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Israeli PM criticized for installing bed on plane



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will seek alternate sleeping arrangements when traveling after receiving a sky-high bill for installing a customized bed on a recent flight to London, officials close to the Israeli leader said. Netanyahu found himself facing a public uproar on Sunday after Channel 10 TV reported over the weekend that he had spent \$127,000 in public funds on a special sleeping cabin for the five-hour flight to attend Margaret Thatcher's funeral last month. Netanyahu's office initially defended the decision, saying the prime minister had a busy schedule ahead of the flight and needed to be fresh for important meetings in Britain. But following public criticism, officials close to Netanyahu said late Saturday that he had been unaware of the cost, and once informed, he ordered the bed be canceled on all future flights. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media. The uproar comes at a delicate time. Netanyahu's government is in the process of drawing up a budget expected to include painful austerity measures and tax increases due to a widening deficit. On Saturday night, several thousand people took to the streets in Tel Aviv and other cities to protest the expected budget cuts. Netanyahu was meeting Sunday with top officials to discuss likely cutbacks in the defense budget. Micky Rosenthal of the opposition Labor Party called for an inquiry into the prime minister's "scandalous behavior" according to the Maariv daily on Sunday. "We thought that nothing could surprise us anymore when it came to the Netanyahus' personal behavior. Well, we thought wrong," wrote Sima Kadmon, a political commentator in the Yediot Ahronot daily. "It is unbelievable that not a single person in the prime minister's inner circle saw how reprehensible this was. Not a single person showed a tiny bit of common sense. There was no one who anticipated just how angry people would be when they learned about this," Kadmon said about the custom-made bed. Earlier this year, Netanyahu stopped buying ice cream from his favorite Jerusalem parlor after an Israeli newspaper discovered his office was spending \$2,700 a year for the frozen treat.