

“ I am convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that the four conspired together to commit municipal corruption. ”

— Judge Jean-Pierre Bonin, convicting contractors José Sardano and Luis Vitorino of planning to pay kickbacks to city councillors

## FAST TRACK

### Alliance ex-chief cleared of assault

Brent Tyler, a high-profile Montreal lawyer and past-president of Alliance Quebec, has been cleared of assaulting two young political opponents two years ago. Crown prosecutor Francis Paradis yesterday withdrew the charges before Municipal Court Judge Jean-Pierre Bessette. “We weren’t surprised,” defence lawyer Daniel Lighter said. “The evidence was weak.” Lighter suggested Paradis realized “the political motivation behind the trial.” The incident took place during an April 2002 meeting of Alliance Quebec, where the head of the English rights group’s youth wing and his brother claim they were assaulted by Tyler.

### MDs file lawsuit for \$3.2 million

Two Montreal-area physicians who allege the Jean Coutu pharmacy chain regularly offers doctors “kickbacks” that violate the profession’s code of ethics filed a lawsuit yesterday claiming \$3.2-million in dam-

## Mystery man dodges assault charge in nasty divorce

### Ari Ben-Menashe suggests he was framed to block his appearance in treason trial

ALLISON HANES  
GAZETTE JUSTICE REPORTER

Ari Ben-Menashe’s detractors have accused him of framing Zimbabwe’s popular opposition leader with a plot to assassinate the African country’s dictator and seize power in a coup.

But Montreal’s most controversial international political consultant suggests police here set him up to take a fall when his divorce from a Westmount socialite got nasty in 2002.

While Movement for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai still awaits a potentially life-threatening verdict at his treason trial in Harare, Ben-Menashe, 51, dodged a legal bullet yesterday in Montreal.

The former Israeli military intelligence agent was acquitted of assaulting his wife and mother-in-law in 2002, provided he sign an undertaking to keep the peace and stay away from them.

A charge that he tried to buy his wife off in their divorce bat-

tle was also dropped.

Defence lawyer Eric Sutton was about to ask the court yesterday to stay the assault charge on the ground a Montreal police officer tried to influence a judge to side against Ben-Menashe in the custody dispute with his ex.

But then Sutton said his client got an offer he couldn’t refuse.

Montreal’s international man of mystery believes the charges were an effort to shut him up.

“I have a feeling – it’s just a feeling – there was an attempt to stop me from going to testify in Zimbabwe,” said Ben-Menashe. “Everyone turned on me. It was a very, very strange incident.”

Ben-Menashe was the star witness at Tsvangirai’s treason trial.

It is believed his shadowy Montreal firm, Dickens & Madison, was paid more than \$1 million by the Zimbabwean government to catch Tsvangirai on videotape hatching a coup plot to remove dictator Robert Mugabe.

Ben-Menashe said the charges against him were raised when he took the stand in Harare. “That was the only thing they could use to try to discredit me.”

Ben-Menashe’s brush with the law began when he reported his estranged wife had abducted their then 5-year-old daughter.

They were located in New

York state and brought back to Quebec. The woman was never charged. Instead she complained her husband had assaulted her and her mother months earlier.

The claim of police interference arose from a phone discussion between the officer who arrested Ben-Menashe’s wife and the judge holding custody hearings. When the officer tried to explain some aspect of the situation, Judge Marie St-Pierre cut the officer off:

“I don’t want to hear anything... I’m not authorized to listen to anything you have to say.”

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C. diff |  
Six-month  
delay  
questioned

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Dominique Breton, an official with the department, disputed the paper’s report, saying her