

LATEST TERRORIST ATTACK IGNITES ANGER AND RAGE AGAINST GOVERNMENT

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- A political firestorm has erupted here in the wake of this week's bus attack in Tel Aviv, with the opposition blasting the government for not cracking down enough on the Palestinians.

Amid a mood of anger and frustration at the third terrorist attack to strike Israel in 10 days, four opposition Knesset factions submitted no-confidence motions in the government.

Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu warned that if Rabin did not crack down on the Palestinians, he will be "personally responsible for a wave of disasters that will follow."

The bomb exploded about 9 a.m. local time Wednesday, shattering a Dan bus traveling north along Dizengoff Street in the heart of Tel Aviv's shopping district. The bomb also ripped apart a second bus traveling in the other direction.

According to initial police reports, the explosion killed at least 22 people and left over 40 wounded, some seriously. Witnesses reported finding body parts strewn across the streets of Israel's largest city.

Hamas, the Islamic fundamentalist movement opposed to peace with Israel, claimed responsibility for the latest attack, as it had the two earlier ones.

On Oct. 9, two Hamas members opened fire on a pedestrian mall in Jerusalem, killing two and injuring 13 others.

Outrage Against 'Conscience Of The World'

That same day, Hamas operatives kidnapped Israeli soldier Nachshon Waxman, who died along with his captors and Nir Poraz, an Israeli commando, last Friday, when Israeli soldiers attempted his rescue.

Claiming responsibility for Wednesday's attack, an anonymous caller to Israel Radio said the bombing was in reprisal for the killing of Waxman's captors during last Friday's rescue attempt.

Israeli authorities said they believed Wednesday's attack was the work of a suicide bomber who boarded the bus with more than 100 pounds of explosives. It was unclear whether the terrorist had the bombs strapped to his body or whether the explosives were carried aboard in a bag.

Police kept back bystanders and brought in bomb experts after a suspected second bomb was found at the site. According to Tel Aviv Mayor Ronnie Milo, police delayed removing bodies from the charred, twisted metal of the bus because they thought the body of the terrorist was booby-trapped.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin cut short a trip to the United Kingdom upon learning of the attack. Rabin, who first heard about the attack during an interview on a local radio station in London, blamed Islamic radicals for trying to destroy the peace process.

"It is the continuation of the attempt by those who are the enemies of peace, the extreme

Islamic terror groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad," he said.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres vowed that Israel "will not hesitate to find those responsible for this terrible action and to prevent them in the future."

In Washington, President Clinton termed the Tel Aviv attack an "outrage against the conscience of the world."

The terrorist "violence is aimed at destroying the hopes of the Palestinian people as surely as it is directed at the people of Israel. They must not be allowed to succeed," said Clinton.

In the wake of the bombing, the army sealed off the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Authorities had re-opened Gaza on Monday, after closing it in the wake of Waxman's kidnapping.

The attack came as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were meeting in Cairo to discuss expanding autonomy in the West Bank. Israel has maintained that the Palestinian Authority has done too little to rein in extremist Islamic groups.

Peres said Wednesday that it was "too early" to say if Israel would move ahead with the peace talks.

Calls From Knesset To Suspend Peace Talks

In a statement from Gaza, Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat condemned the bombing and extended condolences to the victims of the attack.

"Pushing forward with the peace process and implementing the rest of the agreement is the only way to respond to the enemies of peace who are getting their support, their training and financing from well-known outside parties," he said.

Arafat apparently was alluding to Iran's fundamentalist regime, a known sponsor of Islamic groups that militantly oppose the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

But Arafat's statement did not mollify the opposition.

As news of the attack spread, a storm broke out in the Knesset, with opposition members shouting at Peres, "The government is murdering the people of Israel."

Netanyahu called on the government to permanently close the Gaza Strip.

"It is clear Yasser Arafat is not lifting a finger against the Hamas," he said.

Ariel Sharon, a Likud member of Knesset and former defense minister, called for the immediate formation of an emergency national unity government.

Calling on the government to suspend peace talks with the PLO until Arafat reins in militant Palestinians, Sharon also said the government should grant the Israeli army authority in the territories and close the PLO's offices in eastern Jerusalem.

Tsomet Knesset member Rafael Eitan attacked the accord with the PLO.

"Not two days ago I stood on this podium, and said, 'How long will it be until a car bomb goes off in the heart of Tel Aviv?' Whoever was

responsible for opening the borders to Gaza could not have expected any other result," Eitan said.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal, who cut short a trip to the United States, described the bombing as one of the worst acts of terror ever experienced in Israel. He warned that Israel would "escalate the struggle against terrorists."

Wednesday's bus attack exploded the euphoria felt nationwide following Monday's signing of a draft peace treaty between Israel and Jordan.

Fayez Tarawneh, head of the Jordanian team negotiating peace with Israel, also condemned the attack. "This is too much," he said. "The whole idea of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan is to ensure security and peace for the two nations and their peoples."

President Ezer Weizman, who visited the wounded in Tel Aviv's Ichilov Hospital, appealed for calm. "We must continue with the peace process," he said. "I appeal to the citizens of Israel to take a deep breath."

Meanwhile, in a separate incident in Jerusalem on Wednesday, an Israeli soldier was stabbed and lightly wounded by a Palestinian. The suspect was apprehended by police.

JEWISH ACTIVISTS TAKE TO THE STREETS IN WAKE OF THE LATEST TERRORIST ATTACK

By Ilana Wernick

NEW YORK, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- With the Iranian Mission to the United Nations as a backdrop, government officials and Jewish leaders took to the podium Wednesday afternoon to express their sadness, anger and resolve to take action in the wake of the latest terrorist act by the militant Islamic group Hamas.

The rally, which drew an estimated 150 people, came just hours after the news of a bomb attack on a bus in Tel Aviv. The explosion resulted in at least 22 dead and more than 40 injured.

"There's a cumulative effect on the Jewish community," said Michael Miller, executive director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council, which jointly sponsored the rally with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"Our cup ran over," he said, referring to the latest of three terrorist attacks against Israelis in less than two weeks. "We felt an immediate need to come to the streets."

Speakers told the crowd at the half-hour rally that mourning the losses -- both of the bombing and of other recent Hamas terrorism -- was not enough.

"I am filled, as I know many of you are, with a feeling of sadness, a feeling of outrage, a feeling of anger and, most of all, a feeling of almost helplessness," U.S. Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said, often bringing his fist down on the podium for emphasis.

"But we must realize that we are not helpless. We must demand action. Not simply words, but action," the congressman said.

That action, according to Schumer and other speakers, should involve a worldwide isolation of Iran, which many believe is responsible for the funding and training of Hamas.

Israeli officials in New York and Washington also pointed to Iran.

At a news briefing in Washington, Israeli

Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich called for a "concerted international effort against this kind of terror."

He said the world should apply "pressure on Iran," and that concern should "be translated from general ideas into action."

At the State Department, meanwhile, officials also targeted Syria, saying it has the "power and influence" to stop the latest spate of violence.

U.S., Syrian Officials Confer

The U.S. ambassador in Damascus, Christopher Ross, met with Syrian Foreign Ministry officials in the hours after the bus attack to express U.S. condemnation of terror, and to reassure the Syrians of the U.S. commitment to the peace process, according to an official.

In high level contacts between the United States and Syria, officials have asked for any information or assistance that Damascus can provide to stop Hamas terrorism.

"Not only the United States, but the world community must rise up at this point and make clear that this type of incident cannot be tolerated and that everything should be exhausted in pursuing an antidote to this type of violence," a State Department spokesman said.

At the rally in New York, fingers also pointed at Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

"Israel has to strike where Hamas can be found. Arafat has to be part of that effort as a test of his legitimacy," said Alan Hevesi, New York City Comptroller.

Schumer questioned why Hamas headquarters was still allowed to operate in the Gaza Strip, territory controlled by Arafat.

Others applied pressure on the U.S. government to crack down on Hamas.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents, said that under a provision in the recently passed crime bill, those who knowingly provide material support for Hamas or other terrorist groups can face up to 10 years in jail.

"It is time for the United States government to act against those who provide support for Hamas," Hoenlein said. He cited the Islamic Association for Palestine, located in Texas, as such a group.

He also urged the U.S. government to stringently limit travel to the United States by Hamas representatives.

Hamas and other groups recruit and raise funds in the United States, Hoenlein added.

The rally included speeches by Mark Green, New York City public advocate, and Judah Gribetz, president of the New York JCRC, who read prepared statements from Sens. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.). Both senators expressed support for Israel and outrage toward Hamas.

Amid the speeches, there were words of prayer and a moment of silence.

Most of all, there was sadness.

"It's enough," said Esther Kustanowitz, assistant program coordinator for the Hebrew program at Hadassah. "Three incidents in one week. It's just absurd."

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

LUBAVITCHER REBBE AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- The late Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, has been awarded the Congressional Gold medal, joining the ranks of fewer than 100 other Americans.

Both the House and Senate last week unanimously agreed to bestow the honor.

The award "reflects further the long-held appreciation of this august institution of the message of the rebbe and his contribution to the educational, moral and social fabric of our society," Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, national director of American Friends of Lubavitch, said in a statement.

Some 230 members of Congress co-sponsored the bill that made the award.

Forty years of "contributions to the cause of peace and understanding," Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), a sponsor of the bill, said in a statement, "have defined the grand rebbe."

The bill's sponsors came from all areas of the House, said Rabbi Levi Shemtov, director of Friends of Lubavitch in Washington. The entire New York delegation, members of the Black Caucus, the Hispanic Caucus and leadership from both the Republican and Democratic parties signed on, he said.

"The fact that such a broad range of members came together to sponsor this resolution is a clear indication that the rebbe has made a lasting, positive impact, not only on all segments of the Jewish community, but even far beyond the Jewish community," Washington's Shemtov said.

The gold medal and 10,000 bronze replicas should be finished by spring. Sales of the replicas will fund the cost of the gold medal.

Schneerson was the world leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement for more than 40 years. He died at the age of 92 last June.

RABBIS GATHER IN MOSCOW FOR HISTORIC CONFERENCE

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- About 80 rabbis from around the world gathered here last week for a historic conference aimed at charting the future of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union.

Outreach activities, education and kashrut were the main discussion topics at the Oct. 10-12 meeting, which brought together religious leaders from countries including Ukraine, Georgia, Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan as well as France, Germany, Italy, Venezuela and the United States.

It was the first rabbinical get-together of this size and scope in Russia since the start of perestroika in 1987, according to Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, chief rabbi of Moscow.

The conference combined meetings of the Standing Committee of the European Conference of Rabbis, which includes the chief rabbis of 15 European countries, with sessions of the Conference of Rabbis from the Former Soviet States.

The meetings were marked by cooperation among leaders of several competing Jewish religious organizations.

"The conference united all the rabbinic leaders, without exception. We were able to build

consensus and establish a common denominator for our work," said Goldschmidt.

On a practical level, members of the conference passed a number of resolutions to improve and expand kashering facilities in the former Soviet Union.

On an ideological level, a recurrent theme was the need to expand outreach. The rabbis agreed that the euphoria over the newfound religious freedom in the former Soviet states is waning. "As the country becomes more and more Westernized, the community will look more and more like Western communities," said Goldschmidt.

"We're dealing with a very assimilated community. As it becomes easier to get local money for the local community structure, and as Jews find it easier to lead a Jewish life, they have much less time and interest in experiencing Judaism and learning about Judaism," he said.

Some of the financial backing for the conference came from the Jewish Agency for Israel, which is supporting the activities of a number of rabbis in the former Soviet Union.

The involvement of the Jewish Agency signals an important shift, according to Goldschmidt. "There's been in the past a notion, mostly of Israeli organizations, that building the structures of community will hamper aliyah," he said.

These days, he noted, the understanding is just the opposite: that people associated with the Jewish community are more likely to go to Israel.

The conference took place at the Novotel hotel near Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport.

It was a major step forward for rabbis who formerly associated meetings in the former Soviet Union with lumpy beds, broken toilets and imported kosher food, Goldschmidt said.

With pride, he noted that all the kosher food for the conference was produced locally.

BUCHENWALD VANDALS SENTENCED

By Gil Sedan

BONN, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- A skinhead who led a group of youths in the July 23 desecration of the Buchenwald concentration camp was sentenced last week to 20 months in jail by a juvenile court in the eastern German city of Weimar.

Five other defendants in the case, all of whom were minors, were found guilty of disturbing the peace and received suspended sentences or monetary fines. Two of the eight defendants were acquitted.

On the night of July 23, a group of 22 skinheads broke into the site of the former Buchenwald concentration camp, chanting Nazi slogans such as "Heil Hitler" and "Sieg Heil" and smashing windows of former barrack sites at the camp. The group also threatened to set on fire a worker there who attempted to stop them.

All but one of the defendants denied the charges against them. One youth who confessed to having threatened to burn the camp worker had sent the worker a letter apologizing for the incident.

The vandalism at Buchenwald provoked protests from around the world as well as in Germany itself, where Chancellor Helmut Kohl called for severe punishments for the defendants.

Fourteen more skinheads are scheduled to come before the court to stand trial on similar charges

GROUP OF GERMAN JEWS SEEKS MORE LIBERAL FORM OF JUDAISM

By Miriam Widman

FRANKFURT, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- Fed up with what they say is a traditional, rigid and non-spiritual service offered by the mainstream Jewish community, a group of Frankfurt Jews has established an alternative congregation that offers services, discussions and the chance for both sexes to participate.

Some of the founding members of Kehilah Chadashah, or New Congregation, say they are also contemplating a separation from the Jewish community to form a communal organization of their own -- a move that was criticized by Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and a leading member of the Frankfurt community.

"When Germany had 600,000 Jews (before World War II), various communities were possible," Bubis said in a telephone interview. It was Germany that gave birth to Reform Judaism in the 19th century.

"I don't think this is possible with 43,000 Jews. It can't lead to anything good."

The members of Kehilah Chadashah currently see their group as an alternative, not a challenge to the traditional Jewish communal organization in Germany. But given their desire to move toward liberal-style services such as are found in the United States, some of the members feel a break from the community could well come soon.

More Egalitarian Approach Sought

Members of the new congregation complain that traditional German services are too formal and are often difficult to follow. They also seek a more egalitarian service than is offered in German synagogues, where men and women sit separately and where women rarely get the chance to participate in the service.

"Snobbishness is another factor," said Steve Riegelhaupt, a 41-year-old computer expert from Long Island who has lived in Germany for 12 years. Formerly a member of the North Shore Jewish Center in Sautucket, N.Y., he currently lives in nearby Wiesbaden and is also a member of the traditional community there.

He noted that there are Jews who feel alienated from the existing religious offerings and are looking for an alternative.

"My concern is that Jewish life in Germany is very rigid," he said.

But while Bubis said he personally has a certain sympathy for a liberal service, the establishment of a U.S.-style system is out of the question for the German Jewish community, which has its own organizational mode.

Jews in Germany who want to belong to a synagogue do not join a temple. Instead, they must register with the community, prove they are Jewish and then pay annual fees, a so-called church tax, in line with their incomes.

With the collected funds, the community administers all aspects of Jewish life, paying rabbis and teachers and running community centers. Elections in cities where there are communities take place to determine who will run the boards and the Central Council for Jews in Germany, the top supervisory board of German Jewry.

To date, most members of Kehilah Chadashah

are also members of the traditional community. They pay an additional fee of about \$60 a year to their own group, since it receives no tax monies from the central administration.

"The mainstream community has an uncomfortable neutrality toward us," said Riegelhaupt.

Susanna Keval, a Frankfurt scholar and feminist, predicted that the new group might lead eventually to the breakup of Germany's unified communal structure and to the establishment of American-style Judaism here.

Of the some 50 initial members of Kehilah Chadashah, many had regularly attended Jewish services at the U.S. Army base at the Abrams Building in downtown Frankfurt.

But now, with the soldiers going home, services there are closing down and are expected to cease next year. This has left many with no alternative but the traditional German services.

Both Bubis and Michael Friedman, spokesman for the Jewish community and a member of the central council's presidium, said they had no problem in principle with the establishment of Kehilah Chadashah.

But both said the new group had no chance of receiving any community funds.

"Whoever wants to leave can leave, but we don't have anything to share," Bubis said.

Friedman said the group had existed in some form for several years and had tried to get on the board of Frankfurt's Jewish Community, but failed.

He said if progressive and reform-minded Jews got on the board and wanted to change things, he would respect that, but first they have to get the votes.

So far members of the new group conduct their own services, but they are in discussion with several rabbis for their advice and for their possible attendance at services.

This past spring, when the new congregation first started, they met in the homes of various members. But they have now obtained a location near the Frankfurt railway station in a women's school, where they hold services every other Friday.

FLYING UNFRIENDLY SKIES OVER LEBANON
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- Buzzards have found that flying low over Lebanon on their annual migration between Europe and Africa can be hazardous to their health.

They have yet to learn from other migratory species to fly high, beyond gunshot range, dropping lower only when they enter Israeli air space.

According to Israel's Nature Reserve Authority, 10 wounded honey buzzards were brought to the Hula Nature reserve in northern Israel for treatment recently. Five died of their gunshot wounds, and the rest have been transferred to the Ramat Gan Safari park, game officials said. None are likely to be able to fly again.

According to Yossi Va'adia, director of the Hula Reserve, the Lebanese shoot at the birds migrating from Europe to winter homes in Africa.

A number of birds, like pelicans and storks, have learned to fly higher over Lebanon and only drop their height when they reach Israel, apparently realizing they are entering an area with a nature reserve protection policy, he said.