

IN THE NEWS

Israeli settlers clash with police

Israeli police scuffled with settlers holed up inside a disputed property in Hebron.

Paramilitary police on Sunday broke into a three-story home near the Avraham Avinu neighborhood of the West Bank city to enforce a High Court eviction order against two settler families inside.

The settlers, who moved in last month, say they bought the property from its Palestinian owners.

Palestinians dispute this claim.

Before the eviction was completed, settlers and police scuffled near the building.

Seventeen policemen and soldiers were injured and 19 settlers arrested.

Ehud Olmert to address Congress

Ehud Olmert will address both houses of the U.S. Congress.

The rare joint session, scheduled for May 24, will cap Olmert's first visit to the United States as Israeli prime minister. He will also meet with President Bush.

Olmert is seeking U.S. backing for his plans to unilaterally withdraw from portions of the West Bank.

Buffett invests in Israeli company

American tycoon Warren Buffett invested \$4 billion in an Israeli manufacturing firm.

In what Israeli media hailed as the "deal of the decade," Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway corporation over the weekend bought an 80 percent interest in Iscar, an international metal-works consortium based in Tefen, Israel.

The purchase propelled the Wertheimer family, which founded Iscar, to the top of the list of Israel's richest people.

It was also a tax windfall for the new government of Ehud Olmert. **[Story, Pg. 3]**

WORLD REPORT

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Could Masada fall again? Scientists try to assure stability

By SUE FISHKOFF

MASADA, Israel (JTA) — Masada is one of the most renowned symbols of Jewish endurance.

Rising 750 feet above the Dead Sea valley, the site of a mass suicide of Jewish zealots in 73 C.E., it is, next to Jerusalem, Israel's most popular tourist site. Elite units of the Israel Defense Forces hold special ceremonies atop its heights, pledging, "Masada shall not fall again."

But it might.

Not today, not tomorrow, but one day, as seismic tremors, climatic change and, inevitably, gravity continue to threaten the stability of the historic ruins and the mountain that supports them.

Engineering professors from Beer-sheba's Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the University of California at Berkeley have teamed up to make sure that doesn't happen.

Using state-of-the-art monitoring devices and advanced computer modeling techniques, and armed with a four-year grant from the United States-Israel Binational Science Foundation, Beersheba's Yossi Hatzor and Berkeley's Steven Glaser are breaking new ground in geological engineering.

Masada is their test case.

"Masada has been degrading for 2,000 years," says Hatzor, head of BGU's Rock Mechanics Laboratory and founder of the geological engineering team working on the problem.

"There's no imminent danger," he adds. "Nothing is collapsing. We're talking about long-term preservation of a World Heritage site."

The imposing, reddish-gold mountain sits directly on the Syrian-African Rift, an active fault line. Since Herod the Great built his luxury palace on the mountain's northern face more than two millennia ago, at least five major earthquakes have hit, causing rock slides and some damage to the man-made structures. Harsh desert weather continues to impose its own disintegrative effect.

"The terraces of the palace were much larger than what they are today," Hatzor says. "There have been failures and erosions since Herod built it. We can see deterioration of the stones due to rain even in the time period we have been involved in preservation efforts on the mountain."

Masada is not one solid rock. It is composed of horizontal layers of sedimentary rock, and is fractured by vertical cracks or "joints" formed

by tectonic stresses in the earth's crust. These horizontal and vertical joints give the mountain its particular wall-like appearance of huge irregular bricks piled one on top of the other. They also make it vulnerable to seismic tremors.

Work began in 1998, when Israel's National Parks Service began construction of a new cable car to ferry greater numbers of visitors up Masada. They called in Hatzor to evaluate the mountain's stability, something that had never been done before.

Hatzor and his team studied the Snake Path cliff on the mountain's eastern side, which connects the cable car station to an adjoining bridge, and found several large rocks precariously poised. Using a three-dimensional stability analysis, the team determined that some blocks of rock in the cliff face might dislodge

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SCIENCE
&
TECHNOLOGY

■ Masada will not fall again — if two scientists have anything to say about it

Continued from page 1

even in a relatively small tremor.

Hatzor recommended "cable bolting," an engineering technique he'd studied a decade earlier as a doctoral student at Berkeley. He suggested inserting 60-foot-long steel cables through individual blocks and into the solid rock, so the rock's own weight pushing against the cables would act as a stabilizing force.

Stepping off the cable car one morning last month, Hatzor points to an enormous yellow block of rock that hovers menacingly over the walkway visitors traverse on their way to the ruins.

Following his instructions, 30 anchors were inserted into the rock block before the new cable car was built.

Though the enormous block still seems to be hanging in mid-air, Hatzor says it is now perfectly safe. Rock-colored covers hide the end of the anchors from view, preserving the aesthetics.

Hatzor's monitoring system also showed, for the first time, the effects of climatic change on rock movement.

"Why does a block decide to move?" Glaser asks. "Yossi's preliminary monitoring suggested that perhaps it's due to very small changes in temperature, to expansion and contraction of rock over time."

The findings caused quite a buzz in international geological circles.

After the cable car project, Hatzor's team was asked to study the stability of Herod's palace on the northern side of the mountain.

They conducted a computer simulation

using dynamic Discontinuous Deformation Analysis, a new numerical method, also developed at UC-Berkeley, for measuring the risk of rock movement. Using data from a 7.1 quake in the northern Sinai in 1995, Hatzor's simulation found that a similar tremor at Masada could cause shards of rock to come crashing down the cliff.

"To ensure lasting preservation of this historic gem, the north face should be reinforced," he says, a project he estimates would require several million dollars.

Eitan Campbell, director of Masada National Park, wants to make sure that happens, even though there is no budget for it yet.

Campbell has worked at Masada for more than 30 years, starting as a teenager hauling bags of cement for archeologist Yigal Yadin, who initially excavated the site in the mid-1960s.

Two years of heavy winter rains have caused significant damage to the 2,000-year-old structures, Campbell says.

"The whole top of the mountain was one big pool of water, I've never seen anything like it. A couple of the walls collapsed," he says.

In mid-August, Glaser expects to arrive from Berkeley with his new monitoring system.

He and Hatzor will set up seismic monitoring stations at the visitors center at the base of the mountain and at the watchtower on top.

Gauges will be installed to measure the effects of temperature, humidity, barometric pressure and tidal pull on the mouths of cracks, "to measure how the crack opens and closes and whether there's any horizontal movement," Glaser explains.

In addition, the scientists will compare movement at the mountain's base to movement at its top, examining, for example, how the rock responds to tidal changes at different times of the day.

The system has not been tried anywhere else.

"This will be its field test," Glaser says.

Masada was chosen, he says, because of its historical and archaeological importance, and because Israeli interest guaranteed easy and uninterrupted access to the site.

"It's more enjoyable to work on something with historic importance instead of a strip mall," he remarks.

Restoration of the palace is already under way, thanks to an Israeli government grant of \$2.2 million.

Campbell has had all the Roman frescoes from the lower part of the palace, the part most susceptible to wind and rain, removed.

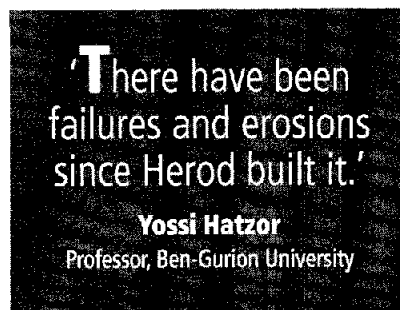
They are being restored, and Campbell plans to mount replicas in their place while displaying the originals in a special museum.

Visitor safety, however, is his immediate concern.

Tourism slowed down considerably after the Palestinian intifada began in 2000, but has now picked up. Half a million visitors came in 2005, and even more are expected this year.

"Restoration should be a yearly budgeted item," Campbell urges. "Masada is subject to the elements. It needs constant attention.

He added: "It's our job to pass it on for generations to come."



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Israeli arrested for terrorist concerns

NEW YORK (JTA) — An Israeli was among five people briefly detained at a U.S. airport on suspicion they might be planning a terrorist attack.

The Israeli and four Angolans were arrested at New Jersey's Newark International Airport on Saturday after passengers and crew members on a flight from

Dallas said they were acting suspiciously and reading flight manuals.

The men were reportedly speaking Portuguese, Angola's official language. Air marshals and an agent from the Drug Enforcement Administration were on the flight and watched over the men while the plane was in the air.

THIS WEEK**MONDAY**

■ Former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner, a likely Democratic candidate in the 2008 presidential race, returns from a fact-finding mission to Israel and Jordan.

■ Israeli Fulbright scholars, past and present, gather in Tel Aviv to celebrate the organization's 50th anniversary. Some 1,400 Israelis have graduated from the program, including Aharon Barak, president of the Supreme Court; Nobel Prize recipient Aaron Ciechanover; and author A.B. Yehoshua.

■ The Conference of European Rabbis holds its 50th anniversary conference through Wednesday in London. The theme of the conference is "Medicine — Ethics and Halacha."

TUESDAY

■ The "Quartet" of bodies guiding the Middle East peace process meet in New York to consider how to funnel relief to the Palestinians while bypassing the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

■ Legislation initiated by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) that would cut off assistance to the Palestinian Authority and severely restrict assistance administered to Palestinians through nongovernmental organizations is scheduled to come to the floor of the U.S. House of representatives for a vote.

■ The San Diego City Council votes on whether the San Diego Hillel may buy or lease almost an acre of city-owned property at a busy intersection. Neighbors near the site say the student facility would bring noise and traffic to the neighborhood.

■ The U.S. Helsinki Commission holds hearings in Washington on anti-Semitism and Holocaust education programs for European police, conducted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

WEDNESDAY

■ The 10th meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Jewish institutions and community leaders runs through May 14, organized by AMIA, Argentina's Jewish central institution and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

■ The Orthodox Union holds its annual lay and rabbinic leadership conference in Washington through Thursday.

THURSDAY

■ Young Jews from the Balkans and Black Sea region of the former Soviet Union gather in Cyrenecka, Greece, for a three-day retreat, part of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's Balkan-Black Sea Geshet program.

FRIDAY

■ The Washington Institute for Near East Policy holds its annual Soref Symposium in Washington, this year focusing on the challenges of Hamas and Iran.

U.S. investor buys into Israel

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — It's not every day that a private investor gets to influence the course of a country's economy.

But that's just what American tycoon Warren Buffett might have done by buying an 80 percent share in Israeli metalworks conglomerate Iscar over the weekend for a record \$4 billion.

Israeli media described it as the "deal of the decade." Given the windfall for the new government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, one newspaper suggested income tax could even be lowered in the future.

"This is major news and a great present for the State of Israel," Olmert said.

"This is not just another deal worth billions.

Here we have the world's greatest investor — not a Jew, nor a Zionist — who is making a vote of confidence in the State of Israel's economy."

In another show of strength, the Cabinet approved Israel's 2006 state budget. The \$64 billion package, which must now pass three Knesset votes, had been held up by infighting under the previous Sharon government.

News of the Buffett buy came as the world's second-richest man made a rare appearance at an Omaha meeting of his company, Berkshire Hathaway.

Buffett is considered a prudent investor who seeks companies with the idea of realizing their growth potential, rather than stripping and reselling them. Iscar's president and chairman, Eitan Wertheimer, said this approach was key to closing the deal.

"We studied his practices with other companies," Wertheimer told Israel's Army Radio.

"He bought and did not sell. He did not

interfere with everyone who wanted to work.

He did not go public with a company that was not already being traded. And he respected people who knew what they were doing."

Wertheimer, who maintains a 20 percent stake in Iscar, described the sale as a world-first for Buffett.

"This is the first time that Warren Buffett has bought a company whose headquarters is not in America," he

said.

And there may be more of the same. Ma'ariv quoted Buffett, who has yet to visit the Jewish state, as saying: "I plan further acquisitions of Israeli companies in the future.

I believe in the Israeli market and the Israeli economy and I think now is a good time to invest here."

Iscar was founded in 1952 by immigrant Stef Wertheimer as a modest metalworks shop in Nahariya.

It now competes for major defense contracts and boasts facilities in the United States, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Italy, Japan and Korea.

The Buffett buy propelled the already-wealthy Wertheimer family to the top of the list of Israel's richest.

With recent public-sector cuts still being felt among Israel's poor, newspaper reports noted that the proceeds of the sale could, in theory, be used to boost welfare benefits or expand the basket of medicines covered by national insurance.

Wertheimer said he hopes the estimated \$1 billion in taxes he will pay will be used to such ends.

His family is also expected to expand its investment in underprivileged areas of Israel such as the Galilee.

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

Nun who fought anti-Semitism dies

NEW YORK (JTA) — Sister Rose Thering, a nun who campaigned against anti-Semitism in the Catholic Church, died Saturday at 85.

Thering examined how Catholic educational materials contained anti-Semitic passages for her doctoral dissertation, which she completed in 1957.

The Vatican used her work when it issued its landmark 1965 declaration that absolved Jews of collective responsibility for the death of Jesus. She was the subject of a 2005 film, "Sister Rose's Passion," that was nominated for an Academy Award in the short documentary category.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Five killed in airstrike

An Israeli airstrike in the Gaza Strip killed at least five Palestinian militants last Friday. Palestinian officials said the dead men were training at a base used by the Popular Resistance Committees, a terrorist group responsible for numerous Kassam rocket attacks against Israel, Ha'aretz reported.

The Israeli army confirmed it had targeted the group, saying members were training for attacks against Israel.

The strike was the first operation approved by Defense Minister Amir Peretz.

Ex-spy to become Israel security adviser

A former Mossad deputy chief was named Israel's next national security adviser.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office announced Saturday that Ilan Mizrahi, who retired from the Mossad intelligence agency in 2002, will take over the National Security Council next month.

He will replace the current national security adviser, Giora Eiland.

An Iran expert, Mizrahi is expected to try to boost the NSC's influence in strategic decision making and unite Israel's various security agencies.

NORTH AMERICA

Bush serious on Iran threat

Iran's threats against Israel must be taken seriously, President Bush said.

"When he says that he wants to destroy Israel, the world needs to take it seriously," Bush said in an interview with the German weekly Bild am Sonntag, referring to recent comments by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"This is a serious threat, aimed at an ally of the United States and Germany. What Ahmadinejad also means is that if he is ready to destroy one country, then he would also be ready to destroy others. This is a threat that needs to be dealt with."

Though the United States, like Israel, has refused to rule out military action as a last resort for curbing Iran's nuclear program, Bush said he prefers to see the U.N. Security Council approve sanctions instead.

Bush: NATO troops needed in Darfur

President Bush told a Jewish audience that the international community must augment African Union forces in Darfur with U.N. and NATO troops.

"We must understand that the rape and the murder and the suffering must be stopped, and that's why I believe strongly that we must augment A.U. forces with a blue-helmeted U.N. force, with a NATO overlay, so that we can send a clear message to the leaders of Sudan," Bush said at the American Jewish Committee's 100th anniversary celebrations.

"We will not tolerate the genocide taking place in that country." Bush previously had said that he was considering such a course of action, but the May 4 commitment was his strongest to date. Jewish groups have led the campaign to end the killing in Darfur, and Bush's pledge won him his biggest cheer of the night.

Bush made his comments before a cease-fire in Sudan was announced last Friday.

U.S. rejects Europe's P.A. aid proposal

Washington nixed a European Commission proposal to transfer funds to the Palestinian Authority through President Mahmoud Ab-

bas. Such a move would bypass the Hamas-led P.A. Cabinet, but the United States believes withholding funds will encourage Palestinians to rebel against Hamas, Ha'aretz reported, citing an unnamed Western diplomat.

According to the diplomat, the United States blocked similar proposals by Britain, France and the Arab League, but is supporting Force 17, a P.A. security force under Abbas' aegis, Ha'aretz reported.

Albright: Lobby paper 'highly overstated'

A paper alleging that a powerful pro-Israel lobby controls U.S. Middle East policy is "highly overstated," Madeleine Albright said.

The former U.S. secretary of state is launching a new book about U.S. failures in Middle East policy.

Appearing at a Council of Foreign Relations event in New York City last week, Albright was asked about the paper written by two academics, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard University.

"It's very easy to get on this tack all of a sudden that it's some kind of an overly powerful Jewish lobby.

There are other lobbies that are very strong, and Washington is full of lobbyists."

Jewish bikers visit Holocaust paper clip project

Jewish motorcyclists visited the Tennessee school where students collected millions of paper clips to commemorate the Holocaust.

Some 400 members of the Jewish Motorcyclists Alliance visited the Whitwell Middle School last Friday.

The bikers viewed the display of paper clips, which is housed inside a German railroad car used to transport Jews to concentration camps during World War II.

WORLD

Sweden offers Hamas visa

Sweden broke with E.U. policy by granting a visa to a Palestinian Authority Cabinet minister from Hamas.

Minister for Refugees Atef Adwan was given a visa to attend a weekend conference in Sweden, the first time an E.U. member state has allowed entry to a member of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority since the terrorist group took power in March.

Israeli officials were infuriated.

France and Belgium had refused visa applications from other Hamas officials after E.U. leaders decided last month that there would be no dialogue with Hamas until it recognizes Israel and gives up terrorism.

The Swedish visa will allow Adwan to travel freely in 15 European countries, and comes shortly after Sweden refused to take part in an international military exercise because Israel was participating.

Annan wants full U.N. membership for Israel

Kofi Annan said he wants to see Israel's unqualified membership in the United Nations.

Addressing the American Jewish Committee's 100th anniversary dinner on May 4, the U.N. secretary-general noted Israel's recent membership in the Western Europeans and Others Group, which granted Israel access to certain U.N. bodies that previously had been closed to it because of Muslim opposition.

"I hope that within my lifetime, just as in this country, where Jews are accepted without question as full citizens by all their fellow citizens, so Israel will be accepted without question as a member by the whole family of nations," Annan said to applause.