

IN THE NEWS

Rumsfeld: No Israelis at Abu Ghraib prison

Checks of reports that Israeli interrogators were present at Abu Ghraib prison have come up empty, Donald Rumsfeld said.

The U.S. secretary of defense responded Wednesday to a claim by Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, who was responsible for the Iraqi prison when abuses were committed against prisoners there, that she had encountered a man claiming to be Israeli.

Israel and the Pentagon both have denied the allegation. Karpinski, a general, has been relieved of her duty pending an investigation into the abuses.

Israel briefs U.N. watchdog on Iran

Israel told the U.N. nuclear watchdog that Iran wants to produce a nuclear bomb.

Israeli officials "were expressing concern about Iran," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei told reporters Wednesday.

ElBaradei arrived in Israel on Tuesday to push for comprehensive Middle East disarmament. But he said Israeli officials had steered talks toward Iran's atomic program in the hope of getting the U.N. to crack down on the Islamic republic.

Ultimatum for Arafat on Palestinian reform

The diplomatic "Quartet" told Yasser Arafat to reform Palestinian Authority security services or risk losing international support.

"Arafat must reduce his dozen or so security forces to three, change all corrupt security bosses, change the interior minister and empower the prime minister," a Western diplomat told Reuters as the Quartet's members — the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia — met in Jerusalem on Wednesday. "Everybody now is sick and tired of empty talk, and there is total disillusion with the Palestinian Authority," the diplomat said.

WORLD REPORT

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Route of Israel's security barrier raises concerns among ecologists

By LOOLWA KHAZZOOM

TEL AVIV (JTA) — For months, Palestinians have blasted Israel's West Bank security barrier as an "apartheid wall" that will extinguish Palestinian national goals.

But an Israeli ecologist says the fence's potential impact on plant and animal life has been completely overlooked.

Noa Olchovsky, campaign coordinator on the fence for Green Action, an Israeli environmental group that advocates "socio-ecological change," said the proposed border zone threatens Israel's ecological system.

"What will tear the ecological system is the separation fence itself," she said. "Animals won't be able to get from the places they sleep to the places they drink water. Trees and plants won't be able to reproduce themselves properly, because their seeds won't be carried by the wind more than 8 meters in one direction. In a few years, certain species of animals and plants in the region will be extinct."

The environmental claims come as the fence has been heavily criticized by pro-Palestinian activists around the world, who see land the Palestinians desire for a future state being lost on the Israeli side of the fence. Palestinians also fret that the barrier will close off their most effective weapon against Israel — suicide terrorism.

Now some Israelis are raising the specter of environmental damage as well.

Already, Olchovsky says, Israel has uprooted hundreds of trees and bulldozed Palestinian farmland to build the fence and a patrol road alongside it.

Yehoshua Shkedi, landscape ecologist for Israel's Nature Reserve Authority, the governmental body in charge of natural conservation, says the problem with the fence is two-fold: "It will destroy everything within its range," he says, and will impact ecological corridors.

"It blocks movement of animals and impedes the growth of plants that are dispersed on the fur of animals," he says.

An Israeli army spokesman, Capt. Ya'acov Dallal, rejected the criticism.

"If an animal were to walk by, the animal wouldn't be harmed by the fence," he said. "It's a fence."

And supporters note that the fence protects the most important species — human beings. With the number of Palestinian terrorist attacks down precipitously in areas where the barrier already is in place, supporters

say potential damage to animal and plant life really is beside the point.

"While they listed the complaints of the birds and the animals, they neglected to mention that the reason the fence is being built is to save people," Dallal said. "The fence is saving lives. We have to start from that premise."

In addition, he said, the fence "can also be moved if the security situation changes, if there's an agreement with the Palestinians. It's not a final border, so it's not something that necessarily is permanent."

But ecologist Ron Frumkin says that even if the fence comes down in a few years, "the scar on the land will stay for up to thousands of years."

Dallal disagrees. "The fence is not an ob-

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

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trusive obstacle to such a degree that it causes irreparable damage," he said.

For most of its planned 450-mile route, the barrier is a sophisticated network of wire-mesh fences built with electronic sensors, patrol roads, ditches, cameras and watchtowers. In some short spans, the barrier is a concrete wall.

Dallal said a variety of factors determined the route of the fence, which runs roughly along the Green Line, the boundary between Israel and the Jordanian-controlled West Bank prior to the 1967 Six-Day War.

"We're using the Green Line as some sort of a contour," he said. "We want to have as many Israelis on the one side, as many Palestinians on the other, so that Israelis can go on with their lives and Palestinians can go on with theirs. Wherever you draw a line, it's difficult."

Frumkin said ecologists want to talk not about whether Israel needs the fence, but "where to put it, how to put it, so that the damage will be minimal, both to ecology and people."

Frumkin says he sat down recently with geologists and security consultants from the Council for Peace and Security, a left-leaning think tank, to prepare a report on an alternative fence route.

"It's possible to do the fence in a different way," Frumkin said, "so that it's good for security, for ecology, and for the aesthetic view."

For example, Frumkin said, building on flat land instead of slopes, and building

on the northern side of hills, where there is more rain and less direct sun, would help the land recover faster if the fence one day comes down.

He also said that setting the fence along a straight route rather than a circuitous one would cut its length by half and thus affect less land.

In Jerusalem, where there is a fence winding around the city, Shkedi said, "it's a pocket closed from three sides. The effect of the fence there is very bad."

So far, Frumkin said, Israel has not given serious consideration to ecological-

ly preferable alternatives to the current route.

"If it was done, it wasn't done properly, with professional people to look at the possible alternatives," he said. The government "only looked at security."

Dallal rejected that assertion.

"There is a whole host of considerations that must be taken into account," he said,

including security, operational, environmental and social concerns.

"It's also a question of priorities," Dallal said. "Foremost among them is saving Israeli lives." ■

Balancing environmental concerns with security needs.

Mexican Jews: Stop crime, kidnapping

By CORRIE MACLAGGAN

MEXICO CITY (JTA) — Jews are joining with other Mexicans in demanding that authorities put a stop to a recent rash of crime and kidnappings.

"Almost everyone has either been assaulted or kidnapped or knows someone who has," said Ari Konik, a Mexico City Jew who helped organize a march of hundreds of thousands of people one day last month down Mexico City's main boulevard. "I think we'll see the government take immediate action."

Simultaneous demonstrations took place in other Mexican cities, including Tijuana, Morelia, Torreon, Guadalajara and Puebla.

"It doesn't do any good to sit at home and watch TV and say, 'What a shame,'" said Eliana Menasse, a Jew who took part in the march in the capital. "The politicians can't close their eyes to this."

The Central Jewish Committee of Mexico did not officially participate in the demonstration, the executive director of the group, Mauricio Lulka, said, but many Jews attended on their own.

"The Jewish community is a reflection of the general society," Lulka told JTA. "We believe that there have been some advances in safety, but that it's definitely not sufficient. The perception is still that crime is a serious problem."

The past month and a half has been a time of heightened public concern here about crime, especially kidnapping. It's

difficult to put the problem into numbers because many kidnappings go unreported for fear that police are involved.

A new study showed that Mexico ranks behind only Colombia in the number of annual kidnappings.

It's also difficult to say how many Jews have been victims of kidnappings, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there have been plenty.

Like many people who marched last month, Konik had a personal reason: His 29-year-old niece recently was kidnapped and murdered.

"She was a good girl, beautiful," he said. "When you can't trust the police, when the authorities don't do anything, something has to change."

The topic of violence has dominated Mexican political discourse since the march. President Vicente Fox applauded the demonstration. Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a 2006 presidential hopeful, accused march organizers of trying to discredit his administration.

Mexico City's police chief announced recently that the government is planning to establish a database of information on kidnappers and gangs.

Attorney General Rafael Macedo de la Concha suggested Monday that Congress should examine the possibility of reinstating the death penalty. Though that seems unlikely, Macedo de la Concha's public announcement is a sign that the march has impacted Mexico's political scene. ■

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American terror victims sue Arab Bank

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — A new lawsuit says the tentacles of Palestinian terrorism have reached into America's own backyard.

Using a recent federal law that makes it illegal to finance terrorism, some American victims of Palestinian terrorism are suing Arab Bank, PLC, a Jordanian bank with a branch in New York. They're seeking more than \$875 million on five counts, including "aiding and abetting" murder and "committing acts of international terrorism."

"While the terrorists are cutting off heads, we intend to cut off their funds," said Mark Werbner, the Dallas-based lead lawyer on the case. Werbner was referring to a recent spate of decapitations of Westerners in Arab countries, mainly Iraq, but his lawsuit specifically targets Palestinian terrorism in Israel.

Filed July 2 in U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of New York, a federal court in Brooklyn, the complaint alleges that Arab Bank launders money raised by the Saudi Committee in Support of the Intifada Al Quds.

Through its branches in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the bank pays death benefits to the families of suicide bombers,

the suit argues. It also charges Arab Bank with serving Hamas and its charity front organizations.

Arab Bank did not respond to a JTA call seeking comment.

For the victims, a group of five American families, it's a stab at the beast that maimed them.

The lawsuit, *Linde v. Arab Bank*, is led by Courtney Linde, the widow of John Linde, Jr., an American killed by a roadside bomb last year in the Gaza Strip while providing security for U.S. diplomats.

"John was a wonderful and gentle person, but he was also a Marine and I know he would have wanted me to fight for him," Linde said in a statement.

Another of the plaintiffs, New Jersey surgeon Dr. David Averbach, told JTA, "We can strike them in the pocketbook."

Averbach's son, Steve, had a hunch about a suspicious-looking passenger who boarded a Jerusalem-bound bus last year. He approached the man, a suicide bomber disguised to look like a religious Jew. The bomb exploded, and Averbach suffered massive wounds from the explosion, rendering him a quadriplegic.

Averbach's wife, Maida, learned of the attack when she flipped on Fox News after

a dinner honoring her husband and recognized her son's hand in the picture.

"It's a horrendous thing," she said in an interview. "It's a man who has been active all his life who is suddenly a prisoner in his body."

Also included as plaintiffs are the parents of Koby Mandell. Mandell, an eighth-grader, skipped school one day in 2001 to go hiking with a friend in the West Bank. A Palestinian mob bludgeoned them to death with rocks, beating their bodies beyond recognition.

A 2001 congressional act to monitor Palestinian terrorism was written in Mandell's name, but it has yet to pass.

Others have sued Arab and Muslim governments that are sponsors of terrorism. Many have won their cases but have had difficulty collecting damages, often due to opposition by the State Department, which opposes efforts by U.S. citizens to collect damages against foreign governments on the grounds that they impede U.S. foreign policy and may result in similar suits against the United States.

The bank case was initiated by Gary Osen, a New Jersey attorney who resolved to combat terrorism personally after his neighbor was killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center. ■

Reform rabbi rapped for sexual misconduct

By JOE BERKOFKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Reform rabbinical board has upheld the reprimand of a California rabbi over allegations of sexual misconduct, but it declined to impose a more serious penalty of censure.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis' board of trustees voted June 20 to support its earlier letter of reprimand of Rabbi Michael Mayersohn in the wake of charges by a former congregant.

The move stems from a May 2002 complaint from Chavah (Lori) Hogue of "sexual boundary violations." Hogue accused Mayersohn of trying to seduce her during a marital counseling session while he was rabbi of Temple Beth David in Westminster, Calif.

Such cases typically remain private, but Hogue publicized her charges after the board failed to follow its own ethics policy, shedding light on how the movement handles such complaints.

Mayersohn, who now teaches and practices pastoral counseling, maintains his innocence.

"I continue to hold that I didn't do any of the things she alleges," the rabbi told JTA.

Despite her setback from the Central Conference of American Rabbis' board, Hogue said she was gratified that Mayersohn had agreed to undergo psychological counseling as a condition of the reprimand.

"The key is that he seeks treatment," Hogue told JTA.

Reform rabbinical officials say that every year they handle a variety of ethics complaints against rabbis, which typically remain private. But Hogue took this case public after the Central Conference of American Rabbis' board initially failed to give her a required hearing and, after Mayersohn appealed, voted in early 2004 to downgrade the ethics committee's censure recommendation to a reprimand.

Hogue said she was allotted 10 minutes last month to address the board and make her case for the full censure.

Though Hogue was satisfied with the outcome of the case, she said the Central Conference of American Rabbis continued to treat her poorly. She learned of the latest decision by reading an article in the Orange County, Calif., edition of the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles, rather than from Central Conference of American Rabbis officials, she said.

"This is not the way to treat victims," she said.

Rabbi Rosalyn Gold of Reston, Va., who chairs the ethics committee, would not comment on the specifics of the case, but she confirmed that the full board upheld the lesser reprimand.

Other Reform rabbinical officials, including Rabbi Elliot Stevens, associate executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, also declined to comment. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Sharon assassination feared

Israeli officials fear extremist Jews may try to kill Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The Shin Bet is on alert for attempts to assassinate Sharon and foil his plan to uproot Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Internal Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said Wednesday.

Israel releases two Iraqis

Israel released two Iraqis who infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon. The two men, released Wednesday to U.N. peacekeepers in Lebanon, crossed into northern Israel on Tuesday night. They were released after it became clear they weren't terrorists, Reuters reported.

Nuke agency to fund Israeli medicine

The U.N. nuclear agency agreed to fund a program for nuclear medicine in Israel.

Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, made the commitment at a meeting Wednesday with Israel's health minister, Danny Naveh. ElBaradei is slated to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz on Thursday.

Al-Aksa terrorist killed

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian militant in the West Bank.

The Al-Aksa Brigade gunman was shot dead by an Israeli undercover unit Wednesday in Balata, a refugee camp near Nablus. In Bethlehem, troops arrested nine terrorist suspects, including members of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

Shinui minister disgraced

An Israeli minister from the Shinui Party is expected to resign following revelations that he tried to entrap a colleague in a felony case. Infrastructure Minister Yosef Paritzky apologized Wednesday on Israel's Channel One Television after the station played a recording of a 2002 phone conversation in which Paritzky discussed having fellow Shinui member Avraham Poraz bribed in order to expose him and end Poraz's political career.

Poraz, now Israel's interior minister, admitted having a long-term rivalry with Paritzky but said he was "shocked" at the revelation.

Israeli Arab jailed for arming terrorists

An Israeli Arab was jailed for selling weapons to Palestinian terrorists. Tel Aviv District Court on Wednesday sentenced Mohammed Matani to 10 years in prison after he confessed to the crime, citing financial difficulty. The court did not say whether the weapons were used for terrorist attacks.

NORTH AMERICA

North American aliyah boost

More than 1,100 North American Jews will immigrate to Israel this summer.

Among them, some 150 New Yorkers will be feted Thursday at the UJA-Federation of New York by the Jewish Agency for Israel, which runs Israeli immigration and absorption. More than 1,800 North Americans will have immigrated to Israel from January to September of this year, a 20 percent increase compared to the same period in 2003, the agency said.

"This year we estimate seeing the highest number of olim from North America in 15 years," said Michael Landsberg, executive director of the agency's North American aliyah delegation.

Group presses Bush on settlements

President Bush should pressure Ariel Sharon to accelerate action against unauthorized settlement outposts, Americans for Peace Now said.

In a letter, the group implored Bush to hold the Israeli prime minister to his commitment to remove the outposts.

On Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed his disappointment over what he called Israel's tardiness in dismantling the outposts.

Sharon says he has dismantled 81 outposts since 2002, and that only 28 remain, but Americans for Peace Now says 28 is a low estimate.

Pro-Israel group aims for conventions

The Israel Project will launch major pro-Israel education efforts for journalists covering the Democratic and Republican conventions this summer.

The Washington-based group will sponsor a reception on a luxury yacht, hold a rally with mothers of terrorism victims and run ads highlighting Israel's democratic values on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC during both the Democratic parley in Boston, July 26-29, and the GOP convention in New York, Aug. 30-Sept. 2, said Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, the group's founder and president.

WORLD

British government blasted over Islamic cleric

Britain's government is being criticized for allowing a radical Muslim preacher to enter the United Kingdom.

Sheik Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who has praised suicide bombings, is due to deliver addresses at several events in Britain starting Monday. Qaradawi has been banned from the United States since 1999.

Jews press E.U. on anti-Semitism

The European Jewish Congress called for E.U. measures against anti-Semitism.

In a statement Tuesday, the European Commission said the president of the congress, Cobi Benatoff, had told commission President Romano Prodi in a telephone conversation that Jews believe that in today's Europe "to wear the kippah was effectively to put one's life in danger."

Benatoff praised Prodi's efforts against anti-Semitism and said he hoped the next commission president would treat the topic with the same care and sensitivity, the statement said.

Jews say SS march immoral

Jewish groups accused Estonia of insensitivity to the Holocaust following events honoring Nazi veterans.

Accompanied by a former president of Estonia, Lennart Meri, and other members of Parliament, the veterans were allowed to parade through the streets of Tallinn on Tuesday in an event organized by the Union of Freedom Fighters.

Austrian president backed Jewish causes

Austrian President Thomas Klestil, who opposed the far-right and supported Jewish causes, died at the age of 71.

Klestil died Tuesday on the eve of his retirement after two terms in office.

He became president in 1992 and restored the reputation of the Austrian presidency after his predecessor, Kurt Waldheim, was revealed to have had links to the Nazis. Klestil also opposed the far-right Freedom Party, which entered government in 2000. Earlier this year, he hosted more than 100 rabbis at the Hofburg Palace.