

IN THE NEWS

Israeli withdrawal to cost \$1 billion

Ariel Sharon's plan for Israeli disengagement from the Palestinians will cost around \$1 billion.

The main factors contributing to the cost are new housing in Israel that will be needed for some 7,500 settlers in the Gaza Strip and the redeployment of Israeli troops, sources in Israel's Treasury said Thursday.

The Israeli prime minister hopes to win President Bush's endorsement for the unilateral plan when he visits Washington on April 14.

There is no indication that Sharon will come with a request for extra American funding.

Jerusalemites nabbed in Iraq

Two Arabs from eastern Jerusalem were abducted by insurgents in Iraq.

A previously unknown guerrilla group, Ansar a-Din, broadcast footage of Nabil Razouk and Ahmed Tikati on Thursday, calling them "servants of the Zionist enemy." At least one of the men, both Christian Arabs from eastern Jerusalem who were in Iraq working for the RTI relief organization, is believed to have Israeli citizenship.

Diamond merchants want more security

The diamond industry in Antwerp, Belgium, asked for extra security after threats from local Arab groups.

Antwerp's Jews long have been the center of the diamond trade in the port city.

The request for security came after a leader of the Arab European League said Antwerp's Jewish community could be targeted if it did not denounce Israeli policies vis-a-vis the Palestinians.

JTA World Report will not publish Tuesday, April 13 and Wednesday, April 14. We wish all of our readers a happy Passover.

WORLD REPORT

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Comparisons to Nazi Germany after school arson in Montreal

By BRAM EISENTHAL

MONTREAL (JTA) — Police here have tightened security at local synagogues and mosques following an arson this week that destroyed most of a Jewish school's library.

The heightened security came as some parents of students at United Talmud Torah's elementary school said the attack was reminiscent of book burnings in Nazi Germany.

Official condemnation of Monday's pre-dawn firebombing of the library, in which most of the books were damaged or ruined, came quickly.

Politicians, community leaders and letters to the editor all condemned the attack.

The city's Sun Youth community organization has offered a \$15,000 cash reward to anyone who provides information leading to the arrests of the perpetrators.

Police reportedly had leads into the perpetrators' identities, but say they don't know the group that claimed responsibility on a note left at the school.

The note linked the attack to Israel's recent assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, and implied that further attacks would follow.

A local resident was awoken by the fire and filmed it with his digital camera. The footage is being examined by authorities.

David Birnbaum, executive director of the Quebec Region of the Canadian Jewish Congress told JTA that top community officials had met early Monday morning to discuss their reaction to the situation.

Birnbaum chairs a security coordinating committee that involves Montreal's major

Jewish institutions and the city's police force.

"First and foremost, we are making sure our institutions are safe," Birnbaum said. "This is the kind of thing, sadly, that we have to be prepared for."

He also stressed that it's not solely the responsibility of the Jewish community.

"This is something that should concern parents of schoolchildren citywide, as well as all of our political leaders. We know we don't stand alone on this," he said.

B'nai Brith Canada issued a statement Monday calling on the government to do more to protect Jewish sites.

"We acknowledge and appreciate the condemnation by politicians of all backgrounds," but "words are meaningless if not accompanied by action," said Frank Dimant, the group's executive vice president.

The incident occurred a few weeks after a rash of anti-Semitic incidents, including graffiti spray painted on homes, in a Jewish neighborhood in Toronto.

Birnbaum said Prime Minister Paul Martin met in Ottawa about 10 days ago with members of major Jewish organizations, who expressed their concern about a growing tide of anti-Semitism in Canada.

The groups included Canadian Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith Canada, United Israel Appeal, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the leadership of several of Canada's Jewish federations.

Canadian Justice Minister Irwin Cotler visited the burned school as Martin's emissary.

Cotler graduated from United Talmud Torah, making this extremely personal for the

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

■ *An arson shocks parents at a Jewish school, and much of Canada*

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international human rights lawyer.

"What we have witnessed here today is the anti-Semitism of hate and of racism," Cotler said.

"We will not be silenced," he continued. "We will not be intimidated and we will act. We will bring the full force of the law to bear on those who would commit these cowardly acts of racist hate crimes."

The government is finishing a plan to establish a hate crimes police force across the country and to establish initiatives to combat racist attitudes, Cotler said.

Cotler described the plan as "an effective and comprehensive approach" that will help to "mobilize a constituency of conscience in this country."

On Tuesday, leading politicians, including the premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, also issued statements of condemnation and support for the Jewish community. Members of Quebec's National Assembly unanimously condemned the incident.

The heads of two leading Islamic organizations, Salam Elmenyawi, of the Muslim Council of Montreal, and Mohamed El-

masry, of the Canadian Islamic Congress, condemned the attack. Elmasry called it a hate crime, adding that "the agony will be double if it was committed by a Muslim."

The St. Laurent district, where the school is located, has a large number of residents of Arab descent, a community that has experienced rapid growth in recent years. Historically, many Jews have lived there as well.

Parents of students were especially fearful of the ramifications of Monday's attack. "It was terrible," Joel Greenberg, a parent of a child at the school, told JTA. "The library is gone, its books completely burned or smoke damaged, and the entire building reeks of smoke."

Another parent, Zev Mestel, likened the incident to "the '40s in Germany."

This is the first time a Jewish institution in Montreal has been firebombed.

Shelley Paris, public relations director for the school, said school officials were heartened by the support they are receiving from the community.

"Parents and teachers, as well as community members, have been offering help

to get the library up and running and the school on its feet," she said.

More and more members of the public are coming out in support of the Jewish community and the school.

The principal of another Jewish day school in Montreal offered to give the school some books, and a leading Toronto book publisher, Kids Can Press, also said it would replace some of the books.

Dominic Spiridigliozzi, chairman of the English Montreal School Board, pledged to try to help the students, either by providing books or allowing them access to other school libraries in the area.

One man on a local radio talk show commented on a sign held in front of the school by one parent at a protest of more than 200 people Monday morning.

"You can burn our books, but you can't burn our spirit," the sign read.

"I am here to tell the people who did this that you can't burn our books, either," the man said. "I don't have a lot of money, but I want to buy a book for the students of this school, and I challenge all of your listeners to do the same." ■

Insurance commission gives checks to survivors

By **MATTHEW E. BERGER**

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The international commission charged with resolving Holocaust-era insurance claims is doling out \$1,000 checks to survivors or heirs who can't document their wartime

policies but say they never collected on them.

Announced last week by the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, the humanitarian awards will go to 16,000 survivors or their heirs. ICHEIC continues to evaluate and provide payments for claims from survivors and heirs.

"These payments are a symbolic acknowledgment of the fact that many insurance policy proceeds were never paid to victims of the Holocaust," ICHEIC Chairman Lawrence Eagleburger, a former secretary of state, said in a statement. "These payments represent the long-delayed efforts to morally address the wrongs done to Holocaust victims who invested their hard-earned savings in insurance policies for their families."

Eagleburger appointed Samuel Berger, national security adviser under President Clinton, to serve as ICHEIC's senior counselor for the humanitarian claims process. Berger developed the criteria for evaluating humanitarian claims and supervised the payment approval process.

"Given the discretionary nature of

judgment involved in evaluating these claims, it was useful to have someone with unimpeachable integrity and outside the process," said Mara Rudman, ICHEIC's chief operating officer.

Berger was unavailable for comment.

The allocations will go to 4,867 recipients in the United States, 5,061 in Israel and thousands in other countries.

The survivors were chosen from a pool of 30,000 claimants whose policies were considered, Rudman said. The criteria for evaluating the claims weren't released, but approximately 93 percent of those receiving the awards are themselves Holocaust survivors.

More humanitarian awards are expected later this year.

Rudman said many claimants couldn't remember the insurance companies' names, but much of the anecdotal information they provided was quite strong.

Sources in ICHEIC said some commission members wanted to give just \$300 to those lacking documentation, but Jewish groups on the commission fought for a higher amount. Rudman disputed that account, however. ■



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U.S. troops celebrate Passover in Saddam's palace

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — When Rabbi Mitchell Ackerson asks why this Passover is different than any other, the answer involves Saddam Hussein.

Ackerson, the senior Jewish chaplain for Operation Iraqi Freedom, led historic seders this week for Jewish servicepeople and civilians in Saddam's former Presidential Palace in Baghdad.

As he readied a seder for up to 125 Jewish troops, civilian administrators and diplomats, and even a few Iraqi Jews, Ackerson considered the prospect of celebrating the Jewish people's liberation from slavery in Egypt in Saddam's palace appropriate.

"We've all come in partnership to provide freedom for this country, in a place where freedom was ripped apart," Ackerson told JTA in a phone interview late last week from Baghdad.

The seder marked another historic milestone: In a rare move, the Department of Defense requisitioned "seder kits" from a civilian supplier for the estimated 1,000 Jews serving in the Iraqi war effort and elsewhere.

"This is the true spiritual victory over an evil empire," said Rabbi Jacob Goldstein, joint forces command chaplain for the National Guard in New York.

Goldstein has helped ferry religious supplies to Jewish troops throughout the war.

"Our government takes the religious needs of its soldiers very seriously and

goes out of its way to make sure they are met."

Other organizations are also pitching in for Passover. The Aleph Institute in Surfside, Fla., has sent Passover supplies to more than 1,300 soldiers around the world, continuing a tradition it has upheld since 1995.

The group, which is affiliated with Chabad-Lubavitch and also ministers to the needs of Jews in U.S. prisons, shipped thousands of pounds of shmura matzah — the matzah baked especially for Passover following strict guidelines — as well as seder plates, Haggadahs, grape juice, gefilte fish and macaroons to soldiers from Haiti to Italy to Iraq.

E-mails to the Aleph Institute came from troops aboard Sixth Fleet ships off Italy; from Navy personnel in Haiti; and from a Protestant Air Force chaplain asking for help for some half a dozen Jews.

Rabbi Menachem "Mendy" Katz, of the Aleph Institute, said the organization sends out Passover and other holiday supplies to any member of the military that responds to its e-mails seeking out Jews. "Not one piece of matzah was sent out without a specific request," Katz said.

Other organizations including the Jewish War Veterans of New Jersey, the Jewish Federation of Rockland County, N.Y., and a newly launched group called

the Jewish Soldiers Foundation have also helped fund similar efforts.

These groups stepped in after some said Jewish troops were not receiving sufficient holiday supplies on time for other holidays. In the past the Jewish Chaplains Council of the Jewish Welfare Board in New York was generally in charge of such efforts.

A series of reports in the Jewish Week of New York detailed delays and other organizational problems with the delivery of religious items under the Welfare Board's aegis.

Ackerson, for example, said he was still waiting to receive more than 400 Purim baskets that the National Council of Young Israel, a modern Orthodox group, had spent more than \$10,000 gathering and sent according to the Welfare Board's instructions.

A Welfare Board official could not be reached for comment.

Ackerson, meanwhile, said the Defense Department, via its Defense Logistics Agency, purchased enough supplies for Jewish servicepeople in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar.

They include two seder kits with Haggadahs, seder plates that include the necessary ritual foods, beef stew, fish, fruit, grape juice and gum, along with kosher-for-Passover rations for 14 more meals, he said.

**A 'spiritual
victory over an
evil empire.'**

Jacob Goldstein
National Guard Rabbi

U.S. Jewish groups to meet Egypt's Mubarak

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — American Jewish leaders will travel to Houston to meet Egypt's president on the day Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is expected at the White House.

Hosni Mubarak will meet Bush at the president's Crawford, Texas, ranch on April 12. Many Jewish leaders will leave straight from the end of the Passover holiday for an April 14 meeting in Texas with the Egyptian leader.

Sharon will meet with Bush in the White House the same day.

Past meetings with Mubarak have been contentious in the Jewish community, and this year's is proving to be no exception. The Anti-Defamation League has refused an invitation to attend in protest of Egypt's cold shoulder toward Israel.

Several other groups will not be represented either, though primarily because of the meeting's location.

The ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, said he'll skip the Mubarak meeting because Egypt boycotted events in Israel celebrating the 25th anniversary of the two countries' peace treaty. "There have to be consequences for behavior that is insulting and offensive to the Jewish community," Foxman said.

Egyptian officials said they skipped the ceremony to protest Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, though they had sought to cancel the events before the killing.

Representatives from Hadassah, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Union for Reform Judaism, the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs are expected to attend the meeting with Mubarak.

"We're going to ask difficult questions," said Reva Price, JCPA's Washington representative. "We're going to talk about anti-Semitism and Egypt's participation in any future plans for Gaza" after Israel's planned withdrawal from the strip.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Libya makes overture on compensation

Libyan Jews are entitled to compensation for lost property, Muammar Gadhafi's son said.

The comments by Saif Al-Islam Gadhafi came after several recent overtures from the Libyan regime toward Israel and the international Jewish community.

In his comments this week, Gadhafi also invited Libyan Jews to return to Libya and leave their Israeli homes to the Palestinians. But Gadhafi said Libya would no longer be involved in Middle Eastern politics.

Purim rampage probed

Ten fervently Orthodox Israelis are suspected in an anti-Arab rampage over Purim.

Police said Thursday that 10 male members of the Bratslav Chasidic group are believed to have attacked Arabs in Jerusalem during the March 7-8 festival.

Five of the suspects, including two minors, are in police custody. There were no serious injuries in the rampage. According to legal sources, the suspects are known to have links to extreme right-wing groups.

Reporter or collaborator?

Israel charged a journalist with abetting Palestinian terrorists.

Dib Abu Ziyad, a reporter for Hezbollah's Al-Manar satellite network, was indicted in a West Bank military court on Thursday on charges of passing information and money from the Fatah movement in Lebanon to armed members in the West Bank. Ziyad, a Palestinian from Jenin, was arrested three months ago.

Although Hezbollah is a Lebanese militia sworn to the Jewish state's destruction, Israeli authorities often turn a blind eye to its media activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

NORTH AMERICA

Bush's Passover message

President Bush sent Passover greetings to the Jewish community. "During Passover, Jewish people celebrate their historic liberation from slavery," the White House said in a message.

"This joyous eight-day observance is testimony to the power of good to overcome evil and is an opportunity for Jews to share the message of God's mercy."

Kerry sends Passover message

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) warned against the renewed threat of anti-Semitism in a Passover message.

"It is lost on no one that as Jews this year undertake this solemn task of revisiting their history of suffering and redemption, their communities face the grave dangers of terror and anti-Semitism," the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said in a Passover greeting released by his campaign. "We cannot rest until the world is freed from these deadly plagues, for the sake of all of our children and all of our children's children."

Wanted: A few Ashkenazi Jews

The National Cancer Institute is looking for Ashkenazi Jews for a study examining genetic links to kidney cancer. Ashkenazi Jews are being studied because they are a relatively homogeneous population. Ashkenazi Jews with two or more family members who have had kidney cancer should send an email to hales@mail.ncicfcrf.gov or call 1-800-949-6704.

WORLD

Controversial film on Israel wins prize

A BBC documentary that prompted Israel to briefly cut ties with the broadcaster won a prestigious U.S. journalism prize.

"Israel's Secret Weapon" won a Peabody Award. When it was broadcast in Israel last year, the head of Israel's government press office, Danny Seaman, said the film contained "ridiculous false assertions." The University of Georgia, which hands out Peabody Awards, called the documentary on Israel's alleged unconventional weapons an "important program" that "contributes vital information to the ongoing exploration of a crucial issue in international relations."

The awards will be presented May 17.

Azerbaijan Passover scaled back

The Jewish community in Baku, Azerbaijan, downsized its Passover celebration after threats. Jewish organizations in Azerbaijan received unsigned letters threatening to avenge the death of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union said.

Only 250 Jews showed up for a community seder this week in Baku, instead of the expected 1,000. Rabbi Meir Bruk, who runs activities in the community on behalf of the Federation of Jewish Communities, said the low attendance was due to widespread security concerns. The community also had to change the venue at the last minute after a public hall refused to rent its space to Jews for fear of possible attacks.

Report: French Muslim politician slurs Jews

A leading Muslim politician reportedly accused the head of the Paris regional council of being "in the hands of the Jewish lobby."

Senior aides to the president of the Paris region, Jean-Paul Huchon, said Moulid Aounit made the remark after Huchon refused to nominate him as one of the region's vice presidents, the daily *Liberation* reported Wednesday. Aounit headed the Communist Party list in the northern suburbs of the capital in last month's regional elections. Aounit has denied the remark.

Swastikas at cemetery in France

Swastikas were daubed on Jewish and Muslim tombstones at a military cemetery in eastern France. The markings were found Monday in the Cronenbourg cemetery near Strasbourg on two Muslim tombstones and a Jewish one.

Russian paper shut down

A court in the Russian city of Novosibirsk shut down a local newspaper that repeatedly published anti-Semitic articles, Interfax reported. An aide to the regional prosecutor who brought the case against the *Russkaya Sibir* newspaper described the articles as extremist and ruled last week that the publication abused press freedom.

Statue to Hungarian protested

A statue honoring an anti-Semitic Hungarian politician was unveiled in Hungary.

The monument to Count Pal Teleki, who was prime minister in the 1920s, and again from 1939-1941, went up over the weekend in Balatonboglár, an hour's drive from Budapest, despite protests from the Hungarian Jewish community. Following the protests, Budapest's mayor suspended plans to erect a statue to Teleki in Hungary's capital, though right-wingers have vowed to put a statue there as well.

Teleki oversaw the drafting of Hungary's first anti-Jewish law in 1920.