group.

Sarna said the Jewish community at the time did not fight the addition of the phrase, because of concerns of being viewed on the side of Soviet atheists in the Cold War era.

"The Jewish community had a lot to lose by opposing 'One nation, under God,' " said Sarna, author of the recently released "American Judaism: A History."

"Non-Jews would have questioned their patriotism and it would have broken their alliances with liberal Protestants and Catholics."

Marc Stern, a lawyer for the American Jewish Congress, said he believes the phrase had religious impact in 1954, and that one of the major motivations for it was to make religion a factor of distinction between Americans and Communists in the Soviet Union.

Liberal Jewish groups, generally quick to weigh in on church-state issues, have remained relatively quiet on the current Pledge of Allegiance issue, viewing this type of what they call "ceremonial deism" as harmless.

"It conveys a resonance of American history and culture without conveying religious activity," said Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism and an authority on the Constitution. "It offers a comfort level that it otherwise wouldn't have."

The AJCongress, which historically has promoted a high wall of separation between church and state, filed a brief with the Supreme Court supporting the recitation of the pledge in public schools.

"It's our belief that the phrase at best has marginal religious meaning, and in the political real world, a decision to ban the phrase would lead to a fast-track constitutional amendment," said Stern, the group's lawyer.

While Stern said many Jews would prefer the phrase not be in the Pledge of Allegiance, a constitutional amendment that would enshrine the words in the pledge might contain provisions or other language that would do more damage.

In a rare example of unity across the Jewish religious spectrum, non-Orthodox groups took a similar stance to Orthodox ones in briefs filed before the court.

For its part, the Anti-Defamation League has reversed its view on the issue

— and now stands virtually alone in the organized Jewish community in challenging the phrase.

In 2002, when the Appeals Court ruled in favor of Newdow, the ADL called the ruling "wrong" and said "it goes against the culture and traditions of this country, which was founded on principles respectful of faith."

But the group later filed a brief to the Supreme Court on behalf of Newdow.

"Upon reflection, our lay leadership decided we should participate in this case," said Steven Freeman, ADL's director of legal affairs.

"It's not a case we would have brought, but we felt that since the court is considering the case, we had to take the position consistent with our interpretation of the Establishment Cause," part of the First Amendment, designed to ensure that government does not endorse or embrace one religion or religion itself.

The ADL argues in its brief that recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, led by a teacher, places subtle coercive pressure on students to embrace God when the students are too young to critically reflect on the statement's meaning.

"The school setting places undue coercion on students to join their fellow students in state-prescribed religious expression, or to engage in silent protest that may well be misperceived as silent approval," the brief states.

"This places the objecting student in an untenable position, and thereby exacts religious conformity in a manner that the Constitution forbids."

While there is a concern that allowing for the use of God in some public contexts can create a slippery slope, many feel there is a line in the sand between acceptable uses of God and those that infringe on religious freedom.

Saperstein said many in the Jewish community view violations of church-state separation in the same manner as Justice Potter Stewart famously handled defining pornography in a 1964 Supreme Court opinion: "I know it when I see it."

And as justices of the Supreme Court consider the case before them next week, they will walk into the chamber as they do each day as a marshal utters the phrase, "God save the United States and this honorable court."

Lincoln was
the first to use
'under God.'

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Poll: 'Passion' viewers less likely to blame Jews

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — You heard it here first: Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is good for the Jews.

So says demographer Gary Tobin, whose San Francisco-based Institute for Jewish & Community Research released a new poll this week concluding that the movie changed Christian attitudes toward Jews and the crucifixion for the better.

"In general, people are less inclined to see Jews as responsible for killing Christ" after seeing the movie, Tobin said.

That finding contrasts sharply with warnings from some Jewish leaders before the movie opened. Critics said Gibson's skewed portrayal — in which Jews pushed the Roman leadership into crucifying Jesus — could inflame anti-Semitism, if not domestically than abroad, where anti-Semitism is more prevalent.

In a random national survey of 1,003 adults conducted by Tobin's group March 5-9, nearly two weeks after the movie's premiere, 12 percent of the 146 people who had seen "The Passion" said it made them "less likely" to blame Jews today for the crucifixion, compared to 5 percent who said they were "more likely" to blame all Jews for killing Jesus.

Conducted by the Pennsylvania-based International Communications Research, a research firm that has conducted surveys for ABC News and The Washington Post, the poll found that 16 percent of Americans said they had seen the Gibson movie, which raked in more than \$264 million in its first three weeks after opening Feb. 25.

A Gallup poll taken March 5-7 found that 11 percent of Americans had seen the movie, and 34 percent more said they planned to see it in theaters.

In Tobin's survey, 9 percent of those who either had seen the movie or were familiar with it due to the buzz surrounding it said the movie made them less likely to hold Jews responsible for Jesus's death; 2 percent said they were more likely to blame Jews; 83 percent said their opinions about Jews remained unchanged.

In February, an ABC News poll found that 8 percent of Americans blamed all Jews, historically and today, for killing Jesus.

Tobin said the movie has become such a phenomenon "that you don't have to

have seen the film for it to influence your thinking."

Sid Groeneman, who worked on the Tobin poll, said the disparity in blame between the ABC polls and Tobin's may be due to different wording.

Tobin's poll comes after an online survey by the Chicago-based International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, a group devoted to interfaith ties and support for Israel, conducted an online survey showing a minority of Christians blame Jews for the crucifixion. The survey, held Feb. 26-March 3, the days immediately after the movie opened, found that only 1.7 percent of 2,500 participants said Jews were responsible for killing Jesus, while 84 percent said "mankind" was to blame.

"Despite the near-hysterical warnings issued by some Jewish groups in the wake of 'The Passion,' we must remember that the danger for Jews does not lie in Christians believing that certain Jewish authorities, acting to preserve their own power, desired the death of Jesus," said the group's president, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein.

Instead, the threat "lies in the abhorrent notion that Jews today have blood on their hands because of the actions of a corrupt few 2,000 years ago." The group's survey shows "it is precisely this belief that the vast majority of Christians reject," he said.

In the movie, the scene in question indeed carries the infamous blood libel that for centuries sparked Christian attacks against Jews.

The scene shows the Roman leader, Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of Jesus's blood, while the Jewish high priest Caiaphas turns to the Jewish mob demanding Jesus be killed and says in Aramaic, "His blood is on us."

Unlike the rest of the subtitled movie, that line was not translated, though the word "yadain," or "hands" in Aramaic and Hebrew, is clear.

Besides earning Gibson a princely \$70 million profit so far on his \$30 million investment, the movie has been the subject of intense media scrutiny, appearing on

the covers of numerous magazines, the front pages of countless newspapers, and winning saturation coverage by major broadcast and cable television networks.

Some have called Gibson's publicity strategy for the movie a model of marketing that will be studied for years to come. Even the Tobin poll received substantial media play, appearing on CNN hours after its release.

'I'm not sure I really understand what these findings mean, based on that 146 people saw it.'

Abraham Foxman
Anti-Defamation League

Among the leading critics of the film was

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who failed to convince Gibson to add a postscript to the movie saying that many Jews were crucified during the Roman occupation of ancient Israel, and that the Jews were not to blame for Jesus' death.

"I hope he's right," Foxman said of Tobin's survey, but "I think it's a little too early to come to any conclusions."

"I'm not sure I really understand what these findings mean, based on that 146 people saw it," he added.

The Tobin poll carried a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points for those who saw the film, and 3.7 percent for those who saw or knew about the film.

The ADL will conduct its own follow-up polls about the movie in the next few months, Foxman said.

Since the film's opening, Foxman said the ADL has received more than a dozen reports of students in public schools being called Christ-killers by classmates. Six name-calling incidents occurred in one Midwestern community, he said.

But Foxman added that such incidents surface occasionally, and the ADL was only starting to examine the reports to determine whether they were connected to the movie.

For his part, Tobin said the ADL and others were right to focus attention on the movie. After seeing the movie Monday, Tobin said he found it "full of anti-Semitic images."

"The film blames Jews in ways that are associated with anti-Semitic beliefs," he said. "But that doesn't mean people are coming away from the movie with anti-Semitic views."

For Morocco's Jews, mix of vibrancy, decline

By MICHAEL S. ARNOLD

CASABLANCA, Morocco (JTA)—Growing up in Casablanca, Raphael Elmaleh says he never felt fully at ease as a member of a small Jewish minority in a heavily Muslim country.

So when he was 7, Elmaleh's family sent him from Morocco to a Jewish boarding school in England.

Elmaleh thought he would feel more comfortable there — but it was in England, already unnerved by the chilly demeanor of the people, that he first encountered anti-Semitism.

Elmaleh is like thousands of other Moroccan Jewish youths who have left their homeland for work or study. But a dozen years ago, Elmaleh did something quite unusual: He came back.

After two decades away, Elmaleh found Morocco more advanced and developed economically and socially than when he had left. As an adult, Elmaleh says, he also was better able to appreciate the country's traditional warmth and ethnic tolerance.

When Elmaleh, who keeps kosher, goes to the homes of Muslim friends, they prepare vegetarian meals for him — and think nothing of it.

"To find that in an Arab country," Elmaleh said in a recent interview, "is amazing."

Yet Elmaleh returned, too, to a Jewish community that has fallen from a peak of 300,000 souls after World War II to about 5,000 today. Marriageable men and women of Elmaleh's age are long gone, most to France or Quebec in search of school, work or love.

"It's very hard to find friends of my age in Morocco." In the Jewish community, Elmaleh said, "my age doesn't exist anymore."

"And to find a bride? Forget about it. I have to go to France or Israel if I want to find a shidduch."

For now, Elmaleh isn't looking. Instead, he's busy going from village to village documenting the country's Jewish heritage and earning money as a tour guide — "Morocco's only Jewish tour guide," as he is quick to tell visitors.

Elmaleh's life illustrates the two poles of experience for Morocco's Jewish community today — warm, patriotic and vibrant, on the one hand; small, diminishing and potentially doomed on the other.

"In 10 to 15 years I feel there may be no more Jews left in Morocco," Elmaleh said. "I don't think most parents would even want their kids to come back."

Serge Berdugo, president of the country's Jewish community and a former minister of tourism, is more optimistic.

"A lot of people said we were going to disappear when we were down to 100,000 people, and then when we were 20,000 people," he said. "We have numbers that can never disappear."

Yet Berdugo is aware of the incentives drawing the community's youth inexorably away. Two of Berdugo's three children found success in Paris, yet one returned to Marrakesh and is living a life of industry and luxury.

So, too, in the family of Jacky Kadoch, head of the small community of Marrakesh. The community numbers about 260 people, most of them over age 60.

Morocco's "is the jewel in the crown" of Jewish communities that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee serves, said Amir Shaviv, the JDC's assistant executive vice president for special operations. "There is such a rich fabric of Jewish life in the community although it's so small, and it's a model of peaceful coexistence in an Arab and Muslim country."

The Casablanca community, which with 3,000 people is by far the largest in Morocco, has 10 Jewish schools serving some 800 students.

Until a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations arrived in the country last month, Berdugo said, he never realized Moroccan Jewry had something to teach other Jewish communities.

But, he said, as a Jewish community living with full rights in a Muslim country — in fact, as the last significant Jewish community in the Arab world — he now realizes they do.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference, said the vitality of the community, despite its small numbers, is inspiring.

"To see a community that is dwindling but that is still investing so much in its future — that should cause us all to re-

think," Hoenlein said.

At the youth center, known as the DEJJ, Jewish scouts stood at the edge of a courtyard to greet a visiting delegation from the Presidents Conference.

As the Jewish dignitaries watched in delight, the Moroccan youths sang "Heiveinu shalom aleichem." In a nearby classroom, young girls performed a choreographed dance number, while in another room a Jewish youth chorus performed.

The American group later visited the Cercle de l'Alliance, a social club that was among four Jewish targets hit in a series of suicide bombings last May 16. A fifth target was located near the Spanish consulate.

No Jews were killed or hurt in the attacks; the buildings were empty of Jews because it was the Sabbath. Twenty-nine Muslims were killed.

The bombings were a blow to the Jews' sense of security in Morocco. Yet many Moroccans saw them primarily as a strike against the country's social and political order, so much so that the anti-Jewish nature of the attacks largely has been obscured.

The community discouraged overseas Jewish groups from visiting after the bombings — acts of solidarity that might have portrayed the attacks as a Jewish affair, or created a sense that the community was somehow alien to Moroccan society.

Instead, Jews here were heartened by the outpouring of support from the country's leadership and public.

King Mohammed VI visited the Cercle de l'Alliance the day after the attack and urged the Jewish community to rebuild. Reconstruction is still in progress.

The regime then organized a huge rally in support of the Jewish community in the streets of Casablanca. Together, the marchers chanted, "Jews are citizens, Wahhabis are assassins," a reference to the fundamentalist roots of the attackers, who have been linked to Al-Qaida.

The bombings clearly have been the seminal event for Moroccan Jews in recent years, yet members of the community insist they are not overly worried.

'It's much worse for Jews in France; there you have real anti-Semitism.'

Moroccan Jew

Since the bombings, there have been two more murders of Jews, one in Casablanca and one in Meknes. Some observers say those, too, were anti-Jewish attacks, but members of the community say they simply were criminal murders.

■
 “A Jew has to be aware no matter where he is — in Casablanca, in New York or in Paris,” said one community member who asked not to be named. “In fact, it’s much worse for Jews in France; there you have real anti-Semitism,” the man continued. “Not here. Here, if you tell someone you’re Jewish, they’ll be proud.”

In the Jewish community, reactions to the bombings tend to divide along two lines. One is a variant on the timeless notion of Jews as the “canary in the coal mine” as a barometer for a society’s health.

From this perspective, the bombings weren’t really directed at the Jews, but essentially were a test of the young king’s power.

A second line is that because the bombings prompted the king to reaffirm the protection his predecessors historically offered to Morocco’s Jews, the community is now more secure than ever.

“We were shocked,” said Kadoch, the head of the Marrakesh community, “but we understood right away that the king takes it very seriously, so right away we felt very safe.”

After the massive Jewish emigrations of the past half-century, it is often said that those who remain in Morocco either are too rich or too poor to leave. Yet since last year’s bombings, some say, even the remaining members of the community essentially are sitting on their suitcases.

“For the Jewish community in Morocco, this is a very sad place,” said one Western observer who asked not to be named. “I think in general, people are packing their bags. It’s difficult for me to imagine that they will have a viable community a generation from now.”

Corinne Breuze, the French consul general in Casablanca, said that nearly all Moroccan Jews have visas to France that can be used in case of emergency, a luxury that is much harder for Muslims



Michael S. Arnold

Jewish scouts in Casablanca, Morocco, greet visiting American Jews.

to obtain.

“I really believe the Moroccan government is doing all it can to allow the Jewish community to live in peace here,” Breuze said. But, she said, as in many countries with small and potentially endangered Jewish communities, “they have the facility to go to Europe — just in case.”

Berdugo insists the current concern is no more than the customary jitters the community has each time the throne changes hands.

“With every change of regime, Jews speculate about continuity,” Berdugo said. “But with each king, the situation gets better.”

■
 Government ministers dispatched to meet with the American group — Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Firhi and the minister of Islamic and religious affairs, Ahmed Toufiq — stressed the historically warm relations between Moroccan Jews and Muslims.

Toufiq, an ethnic Berber who grew up in the Atlas Mountains, said his community still regrets the emigrations of the 1950s and 1960s, when successive waves of Jews left Morocco for Israel, France and Canada.

Many members of the American delegation marveled at the ease and warmth with which Jews and Muslims mingled at the receptions and meals for the American group.

Liliane Shalom, the Moroccan-Ameri-

can president of the World Sephardi Federation, wept demonstratively during a visit to the Rabat tomb of King Mohammed V, the current monarch’s grandfather.

Yet a few members of the delegation were less impressed by the oft-stated commitment to tolerance, saying it evoked medieval times when Jewish communities depended precariously on the monarch’s favor for their safety.

With equality among citizens today taken for granted in the enlightened world, Morocco’s tolerance is noteworthy only in comparison to the anti-Semitism raging in other parts of the Muslim world, they said.

■
 “We’re supposed to say thank you that the Muslims here aren’t killing their Jews?” asked Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America. “What kind of standard is that?”

Indeed, though the American group encountered smiles and warm wishes at every turn during their brief visit, they traveled under extraordinarily heavy security.

Members of the local community say they do not flaunt their Jewishness, but don’t hide it either.

Elmaleh said he rarely encounters problems because of his ethnicity, except among less-educated Moroccans who are enraged by televised images of Israeli-Palestinian violence and who scorn all Jews as Zionists.

“They don’t know that there two different kinds of Jews,” Elmaleh said.

Community members are not naive about the potential dangers of the situation, but generally they feel safe, Berdugo said.

“After the bombings I was afraid. But when I saw how many letters I got from Muslims, how many visits of condolence” — and then the huge Casablanca rally — “we don’t feel so isolated,” Berdugo said.

“Of course in our history here we have dark pages,” he said. “Nevertheless, we feel we have a better life here than many Jewish communities all over the world.” ■

Breaking mold, elderly go on a mission to Israel

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Walkers and wheelchairs rumble over the uneven stone alleyways as nursing home residents from New York make their way through Jerusalem's Old City, stopping to gaze, posing with giggling schoolgirls, and sometimes weeping.

Most of these visitors touring Jerusalem — on a weeklong trip — are in their 80s and 90s.

For some, it is their first trip to Israel. But for all it is likely to be their last, and they can't believe their luck at getting here this time.

All residents of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale in the Bronx, the group of 10 came to the Jewish state last week for what organizers dubbed the "Chutzpa Mission."

The chutzpah members were accompanied by a doctor and a team of nurses and orderlies.

In addition to touring Jerusalem, the group is floating in the Dead Sea, taking a cable car to Masada and exploring the Golan Heights and the Galilee.

Arthur Rosenberg, 82, looks up from his wheelchair at the rebuilt stone archway of the 19th-century Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Jordanians in 1948.

He asks to have his photo taken in front of it. This is his second trip to the Jewish state.

"It's something I never thought I'd be able to do again. It's a miracle I was chosen to come," said Rosenberg, a World War II veteran who fought in the South Pacific and who worked in a "million things" during his working days, from bellhop to sales rep to businessman.

Setting off in his wheelchair toward the Western Wall, he clutches an envelope full of notes from grandchildren and other relatives to wedge between the stones at the holy site.

The steady hand pushing his wheelchair and sharing his enthusiasm is Kofi Ankomah, an immigrant from Ghana who works at the Hebrew Home as a nurse's aide.

Walking alongside the residents is a

beaming Daniel Reingold, the executive vice president of the senior home and the driving force behind the trip.

"Why shouldn't 90-year-olds live their lives? It's all about the possibilities of aging," he said.

Reingold was first struck with the idea, he said, during a Rosh Hashanah sermon this past fall by his rabbi urging community members to travel to Israel.

He said he hopes the trip will send a message to younger Diaspora Jews who, like other tourists, have stayed

away from Israel during the last three years of intifada.

If these elderly residents can make the trip, they have no excuse not to, Reingold said.

Reingold is the first to admit it was not easy to take on the logistical challenge of bringing a group of elderly people 6,000 miles across the world.

Planning was meticulous: His staff met weekly for more than two months to prepare for all possible scenarios and contingencies. They decided what medicine to bring, how many walkers to pack, what criteria to establish in order to determine who was physically able to make the trip.

Every last detail was thought through. Aisle seats on the plane were booked for residents to ensure speedy access to toilets.

Staff members walked with them every hour to help avoid the development of thrombosis.

Arrangements were made with Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem to accommodate any emergencies. Special salt-free, low-spice menus were arranged.

Wheelchair access was checked into, arrangements were made with police and other authorities to bring the group's mini-bus as close as possible to sites — in the case of the Western Wall, they were dropped off at its plaza, about 50 feet away from the Kotel itself.

Organizers even made sure that the box of candies distributed on the bus was sugar-free.

The cost — some \$1,800 per person — was

covered by the Hebrew Home's board and a local fund-raising drive. Most of the residents there live off of retirement funds and social security and would not have been able to afford the trip otherwise.

Reingold hopes this trip can be used as a model for other nursing home officials who might want to take their residents on long-distance trips.

The excitement surrounding the trip began long before the group took off from New York. The 2,500 or so residents that remained behind joined in symbolically by tucking notes inside a mock-up version of the Western Wall put on display at the home.

At the real Western Wall, the group posed for photographs, positioned in a row, smiling and sporting their turquoise baseball hats emblazoned with the words "Chutzpa Mission." Some leaned on canes and walkers; others sat in wheelchairs.

At 78, Rosa Tatz is the youngest of the group and it is her first trip to Israel. A survivor of Auschwitz, tears spill down her cheeks as she approaches the holiest site in Judaism.

Her fellow residents rest their hands on the massive blocks of stone, tuck notes in between the cracks and pray. She too approaches the wall. She lowers her head and then begins to sob.

"I don't forgive, not even God, for what was done," she says, repeating the names of those in her family who were killed in the Holocaust.

Sadie Hankin, who is about to turn 91, also was emotional at seeing the Kotel for the first time in her life.

"You think of the ones who have gone and you say a prayer for them," said the sprightly Hankin, her white hair cut in a bob and her glasses hanging on a chord around her neck.

She says she is having the time of her life.

"I'm enjoying every bit of it — except the walking. These are very old roads, but of course they cannot get rid of them, they are even older than I am!"

The trip marks the first time anyone in her family has come to Israel.

She clasps in her hand a card given by her granddaughter Alexis, a college student in Washington, which reads — in reference to her grandmother's trip — "When you gotta go, you gotta go." ■

At 78, Rosa Tatz is the youngest of the group and it is her first trip to Israel.

ARTS & CULTURE

Aharon Appelfeld charts a journey

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In the beginning, as an orphaned survivor of the Holocaust, barely 14 years old and freshly landed in Palestine, Aharon Appelfeld's wrote as an act of self-preservation.

He had no family, so he wrote about family. He had lost the Jewish world of Eastern Europe between the wars, so he recreated it with his pen. The writing was halting, and German and Yiddish slipped in with the Hebrew he struggled to master.

"I began a dialogue with myself," he said. "I found that words connected me to my grandparents, to home. Through my writing, I was building a home."

Many novels, short stories and essays later, Appelfeld is an international literary figure. In the cafes of Jerusalem — his de-facto office — he is still writing, trying to connect the dots of memory to capture what he describes as the Jewish soul.

Small, balding and compact, Appelfeld recently talked about his beginnings.

The day he fled as an 8-year-old boy after his mother's murder led to six years alone and on the run, including an escape from a concentration camp at Transnistria.

■

Appelfeld's most recent book, "Wild Blossoming," was published last month. It's the story of a forbidden relationship between a brother and a sister in the Carpathian Mountains in the early 19th century.

The only child of intellectual, assimilated parents in Czernovitz, Bukovina — then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now part of Ukraine — Appelfeld focuses on Jewish life before the Holocaust instead of on the camps and ghettos.

After the war, Appelfeld came to Palestine into the disorienting thud of a post-war reality of life without parents, little education and another war ahead.

He was struck by the sense of triumph among Israelis despite all the uncertainty and hardship. "There was a faith in the righteousness of the path," he said.

Today, with so many pressures bearing down on Israel, that faith is being shaken, he said, and it is a mistake to try to dismiss the state's Jewish character and history.

"A person without a past, who is he?" he remarked. ■

Marking 50 years of pastrami, NYC deli turns back its prices

By E.B. SOLOMONT

NEW YORK (JTA) — Over the years, the scenery outside the 2nd Ave. Deli has changed: Neighbors have left, and the surrounding buildings have grown taller.

The deli itself has expanded, and its prices have gone up over the years.

But time was turned back Monday when the New York City institution, celebrating 50 years in business, served lunch at its 1950s prices as a hungry crowd lined up down the block and around the corner.

It was a throwback to another era: Sandwiches cost 50 cents, potato knishes went for a dime and a bowl of matzah ball soup cost 40 cents.

At one table, the bill for four strangers who met in line added up to \$4. That included Stu Richel's "splurge" for a soda, which cost 5 cents.

But it wasn't just the prices that had patrons lining up in the East Village: Since it opened in March 1954, the 2nd Ave. Deli has attracted both tourists and locals for whom the traditional Jewish menu has become a favorite.

"Nothing has changed," owner Jack Lebewohl said, presiding over teeming crowds jostling to get inside and waiters hurriedly delivering steaming soups and sandwiches.

Steve Gluck, 51, a deli patron for 20 years, said the food has gotten better with time. "I don't eat here often because it's too fatty; it's loaded with cholesterol," he said. But he showed up Monday, he said, because he likes the "flavor" of the place.

Inside, the tiled floors and photos of celebrity patrons give the restaurant a heimische feel. But it was the food that caused some to wax poetic.

"The pastrami was divine; the matzah balls were heavenly," said Rachel, an actor who lives nearby.

"We're not a nouveau restaurant," said Steve Cohen, who has been the deli's general manager for 22 years. "We're a place where you come in and people are glad to see you."

Started by Abe Lebewohl in 1954, the restaurant has been owned and operated by Jack since Abe was murdered eight years ago not far from the restaurant. The case that remains unsolved.

The deli epitomizes an American and New York dream.

"Abe came as an immigrant," Cohen said. "It's a celebration of what you can do when you come to New York and to America."

'It's a celebration of what you can do when you come to New York and to America.'

Steve Cohen

Manager at the 2nd Ave. Deli

The restaurant's success can be attributed partly to a menu that has barely changed over the decades, decor that is a tribute to the past, and staff — most of whom have risen in the ranks from counter boys to wait staff to managers — who have been loyal to the deli for decades.

"We try to create an atmosphere where people don't feel like

they're in a restaurant, but at home," Lebewohl said.

On an average day, 500 to 1,000 people might eat at the deli. On Monday, Lebewohl said he expected to turn over the 128 tables at least 20 times, serving between 5,000 and 10,000 people.

Given the throngs of Jews and non-Jews waiting outside, that figure seems possible. One patron came prepared with a collapsible chair for the long wait.

Rose Marie Higgins, 75, and her daughter Janet, 46, trekked all the way to the East Village from Westchester County.

Even Mayor Michael Bloomberg stopped by.

Monday was the first visit to the famous deli for Avigail Hurvitz-Prinz of Portland, Ore. Stuck in the long line near 10th Street, she said she had been waiting for too long but had "nothing better to do" than stand outside on a sunny day.

Alice Heideman and Ruth Rosenbluth said they had a soft spot for the deli's chopped liver and for the restaurant where they have shared many memories during a 40-year friendship. The women, both in their 70s, said they had been eating at the 2nd Ave. Deli for 48 years.

"We love this place," Heideman said. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

E.U. to take up terror

The European Commission slammed member states for failing to implement E.U. directives against terrorist groups.

The commission said Thursday that five member states had failed to integrate a directive to incorporate a Europe-wide arrest warrant into their national law.

Another three states were tardy in bringing in stiffer sentencing policy for terrorist crimes. Among measures suggested by the commission is a proposal that new groups to be added to the E.U.'s proscribed list of terrorist organizations would no longer require a unanimous vote of member states.

Last year, France attempted to block an E.U. decision to ban the political wing of Hamas and to freeze the terrorist group's European-based assets.

BBC apologizes for documentary

The BBC acknowledged error after a complaint about anti-Israel bias in one of its documentaries.

"The Road to Armageddon," aired last summer, focused on Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. After a Jewish couple from London complained that the documentary was inaccurate, the broadcaster's complaints unit acknowledged that the 90-minute program contained both factual errors and misleading footage.

Among a number of inaccuracies, "Road to Armageddon" suggested falsely that an Israeli army tank fired a shell at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem during the 2002 siege of the city.

In another sequence on the 1994 Hebron killings carried out by Dr. Baruch Goldstein, the program said that 70 Palestinians had been killed, rather than 29, which is the actual figure.

Call for ban on ritual slaughter in Austria

Austrian Jewish leaders compared a right-wing political party's call for a ban on ritual slaughter to a similar Nazi law.

The party calling for the ban is Austria's Freedom Party, led by Jörg Haider. Jewish community leader Avshalom Hodik made his comparison Thursday after the party called for a ban on both Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter.

The Nazis banned ritual slaughter in both Germany and Austria in the 1930s. In recent years, animal-rights groups in Europe have called for a ban on the practice, known as shechitah in Judaism.

Hamas Web site in Sweden shut down

Hamas' Swedish Web site was shut down.

The decision to shut down the site was made because the site promoted racial hatred, The Associated Press reported. Hamas was added to the European Union's list of terrorist organizations last fall.

NORTH AMERICA

Mel turning Maccabean?

Mel Gibson, whose movie about Jesus has turned into a cultural phenomenon, is considering making a movie about the Chanukah story.

Gibson, who co-wrote and directed "The Passion of the Christ," which some Jewish groups say unfairly blames Jews for the crucifixion, said he's planning a movie based on the book of Maccabees, the New York Daily News reported.

"It's about Antiochus, the king who set up his religion in the Temple and forced them all to deny the true God, and worship at his feet and worship false gods," Gibson told WABC Radio host Sean

Hannity. But the Maccabees "stood up, and they made war, they stuck by their guns and they came out winning," he added. "It's like a Western."

Kerry to Mahathir: No thanks

Sen. John Kerry's campaign rejected an endorsement from the former Malaysian prime minister, saying he is an anti-Semite.

Mahathir Mohammed, who retired in October, told The Associated Press on Thursday that he hoped the Massachusetts senator would win the race for U.S. president.

"I think Kerry would be much more willing to listen to the voices of people and of the rest of the world," Mahathir said. Shortly before retiring, Mahathir said Jews rule the world by proxy and that the Muslims must unite to defeat them.

Kerry's top foreign policy adviser, Rand Beers, called Mahathir an "avowed anti-Semite whose views are totally deplorable."

Rabbi performs same-sex marriage

A rabbi was expected to marry a same-sex couple in New York City. Rabbi Ellen Lippmann of Kolot Chayeinu congregation in Brooklyn was to marry the couple at City Hall on Thursday.

The ceremony comes as Jewish groups debate whether same-sex marriages should be allowed or whether they should support a constitutional amendment proposed by President Bush that would make only heterosexual marriages legal.

Canada wants to deport accused camp guard

Canada moved to denaturalize and deport a man accused of assisting in the mass murder of Jews as an SS guard during World War II.

Josef Furman, an 83-year-old resident of Edmonton, Alberta, is alleged to have been part of the Trawniki guard, a unit responsible for hundreds of anti-Jewish operations that included the execution of 40,000 Jewish inmates in three concentration camps and the routing of a train from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz carrying 1,200 Jewish children.

MIDDLE EAST

A November settlement sweep?

Israel could remove four West Bank settlements ahead of the U.S. elections, Israeli media reported.

Ma'ariv said Thursday that security advisers to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had recommended that Kadim, Ganim, Sahur and Homesh be dismantled to bolster President Bush's chances of re-election in November.

Bus-hijacking alert

Israel's bus companies are on high alert for Palestinian hijacking plots.

Security sources said Thursday that the Egged and Dan bus companies, whose guards have been on the lookout for suicide bombers since the Palestinian intifada began three and a half years ago, had been instructed to prepare for attempts to hijack buses and take them into Palestinian areas.

Israel pays injured teen

Israel will pay some \$600,000 to an Arab teenager from Jerusalem paralyzed by a rubber bullet.

The youth was injured during rioting on the Temple Mount at the start of the intifada in fall 2000. As part of an agreement reached by both sides and ratified Wednesday by an Israeli court, Israel will not admit to being responsible for the teen's injuries.