



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ A federal jury in New York found blind Egyptian cleric Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman and nine other defendants guilty of seditious conspiracy for their plan to blow up the United Nations and other N.Y. landmarks. The sheik faces life in prison, while most of the other defendants may be sentenced up to 20 years in prison.

■ Four Israeli civil administration facilities in the West Bank are slated to be evacuated in the coming days, according to Israel Defense Force sources. The move represents a first step toward implementing the Interim Agreement signed last week in Washington.

■ FBI agents were expected to help investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of Palestinian American Azzam Muslih, 52, who was arrested by Palestinian security forces last week. Family members said Muslih's body was returned 36 hours after the arrest, with signs that he had been severely beaten.

■ The flight attendant who hijacked an Iranian passenger plane to Israel officially asked Israel to grant him asylum. But a Foreign Ministry official said it was unlikely that the request would be honored.

■ Israel's Supreme Court ordered authorities to explain why two Shin Bet interrogators who shook a detainee to death were not prosecuted. Abdel-Samad Harizat, 29, who was suspected of belonging to Hamas, died after an April interrogation by the Shin Bet, Israel's domestic intelligence service.

■ A Jerusalem court began closed-door hearings for Herzl Rad, 31, an Israeli suspected of spying for Iran. Rad, a clothing merchant in Jerusalem, faces charges of spying for an enemy country, endangering national security and having contact with foreign agents.

Because of Yom Kippur, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Wednesday, Oct. 4.

Jewish groups appeal to Clinton to veto welfare reform legislation

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish activists are appealing to President Clinton to veto the welfare bills approved by Congress, saying that the reform legislation poses an alarming threat to the nation's poor and relegates legal immigrants to second-class citizenship.

Attention is now focused on a House-Senate conference committee that must reconcile the Senate version, passed two weeks ago in a 87-12 vote, with a bill passed by the House in March.

Jewish activists are decrying most of the Senate bill's provisions, including a five-year limit on benefits, the lack of adequate child care provisions, the denial of benefits to most legal immigrants and the tightening of eligibility requirements for some immigrants even after they have become American citizens.

The House measure goes further in restricting welfare benefits and turns over more federal programs to the states.

"It's hard to reconcile these changes with Jewish values or American interests, and I think this will gravely harm millions of poor people," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

"It will shackle the ability of Jewish social service agencies to continue their extraordinary work and it will cause enormous instability in the country. It's bad for America and it's bad for the Jewish community."

Chief among the concerns of many Jewish activists is the impact welfare overhaul will have on the hundreds of thousands of Jews who have come to America from the former Soviet Union, as well as thousands more seeking to immigrate.

'A deeply troubling development'

If welfare reform passes in either of its current forms, Jewish activists say, the safety net for Jewish immigrants will disappear, as will programs that allow many Jewish families to bring their relatives to live in the United States.

As a result, individual families will be left to shoulder the burden for themselves.

"We're entirely a community of immigrants, and the idea that America is not going to extend the benefits to immigrants that it gives to others is really a deeply troubling development in America that makes a mockery of the open-handed promise on the Statue of Liberty," Saperstein said.

Critics of the reform measure say the assault on immigrants is shortsighted because immigrants contribute about \$25 billion more annually in taxes than they receive in benefits.

"We believe that this legislation undermines and disrespects the sanctity of citizenship by relegating naturalized citizens to second-class status," said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federation's Washington Action Office.

"We are deeply disturbed that both the House and Senate welfare bills impose Draconian restrictions on the access of America's foreign-born to the social safety net that their taxes help support."

The overwhelming majority of Jews who come to the United States each year from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe enter the country as refugees.

An estimated 30,000 Jews are expected to come to the United States from the former Soviet Union in 1995.

Although refugees are considered immigrants under current American law, they are afforded special benefits because they are presumed to be fleeing a "well-founded fear of persecution."

Both the Senate and House bills would limit refugees' access to benefits to five years.

The House measure would only permit refugees older than 75 to collect benefits.

The Senate version would require those older than 75 to have worked for 10 years in order to receive certain cash benefits, including Supplemental

Security Income. Coupled with the drastic reductions in welfare services and funding, the proposed restrictions would add insult to injury for immigrants and refugees, Jewish activists say.

Although the Senate bill is generally viewed to be less harsh on the nation's poor, activists say the competing bills still constitute a choice between bad and worse.

But with President Clinton indicating his support for a bipartisan welfare reform bill that resembles the Senate version, Jewish activists are turning to damage control.

The Council of Jewish Federations remains hopeful that Clinton can, at the very least, exact a compromise on the immigrant provisions in exchange for supporting Congress' final action.

"We are urging this president to make clear his opposition to such far-reaching, stringent treatment and blatant discrimination against legal immigrants," Aviv said.

Beyond the concern over immigrants and refugees, Jewish activists say that dismantling safety net programs would jeopardize the well-being of poor children and their families.

In a letter to Republican congressional leaders, Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, urged congressional conferees "to make badly needed changes in the bill to avert a serious catastrophe for the poor of the nation."

"We believe that the bills under consideration fall far short of providing what is needed in the way of training and education assistance, child care and other social supports to enable poor mothers to move off welfare into the economic mainstream," wrote Baum.

Clinton asked to veto legislation

But barring dramatic improvements, Saperstein said, "We would hope the president would veto the bill and seek to work out some sort of compromise."

The National Council for Jewish Women is calling on Clinton to veto the legislation outright.

"Right now, we feel that this bill does more harm than good," said Sammie Moshenberg, director of the Washington Office of the National Council of Jewish Women. "It would be a pipe dream to imagine that this bill is going to get better in the conference committee."

Some Republican Jewish activists support the reform legislation.

"By changing a national welfare system that has failed to meet the needs of the people it was designed to serve, the Republican Congress has answered the call of the American people," Cheryl Halpern, national chairwoman of the National Jewish Coalition, said in a statement.

"The traditional Jewish perspective has always included two concepts: that assistance to the poor is best handled by the community on a local level and that the goal of such assistance is to empower individuals to build independent, productive lives," said Halpern.

"The welfare reform bill passed in the Senate, like that passed earlier in the House, is a considered attempt to implement these principles in our own welfare system," Halpern added.

Baum of AJCongress disagreed, calling both bills "punitive and oppressive."

"We firmly oppose ending the current federal guarantee of cash assistance to poor women and their children, and the shifting of responsibility for this type of aid to states through block grants free of most federal standards and requirements," Baum wrote in his letter to the Republican leadership.

For many Jewish activists, the welfare debate reaches to the core of traditional Jewish views of society.

"As Jews, we have a long tradition of social justice," Moshenberg said. "We have very strong feelings that a democratic society must recognize the need to provide for those who are unable to provide for themselves."

Concern for those in need, she said, "is basic to the whole notion of social justice, and we have a moral obligation not to turn our backs on these people, or to allow government to renege on its responsibility." □

Oman is 1st Persian Gulf state to forge trade relations with Israel

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Oman has agreed to forge trade ties with Israel, becoming the first Persian Gulf nation to establish lower-level relations with the Jewish state.

The decision to exchange trade representatives came during a Saturday night meeting at the United Nations between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and his Omani counterpart, Yusef Ben Alawi.

The two were in New York for the U.N. General Assembly.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Israel and Oman would cooperate in the fields of agriculture, medicine, telecommunications and water projects.

In December, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Oman for discussions with the country's ruler, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said.

It was the highest-level contact between Israel and a Persian Gulf state.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres also met his Qatari counterpart last week and discussed the possibility of developing commercial ties during what was their third such meeting, Israel Radio reported.

Oman, along with the five other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar — does not maintain official diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

The Saudi-dominated council has stated that any normalization of ties with Israel would depend on the reaching of a comprehensive Middle East peace. □

Temple Mount Faithful argues to pray at site during holidays

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An ultranationalist Jewish group has petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice for permission to pray on the Temple Mount during the Yom Kippur and the Sukkot holidays.

The petitioners from Temple Mount Faithful recently argued that their right to enter the complex was protected under the right to freedom of worship.

The Temple Mount is the location of the First and Second temples, the holiest Jewish site. It also is home to Islam's third holiest site, the Al-Aksa Mosque, where the Koran says the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven on a white steed.

The Temple Mount Faithful movement seeks to restore the temple.

In July, the court allowed the group to enter the Temple Mount complex on Tisha B'Av, the Ninth of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the First and Second temples.

But police closed down the site after Muslims tried to confront Jews at the site.

After riots on the Temple Mount in October 1990 resulted in the deaths of 17 Palestinians, police barred Jews from worshiping at the site during Jewish holidays. □

Court: Suburban N.Y. village violated Orthodox Jews' rights

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — After being harassed and intimidated by local residents who opposed their presence, fervently Orthodox Jews in suburban Airmont, N.Y., have won the right to gather and pray in the small, home-based congregations known as "shtiebels," which are often found in Orthodox neighborhoods.

A Sept. 21 verdict from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit reversed a lower court decision and confirmed that the Orthodox Jews' rights under the Fair Housing Act and the First Amendment had been violated by their neighbors in the Rockland County village.

The village was found guilty of violating the Orthodox Jews' right to free exercise of religion and to fair housing, but no damages were awarded.

The village will probably appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, said Airmont Mayor Raymond Kane.

In 1991, Airmont was carved out of the town of Ramapo. Its founders wrote zoning laws to prevent the fervently Orthodox families from forming shtiebels, which are common because Orthodox Jews are prohibited from driving on Shabbat and need congregations close to their homes.

A group of Orthodox Jewish residents and the U.S. Justice Department charged that Airmont's commitment to "strict zoning" was designed to make the village a less desirable place for Orthodox Jews to live.

"Preservation of neighborhoods [through strict zoning laws] is often the byword of the racist," said David Zwiebel, general counsel for Agudath Israel of America, an organization that represents haredi, or fervently Orthodox Jews. The organization filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the case.

"There was a lot of sentiment expressed by the residents of Airmont that went beyond concern over changes in logistics," he said.

'Surveillance of Orthodox homes'

"We are pleased that willful discrimination by an artificially created village was recognized by this decision," said Sanford Schlesinger, chairman of the N.Y. regional board of the Anti-Defamation League, which also filed a friend-of-the-court brief.

The village of some 9,000 residents has several hundred Orthodox residents, a number that has "in the last couple of years doubled or tripled," said Kane, a defendant in the case.

Most of the haredi residents have moved to Airmont from nearby Monsey or from Brooklyn and other parts of New York City, about an hour south of the Rockland County village.

Several pages of the 53-page ruling detail the ways in which some of Airmont's founders have attacked the Orthodox community — particularly those who tried to pray at the home of Rabbi Yitzchak Sternberg.

On one Shabbat morning, a man later appointed to the Airmont planning board stood on the boundary of Sternberg's property, counting and taking notes on the worshipers, according to the appellate court decision. He and others "conducted surveillances of Orthodox Jewish homes at prayer times," the decision states.

Many biased comments were made by Airmont's leaders against the Orthodox community, according to the court's ruling.

According to testimony of one of the plaintiffs, the Airmont Civic Association's then-president had said Orthodox Jews "knew that there were no houses of worship when we moved here," that the Orthodox should

not have moved to Airmont and that the Orthodox were "foreigners and interlopers coming from the outside" as well as "ignorant and uneducated."

At a 1986 meeting of the Airmont Civic Association, a group formed to create the village of Airmont, one resident had said they should not be "giving up for what we've worked very hard for, to a bunch of people who insist on living in the past." The resident also had said, "I will not have a Chasidic community in my back yard."

Agudah's Zwiebel said, "The problem of anti-Orthodox bias, which we have seen in many different communities using zoning laws to keep them out, is not at all limited to non-Jews. It's an extraordinarily troublesome phenomenon."

The fact that approximately one-third of Airmont's non-Orthodox residents are Jewish, said Kane, would seem to bear out Zwiebel's assertion.

"This is an extraordinarily major victory. I hope it sends the message out" that bias against Orthodox Jews will not be tolerated, Zwiebel said, "because it's not a phenomenon restricted to the boundaries of Airmont." □

Fathers of victim, terrorist agree to open tolerance center

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The father of an Israeli killed by Hamas terrorists and the father of one of those terrorists managed to bridge their differences and agree to establish jointly an educational center that would teach tolerance to Israelis and Palestinians.

Yehuda Waxman — the father of Cpl. Nachshon Waxman, who was abducted and killed in October by his three Hamas captors during a failed Israeli commando rescue attempt — reached agreement for the center during a meeting initiated by a local newspaper with Sheik Yassin Bader.

But Waxman said he had agreed to the meeting only after Bader agreed to a precondition.

"Before I met Sheik Bader, I asked him to give me a letter that will say that he condemns the kidnapping of my son, and that he is against any terror," Waxman told Israel Radio.

"We decided that an educational center for tolerance and understanding between Palestinians and Jews will maybe help," he added. □

Jordan's kosher eatery changes menu

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed last October has not borne fruit for at least one Jordanian.

The first, and only, kosher restaurant in Amman has closed its doors and will soon reopen with a non-kosher menu devoted to Lebanese food. The owner of the Istanbul Restaurant, Khaled Mohammed Al-Hindi, blamed the failure of his venture into kosher food on his Israeli partners, local hostility and a lack of customers.

In New York, however, a spokesman for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, said the restaurant was not properly certified as kosher.

Although Israeli tourists have flooded Jordan since the two countries signed their historic peace treaty, Hindi said the 110-seat restaurant was nearly empty since opening in June. He reportedly lost up to \$14,000 in the enterprise, and accused his three Israeli partners of not living up to their side of the bargain.

One of the Israelis, Pinchas Sela, countered by denying that the partners had not paid their financial obligations. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES
Israelis almost evenly divided in wake of Washington signing

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If Israeli leaders were expecting a strong reaction from the Israeli public to the Washington signing of the Interim Agreement, they were in for a surprise.

Israeli and Palestinian officials announced just hours before the start of Rosh Hashanah that an agreement for extending West Bank autonomy had been reached.

But many Israelis did not learn of the Interim Agreement, known here as Oslo II, until the end of the two-day holiday, leaving no time to organize rallies, for or against the agreement.

Israeli public opinion, according to the latest opinion polls, is about evenly divided when it comes to the agreement.

On Sept. 27, a day after Rosh Hashanah, hundreds of people demonstrated under the banner of Zo Artzeinu, or This is our Land, a right-wing group that in the past has mobilized thousands of demonstrators across the Jewish state.

Although sporadic demonstrations snarled traffic in the capital and elsewhere, the scene was a far cry from the massive outpourings of anti-government sentiment that have taken place recently.

The greatest display of disaffection took place among West Bank settlers, particularly in the West Bank town of Hebron.

Last Friday, a day after the Sept. 28 Washington signing ceremony, settler leaders announced that they would form a voluntary militia to patrol the West Bank when Israel begins redeploying its troops there under the terms of the Interim Agreement.

And Saturday, about 100 settlers marched through the streets of Hebron shouting "This is Our Land" and "Slaughter the Arabs."

Two settlers were detained after they threw stones at Palestinians, Army Radio reported.

On Sunday, more than 100 Israelis from Jordan Valley farming settlements protested at the Allenby Bridge crossing into Jordan, charging that the Interim Agreement was abandoning them to Palestinian rule.

Traffic was stopped for hours until Israeli police dragged the settlers away from the bridge entrance, which is located just outside the Palestinian self-rule enclave in Jericho.

But in Jerusalem, there was little evidence of those high-pitched emotions.

'Document of surrender'

According to the latest poll published in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot, 51 percent of the Israeli public supports the Interim Agreement, while 47 percent of the public opposes it.

Given the poll's 4 percent margin of error, the results represent a statistical dead heat.

Although the scene on the streets here was relatively low-key, the Israeli press was full of commentary.

Reaction was predictable, depending on the newspaper's predisposition to the peace process as a whole.

The right-wing daily Hatzofeh, an organ of the National Religious Party, blasted the agreement in an editorial as the "Rabin government's document of surrender" to Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Editorialists for the Israeli daily Ma'ariv wrote that to the credit of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, the Interim Agreement "does not

create irreversible facts in three areas: responsibility for security, the fate of the settlements and the future of Jerusalem."

The newspaper also said that "less than one-third of Judea and Samaria, including the cities of the West Bank, is being given to Arafat," and that "if the agreement founders, Israel will hold the key positions: the mountainous spine of Judea and Samaria, the Jordan Valley, Greater Jerusalem, control of the roads and the settlements."

Walking around Jerusalem, randomly interviewing passers-by and shopkeepers, it seems that few Jewish Israelis wholeheartedly support the interim agreement.

Although many Israelis say they are uncomfortable about making concessions to the Palestinians, they feel unable to stop the momentum.

"I hope for the best, of course, but I am afraid," Shoshana Cohen, a soft-spoken Jerusalemite in her 50s, said just hours before the White House signing ceremony.

"Look for yourself. There is none of the euphoria that greeted the peace treaty with Egypt. Were you in Israel then? People were thrilled, they danced in the streets."

Cohen, taking pains to stress that she is not anti-Arab in principle, recalled strained Arab-Jewish relations during her childhood.

"I grew up in the Old City, so I know the Arabs," she said. "Growing up, my family lived in a one-room apartment with a single window.

"Every night, my father boarded up that window because Arabs would bang their knives against the grill. They threw stones at us as children. So, yes, I'm concerned about the future."

Culmination in a state?

Said Uzi Avrashim, a 26-year-old exercise instructor: "I'm not unhappy about Oslo II, but I am uneasy. The agreement isn't clear enough. I get all my information from the TV and newspapers, so it's impossible to know what it all means."

Taking the issue of Hebron as an example, Avrashim said, "What will happen to Kiryat Arba and the Tomb of the Patriarchs? They must stay in our hands."

Asked whether he believes that the agreement will culminate in a Palestinian state, he shrugged and said, "It's clear that there will be a Palestinian state. What can we do about it now? This is just the way it will be.

"What bothers me most," he added, "is the way the government has pushed through the agreement without telling us anything. Why shouldn't we feel uneasy?"

But Ayad Hoshi, an 18-year-old Palestinian lifeguard working in western Jerusalem, called the agreement "a good thing, assuming the assurances are genuine."

According to a survey conducted by the Nablus-based Center for Palestine Research and Studies just prior to the Washington signing ceremony, 70 percent of Palestinians support continued peace talks with Israel.

"I really want this peace agreement to work," Hoshi said.

"I want to be able to go out with my friends — I have both Jewish and Arab friends — but there is just too much fear at the moment. Really, this agreement is a step in the right direction."

Another young Palestinian, a restaurant worker who asked that his name not be used, agreed.

"I think this is a very good agreement because it provides us with what we need. My friends and I really want peace.

"Right now, we don't really live; we need to have the chance to live, to have some freedom." □