

IN THE NEWS

Syria to begin troop redeployment

Syria will begin a partial redeployment of some of its troops within Lebanon, Lebanon's defense minister said.

The minister said Syria will redeploy some of its troops to the Bekaa Valley on Monday. But Israeli and U.S. officials said the redeployment would not be sufficient.

Israeli media: Sharon to meet Bush

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will meet President Bush in Washington on April 12, Israeli sources said.

The White House summit is expected to follow a separate meeting between Bush and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas next month and to focus on peacemaking efforts, sources said Sunday.

According to Ha'aretz, the Bush administration initially wanted Sharon to visit Washington later this month, but he declined, citing a crucial March 17 Knesset vote on the 2005 budget.

Bush and Sharon have met nine times while serving as their nations' chief executives.

Court compensates department store heirs

Heirs to a Berlin department store seized from its Jewish owners by the Nazis are entitled to \$17 million in compensation, a German court ruled.

The court ruled last Friday in favor of Barbara Principe and her nephew, heirs to the Wertheim department store.

The money awarded to the heirs came from the sale of property that was one part of their family's holdings.

The property was seized by the Nazis in the 1930s and then bought by a private company after the fall of communism in 1994.

The company, KarstadtQuelle, said it would appeal last Friday's decision, and compensation cases over additional properties once owned by the family are still in the courts.



WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG

Jewish groups pleased but wary after Argentina says it flubbed AMIA probe

By LARRY LUXNER

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — It's about time, but the struggle is far from over. That's how Memoria Activa founder Adriana Reinfeld summed up the Argentine government's long-awaited admission of guilt last Friday during a hearing at the Organization of American States in Washington.

At the hearing, which was closed to the media, representatives of Argentine President Nestor Kirchner presented a nine-point proposal aimed at ending a 1998 lawsuit filed against the government in connection with a 1994 car-bombing that destroyed the Buenos Aires headquarters of AMIA, the country's largest Jewish institution.

The lawsuit was filed by Memoria Activa, an association of AMIA bombing victims and their families.

"We're satisfied, but we hope the Argentine state will keep its promises," said Reinfeld, whose sister, Noemi, was working inside the AMIA building when it was ripped apart by a powerful bomb.

She was one of 85 people killed in the attack; another 200 were injured.

"For 10 years, we demanded justice, and the only thing we got were words," Reinfeld told JTA immediately following the hearing. "We had a judge who worked to block the investigation. After 10 years of injustice, we're not sure if what they're offering will really translate into concrete steps."

A report prepared by Claudio Grossman, official observer to the OAS' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, accuses Argentine officials during and since the administration of ex-President Carlos Menem of intentionally misleading investigators prob-

ing the attack, considered the bloodiest act of terrorism in Latin American history.

"It was a scathing report," said Dina Siegel Vann, director of the American Jewish Committee's Institute of Latino and Latin American Affairs. "It showed that the Argentine government was totally at fault for violating the human rights of the victims by not bringing those responsible to justice, and by not preventing an attack that could have been prevented."

Siegel added that "for the first time, Argentina has recognized that the state — not a specific government, but all three branches of government — were involved in the cover-up."

Pablo Jacoby, an Argentine attorney representing Memoria Activa, accompanied Reinfeld and two other activists to Washington in order to press their case before the OAS.

"It is very important that the Argentine government recognize that it failed to take measure to avoid the attack, considering that the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was attacked only two years before," he told JTA. "This should have triggered a sufficient alarm for the Argentine state to have a contingency plan against future terrorist attacks."

Reinfeld said Memoria Activa, which has about 100 members, wants justice and truth — though some form of monetary compensation is also on the table.

"The government has offered to discuss indemnities for all the AMIA victims and their families, though we haven't asked for any money," she said, adding that no specific dollar amounts have been mentioned to date.

"The most important thing is that they're

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Argentina's admission in AMIA bombing probe is seen as a first step

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committing themselves to revitalizing the investigation and finding those responsible, no matter what," she explained. "This is just the first step. We have asked the commission to supervise these negotiations. If they don't work, our next step is to go to the Inter-American Court of Justice in Costa Rica."

That may not happen, however, given the Kirchner government's apparent determination in getting to the truth.

Last week, Kirchner personally turned over top-secret files from Argentina's intelligence agency, SIDE, to two independent prosecutors leading the AMIA probe. This marked the first time in Argentine history that secret information has been declassified and shared with officials not associated with state intelligence services.

Yet the investigation itself is proceeding at a snail's pace, despite the recent establishment of a special unit that has 45 people working full-time on the case.

Top Justice Ministry official Alejandro Rúa told an Argentine newspaper last week that he believes the bombing was done with a minivan, and that "Iranians, Colombians, foreigners who lived in Argentina for several years were part of this plan." Rúa added that he thinks Samuel el-Reda, a Colombian convert to Islam; the husband of a secretary of the then-Iranian cultural attache, Moshen Rabbani; and a man from the Triple Frontier with a cellphone under

the name of Andre Marquez coordinated the operation.

The Triple Frontier is the area where Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay meet.

Yet Rúa conceded that Rabbani, el-Reda and Marquez are most likely in Lebanon or Iran, making their capture and eventual extradition to Argentina nearly impossible.

Said Jacoby: "When you have a suspect, you must have physical evidence and testimony to be able to issue a warrant for his arrest. If you don't, unfortunately the extradition request will fall apart. This is what happened with Hadi Soleimanpour,"

referring to the Iranian ambassador to Argentina at the time.

Diana Malamud, who lost her 35-year-old husband in the bombing, doubts the terrorists will ever be brought to justice.

"It's very difficult now, because 10 years have gone by, and the time lost is irreplaceable," she said, adding that what really hurts is an attitude of indifference on the part of Argentine media and society.

"The attack against AMIA was really an anti-Semitic attack, but what the government said was, 'this has nothing to do with us.' In the media, it was reported that 'Jews and innocent people died,' as though Jews were not innocent. The government and society in general always wanted to separate us. We have always struggled against this." ■

'The time lost is irreplaceable.'

Diana Malamud
Wife of AMIA bombing victim

Germany arrests Holocaust denier

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — A Holocaust denier learned he could come home again — but not because he wanted to.

Germany arrested Ernest Zundel last week after he was deported from Canada.

Zundel, who had lived in Canada more than 40 years, was sent to Germany on March 1.

One of the world's most notorious Holocaust deniers, Zundel had lost his appeal in a Toronto court against deportation to Germany, where he was born.

According to German prosecutors, Zundel, 65, was immediately arrested and jailed when he arrived in Germany. He had been sentenced to five years in prison for incitement and insulting and denigrating the memory of the dead.

The prosecutors had charged Zundel — a German national — with sending hate material and anti-Semitic and Holocaust revisionist documents over the Internet from both the United States and Canada.

During his stay in Canada, Zundel gained a reputation as one of the world's foremost Holocaust deniers. He moved to the United States in 2000 but was deported back to Canada in 2003 on a legal technicality. He had been held in a Toronto detention center ever since.

In a 64-page court decision last month, Canadian Judge Pierre Blais called Zundel a "racist hypocrite" who tried to pass himself off as a pacifist in order to win support

for his right-wing extremist anti-Semitic propaganda. He called Zundel both "a threat to Canadian national security" and "to the international community."

The Canadian government had issued a national security certificate against Zundel, asserting that he was a dangerous mentor to many white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups, including some that espouse violence. A federal court ruling upheld the view that Zundel was a threat to national security, clearing the way for his removal.

Canada's Jewish community "is breathing a sigh of relief" at seeing Zundel go, said Bernie Farber, CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

Zundel immigrated to Canada from Germany in 1958 to avoid serving in the German army. Beginning in 1976, he published and disseminated neo-Nazi and Holocaust revisionist material. He took part in the founding conference of the California-based Institute for Historical Review, which became a hotbed of Holocaust denial.

In 1991, a German court sentenced him to a fine, in absentia, for his activities.

Zundel reportedly has regular contacts with British Holocaust denier David Irving, as well as with Russian right-wing nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. He once claimed that he had nothing to do with the anti-Semitic Web site called "Zundelsite," saying it is operated by Ingrid Rimland without any input from him. Zundel reportedly married Rimland in early 2001. ■



WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Religious reform breeds uncertainty in Ukraine

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Some religious leaders in Ukraine are questioning President Viktor Yushchenko's plan to jettison a government body that oversees church-state relations in Ukraine.

The criticism over the decision to eliminate the Ukrainian State Committee on Religious Affairs comes amid confusion over how religious groups will operate under Yushchenko, who was elected to office last

year on a pro-Western platform aimed at eliminating bureaucracy and corruption.

The reforms are part of Yushchenko's plan to integrate Ukraine into the European Union and NATO.

Some experts agree its liquidation would increase religious freedom in Ukraine. Others, however, fear that if the special government body controlling church-state relations is gone, the situation for minorities might grow worse. Those groups might lose direct access to the government. The dominant Orthodox church, on the other hand, is unlikely to lose that access.

Among the leaders opposing the idea of eliminating the committee is one of Ukraine's chief rabbis, Yakov Dov Bleich, who said the committee helped the Jewish community in several areas.

The committee, which was created during the Soviet era, helps Jews obtain visas for foreign guests, Bleich said.

He added that the committee helped the Jewish community resolve restitution issues, mentioning the return of the Brodsky Synagogue in Kiev.

"It helped us and was a good mediator between the Jewish community of Ukraine and the government," Bleich said.

A prominent Muslim cleric agreed with Bleich that the agency served a useful purpose.

"We always tried to find good relations with the committee to resolve our problems," Sheik Ahmed Tamim, the mufti of Ukraine, told JTA.

Representatives of Ukraine's major faiths all agree that the committee — one of more than 40 committees slated to be shut down as part of Yushchenko's reform of the bureaucratic apparatus — is no longer focusing on limiting religious freedom, as it did during the Communist era.

"Today nobody interferes with our religious activities," Bishop Stanislav Shyrokiy, General Vicar of the Kiev-Zhitomir Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, told JTA.

Yet he disagreed with Bleich that the new Ukraine needs a special government body on state-church affairs.

"I'm sure there is no place for such a

committee in the democratic world," said the bishop.

Some Jews agree with the bishop, calling the committee an outdated institution.

"The State Committee on Religious Affairs was an instrument of the Soviet system," said Eduard Dolinsky, executive director of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, an umbrella organization.

The issue of the committee's liquidation topped the agenda of a conference on church-state relations held in Kiev on Feb. 17-18.

A leading expert on religious affairs told JTA that liquidating the committee would not necessarily mean that Ukrainians would get more religious freedom.

"I can't see anything good in the liquidation" of the committee, said Viktor Yelensky, an expert with the National Academy of Science.

"The committee did not have any controlling functions any more. Religious freedom was probably the only civil liberty which Ukraine

really had during Kuchma's regime," he said. Leonid Kuchma was Ukraine's leader for 10 years.

But other experts welcomed the committee's liquidation.

Such an agency is not needed today, and its functions can be carried out by a department of the Ministry of Justice, said Anatoly Kolodny, the head of the Association of Religious Studies in Ukraine.

Kolodny said in his view Ukraine should develop a full church-state separation and that faith should be depoliticized. He said that some religious leaders and Kuchma's officials put pressure on religious communities during the 2004 presidential campaign, forcing them to support Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, Kuchma's handpicked successor.

The elimination of the committee leaves open the question of how church-state relations will operate in the future in Ukraine.

Josef Zissels, the leader of the Va'ad, Ukraine's oldest Jewish umbrella group, argued that given the country's lack of experience in building democratic institutions, it is essential to turn to other nations' experience in dealing with religious affairs.

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ Conservative rabbis are taking a hard look at the future of their movement this week in Houston, at the Rabbinical Assembly's 105th annual conference. Some 300 members of the movement's rabbinic arm are addressing the theme of "Reinventing Conservative Judaism: Defining Our Mission for the 21st Century." The conference, which began Sunday and runs through Thursday, follows a recent survey indicating that the movement's membership is dwindling. Rabbis will debate and vote on a dozen resolutions on issues from the crisis in Sudan to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to stem-cell research.

■ The New York/Jerusalem Dialogue Project kicks off a week of dialogue between the two cities. Part of the federation system's Partnership 2000 project that twinned the cities together, the week begins with a speech by David Harris, the executive director of the American Jewish Committee.

TUESDAY

■ Educators will convene at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City to discuss postwar life for Holocaust survivors and their liberators at the "Sixth Annual Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Conference for Educators." Teachers will learn about the experiences of survivors in the Displaced Persons camps as well as the experiences of Allied soldiers who liberated them from concentration camps. The conference will also examine the relationships that developed between those who served as soldiers and those who survived.

WEDNESDAY

■ Israeli Contemporary Art Week in New York begins with an exhibit at the Chelsea Art Museum. The events include a Sotheby's auction of Israeli art, dance performances, concerts and film screenings around New York City.

Ukrainian religious leaders disagree over how to build religious freedom.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Tough talk by Iran on nukes

Iran will never permanently cease enriching uranium, its chief nuclear negotiator said.

The statement by Hassan Rowhani came during a conference on nuclear technology in Tehran over the weekend.

Rowhani also warned that if the U.N. Security Council were to seek sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program, the stability of the region could be jeopardized.

Iran recently suspended uranium enrichment under European pressure, but that does not meet U.S. and Israeli demands that Iran dismantle any nuclear weapons programs it operates.

Race rumor dispelled

Israeli officials moved to dispel a false report that a right-wing rabbi had authorized settlers to fire on non-Jewish troops who come to evacuate them from their homes.

"There was never a ruling, so this is not an issue," Border Police chief Hussein Fares told reporters March 3, after Beduin and Druse servicemen expressed concern that they could be in danger.

The original report on Israeli television prompted a Bedouin cleric to put out a Muslim religious order allowing troops from his community to shoot back if fired upon.

In a solidarity move, Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar met with servicemen from Israeli minority communities, accompanied by top military brass.

Iraqi speaks up for Israel

An Iraqi politician whose sons were killed after he visited Israel said Iraq should establish relations with the Jewish state.

Mithal Al-Alusi told Wolf Blitzer on CNN's "Late Edition" on Sunday that there is no reason for a democratic Iraq not to have relations with Israel.

Alusi's two sons were killed in retribution after he visited Israel recently. His party, the Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, failed to win any seats in the Iraqi Parliament during Iraq's January elections.

Stage Club reopened

The Stage Club reopened in Tel Aviv, less than a week after a suicide bombing outside its doors killed five Israelis. The March 3 festivities included Israeli singers, with the event titled, "We will not stop singing."

Sharon eyes women's roles

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called for boosting the number of women in Israel's civil service.

Addressing his Cabinet on Sunday ahead of International Women's Day on Tuesday, Sharon noted that, under his government, 25 percent of the heads of government ministries are female.

"But this fact is not enough and we must reach the day when one-quarter of the directors general are men," he said.

A survey released by the Israeli women's group Na'amat found that 63 percent of the public want more women involved in diplomacy, with around half that number supporting the belief that Middle East peace would be achieved if women were in charge.

Israel honors Max Fisher

Ariel Sharon eulogized Max Fisher, a U.S. Jewish leader who died March 3.

"The State of Israel has lost a true friend, who was one of its greatest supporters," the prime minister told his Cabinet on Sunday,

referring to the former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors.

Sharon cited Fisher, who died at age 96, for his key role in encouraging Jewish immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

NORTH AMERICA

Skirball endows university

The Skirball Foundation established an endowment fund supporting the Center for Jewish Studies at the City University of New York.

The foundation donated \$1.5 million to start the Jack H. Skirball Fund for the Center for Jewish Studies, which is meant to help secure the center's financial stability and help it recruit a prestigious director.

Jack Skirball was a rabbi who became a motion-picture distributor and Academy Award-winning film producer.

eBaying for federation dollars

Tzedakah boxes designed by 10 New Jersey artists will be auctioned on eBay to raise funds for a local federation.

The Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey will launch a one-week auction of the tzedakah boxes beginning March 10.

While the project will raise money for federation programs, federation officials hope it will also raise awareness of those programs.

WORLD

Pope thanks Jews for support

Pope John Paul II thanked Jews and members of other faiths for their support during his hospitalization.

The 84-year-old pope, who is convalescing from a tracheotomy last month, waved to a crowd from his window in Rome's Gemelli hospital on Sunday.

An aide, meanwhile, read a message from him to the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for the weekly Sunday Angelus blessing.

In it, John Paul expressed a "special recognition" to "believers of other faiths, notably Jews and Muslims" for the solidarity they have shown him during his illness.

Papon can't wear medal

A French court rejected an appeal last week by Maurice Papon, who was fined for wearing a prestigious French service award.

Papon was stripped of his decorations after he was convicted of Nazi-era crimes.

Now 94, Papon was sentenced in 1998 to 10 years for his role in the deportation of some 1,500 Jews from southwest France to Nazi death camps in 1942, when he was a Vichy France official.

In 2002, he was released from prison on medical grounds.

London mayor: Sharon a 'war criminal'

London's mayor called Ariel Sharon a "war criminal." Mayor Ken Livingstone has been under fire for several weeks since he compared a Jewish reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

Writing Thursday in Britain's Guardian newspaper, Livingstone said Israel was engaged in "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians and said the Israeli prime minister should be imprisoned.

Livingstone denied accusations that he is anti-Semitic, but added that the Israeli government has overdramatized anti-Semitic incidents in Europe to suggest that Jews face discrimination.

"The mayor is confused once again," said the Israeli ambassador to Britain, Zvi Heifetz. "Ethnic cleansing was perpetrated in the concentration camps, which he should know, being such an expert on them."