



NEWS AT A GLANCE

- Jewish groups renewed their call for anti-terrorism legislation in the wake of the deliberate derailment of an Amtrak passenger train. The Anti-Defamation League suggested that the group claiming responsibility, the previously unknown "Sons of the Gestapo," was linked to a right-wing, anti-Semitic group. [Page 1]
- The House Judiciary Committee began finalizing legislation that would significantly reduce the number of legal immigrants allowed into the United States each year.
- Israel turned over three civil administration buildings in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority. The move came a day after Israel transferred an administration building in the West Bank village of Salfit and after Israel released some 900 Palestinian prisoners. [Page 2]
- An Israeli soldier was seriously wounded during a clash with members of the Hezbollah movement in the eastern sector of the South Lebanon security zone. Israeli troops found a large weapons cache in the area of the clash.
- Russia's most rabidly anti-Semitic newspaper was back in circulation after being shut down 10 months ago. The latest edition of Al-Kods featured a series of anti-Semitic diatribes. [Page 3]
- Two German neo-Nazis were sentenced to prison after a retrial on charges that they had set fire to a Jewish museum at the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, termed the latest verdict "correct and important." [Page 4]
- A Jewish cemetery near Bonn was reportedly desecrated by vandals. The incident followed repeated vandalism against a memorial in Berlin to Jews deported to the Nazi death camps.

Because of the Jewish holidays, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Tuesday, Oct. 17, and Wednesday, Oct. 18.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Amtrak derailment prompts new calls for anti-terror laws

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The derailment of an Amtrak passenger train in the Arizona desert has led to renewed calls for the swift passage of anti-terrorism legislation currently stalled in Congress.

Counterterrorism legislation has been one of the top legislative priorities in the organized Jewish community.

Taking aim at those opposed to the legislation, President Clinton urged Congress to provide the tools needed to fight terrorism.

"It's a mistake to do nothing," he said at a news briefing here Wednesday.

The derailment of an Amtrak train en route from New Orleans to Los Angeles early Tuesday plunged two locomotives and four cars 30 feet off the end of a trestle, killing one passenger and injuring 78 others.

The perpetrators, calling themselves "Sons of the Gestapo," left at least two notes claiming responsibility near the site of the derailment.

Officials were investigating reports that the sabotage could have been an act of retaliation against the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and local police. The notes made references to the Ruby Ridge and Waco sieges, in which law enforcement officials fatally clashed with extremist groups.

Federal investigators are also looking into the possibility that a disgruntled employee sabotaged the track.

Jewish groups joined Clinton in pushing for passage of anti-terrorism legislation.

"Once again American citizens have become victims of domestic terrorism," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said in a statement.

"In this case the perpetrators reached back into the ugly side of our recent history to flaunt their heinous act under the umbrella of Nazism.

"The signature 'the Sons of the Gestapo' suggests to us they are a right-wing, anti-Semitic group.

"This incident, unfortunately, demonstrates that domestic terrorism is a clear and present danger to the American people," Foxman said, adding, "The need for strong anti-terrorism legislation must be a priority and a reality."

Likewise, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations said it has intensified efforts to move the anti-terrorism legislation forward.

At the same time, Malcolm Hoenlein, the group's executive vice chairman, cautioned people not to jump to conclusions about the motive behind the train sabotage until the facts are known.

A prominent Jewish concern

Anti-terrorism measures remain a prominent Jewish concern, according to Richard Foltin, legislative director of the American Jewish Committee.

"The Jewish community has been singled out and has been a victim of international terrorism," Foltin said. "There's a need for strong anti-terrorism legislation to protect our community."

Calls for anti-terrorism legislation accelerated following the Oklahoma City bombing last April, with the emphasis shifting from countering international terrorism to containing domestic terrorism.

In June, the Senate overwhelmingly passed an anti-terrorism bill allowing for broader government investigations, tighter immigration controls and some bans on fund raising in the United States for terrorist organizations.

The House Judiciary Committee approved a bill in June that most Jewish groups saw as being even more effective in countering terrorist activities than the Senate version. Among other things, the House proposal calls for even stricter bans on fund raising.

Floor debate on the House bill, originally slated for late September or early October, is still pending.

Despite renewed appeals for the legislation's passage, widespread

congressional support is far from solid, particularly with the investigation into the Amtrak sabotage still in its early stages.

An unusual coalition has formed in opposition to the legislation, which was introduced by Clinton last year. Conservatives who oppose gun control and expanded government authority have joined with liberals, who are concerned about the bill's impact on civil liberties.

"That marriage of convenience has stalled momentum that had been built up for the bill," said Michael Lieberman, associate director of the ADL's Washington office.

Responding to Clinton's call for passage of the anti-terrorism legislation, House Speaker Newt Gingrich accused Clinton of political opportunism in using the train wreck as a "gimmick" to move forward his legislation.

He defended the House's slow movement, saying, "We're going very slowly, frankly, because when you look at Waco and you look at Ruby Ridge and you look at other information, a lot of Americans are very cautious about how much power to give to the executive branch and how much police powers to give away and how many civil liberties to give up," he said Wednesday.

At the same time, Gingrich said he would call on the FBI to determine if such legislation could have done anything to avert an act of sabotage like the one in Arizona.

While acknowledging concerns about government excesses, Lieberman of ADL said Waco and Ruby Ridge are essentially red-herrings. "Those hearings clearly demonstrate that law enforcement can sometimes overreact and overreach in exercising their authority, but they have no bearing whatsoever on the threat of terrorism facing the United States," Lieberman said.

"Past excesses by law enforcement officials should not paralyze congressional leaders from taking action to prevent the kind of terrorism that we've seen in the last few months."

In his news briefing, Clinton said the goal of countering terrorism can be reconciled with concerns about granting government too much power.

"I think the answer is, give us the tools we need to fight the problems of today and tomorrow with anti-terrorism, but hold us strictly, strictly accountable.

"That's the answer; that's the balanced, fair answer," the president said. "We can achieve both." □

Israel releases 900 prisoners as transfer of authority begins

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM(JTA) — Israel began implementing its latest accord with the Palestinians this week, freeing close to 900 Palestinian prisoners and transferring four civil administration offices in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority.

But the first steps toward expanding Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank were not without disputes.

The Interim Agreement, which calls for the phased release of most Palestinians in Israeli jails and for the immediate release of all female prisoners, ran into a snag this week when President Ezer Weizman said he would refuse to shorten the sentences of two of the 27 female prisoners scheduled for release.

Weizman, who has been pondering the release issue for at least two weeks, said Sunday that he would adhere to an earlier pledge not to let any prisoner with Israeli blood on his or her hands go free.

Two other female prisoners were refused release this week by Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, the commander in charge of an area that includes the West Bank.

Israel's refusal to release the four women prompted Ahmed Tibi, an adviser to Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, to petition Israel's High Court of Justice.

Tibi argued that since the release of all female prisoners was part of the Interim Agreement, Weizman had acted beyond his authority in refusing to pardon two of the female inmates.

Of the 900 Palestinian prisoners released Tuesday, some 500 had been convicted of committing security offenses against Israel.

The security prisoners were set free after signing pledges that they would refrain from future terrorist activities.

Those prisoners who had been jailed for criminal offenses were freed after they signed pledges that they would not take part in any further criminal activities.

The releases were delayed by several hours Tuesday, after Palestinians officials demanded that the former criminals be handed over directly to the Palestinian Authority.

Hisham Abdel Razek, a Palestinian negotiator on the prisoner issue, said Palestinian officials had wanted to review their files to decide whether they should be set free or be put in PLO-run jails.

Though they were free to go, some 84 former criminals remained in jail Wednesday after no Palestinian Authority official came to pick them up, Army Radio reported.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials on Wednesday turned over three civil administration buildings in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority.

The transfer of the buildings in the villages of Hirbata, Yata and Kabatyah came a day after Israel transferred to the Palestinians an administration building in the West Bank village of Salfit.

As Israeli troops left the three facilities for the last time Wednesday, local residents put up Palestinian flags and pictures of Arafat.

Rabin jeered

Meanwhile, Israel allowed three leaders of the PLO's mainstream Al Fatah movement who were responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks in the past to enter the West Bank.

The three were expected to take up governing positions in the West Bank towns of Tulkarm, Nablus and Ramallah. The three cities are among the Arab population centers to come under Palestinian self-rule.

Israeli opposition leaders denounced the move. The denunciation came as the Likud Party launched a campaign against the Interim Agreement at the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

The gathering on Wednesday, which drew more than 1,500 supporters, was aimed at stressing the importance of the Gush Etzion bloc of settlements as an integral part of Israel and as a southern defense for Jerusalem.

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu said that opposition to the agreement must be within the framework of the law.

He denounced right-wing supporters who had jeered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at an annual gathering of Israel's English-speaking immigrant population on Tuesday.

Rabin, confronted by continued shouts and booing at the Netanya event, reportedly had left the stage in a rage after 10 minutes.

"We cannot condone physical attacks against Cabinet ministers or representatives of the government," Netanyahu told his audience in Efrat. "We have to express ourselves in the ballot box, not through violence." □

Yeltsin envoy reaches out to Jews at Moscow synagogue

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — There was a surprise waiting for hundreds of Moscow Jews who attended High Holiday services last week at the Chorale Synagogue: live greetings from a member of Russian President Boris Yeltsin's administration.

The chairman of the Russian president's Commission on Citizenship, Abdullah Mikitayev, told the assembled, "The Jewish community of Russia is making a considerable contribution to the development of Russia's economy and culture."

He stressed that "Jews, Muslims and Christians all are represented by the government and play a role in the democratic process."

The short speech from the bimah represented the first occasion that a member of the Yeltsin administration has publicly addressed the Jewish community at a religious event and may be a sign that the Jewish community of Russia is gaining more recognition from the government.

But in an election year, Mikitayev's remarks were not seen as entirely apolitical. The presidential envoy, whose commission is responsible for a legal amendment allowing Russians dual citizenship with other countries, is the chairman of the Inter-Ethnic Union, a minority bloc seeking seats in the parliamentary elections set for December.

In an interview, Mikitayev said the situation for Jews in Russia differs from that of other minority groups such as Greeks and Koreans. Despite their small numbers compared to the general population, he said, "Russian Jews enjoy a far greater economic and cultural potential than other minorities."

This potential, he said, "might inspire ethnic hatred toward the Jews." Countering anti-Semitism is one of the Inter-Ethnic Union's objectives, along with defending minority rights in the Russian Federation.

Mikitayev was not alone in using the High Holidays as an occasion to address Russia's Jewish community. Russia's Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who chairs the government's Our House is Russia party, is also courting the minority vote. The prime minister this month sent out a public High Holiday greeting to the Jewish community.

"This talented people has suffered different fates throughout the centuries, but it has always been tightly linked with the fate of Russia, with the development of our history, science, culture and art," Chernomyrdin said. □

Virulently anti-Semitic paper is back on the stands in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russia's most rabidly anti-Semitic newspaper is back in print after a 10-month hiatus.

Al-Kods, which bills itself as the "Russian-Palestinian Voice," was shut down last November by the Russian State Committee on the Press for a technicality: The paper's publisher was not a Russian citizen.

But now Shaaban Hafez Shaaban, originally a Palestinian from Jordan, has acquired Russian citizenship and his bi-monthly is back on the newsstands, brandishing its trademark racist slogans and promising its readers in 12-point capital letters "WE WILL BURY ZIONISM IN RUSSIA!!!"

The reissue of Al-Kods, the Arab name for Jerusalem, not only underscores what is seen as the passivity of the Russian Press Committee, but also represents an indictment of the country's judiciary.

Article 78 of the Russian criminal code prohibits just the sort of "incitement to racial hatred" to which the Russian-Palestinian paper enjoins its readers in every issue. But so far authorities have not prosecuted one of the dozens of Russian papers spewing hate and being sold at every Moscow metro station.

The front cover of the latest issue of Al-Kods shows a huge cartoon of the paper's Palestinian publisher nailed to a Star of David in a parody of the crucifixion of Jesus. Underneath is a long article propagating the myth of a Zionist conspiracy plotting the downfall of the Russian nation, and relying heavily on quotes from the notorious anti-Semitic tract, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

"Real power in Russia lies not with the people and not even with the bureaucrats, but with Zionists, and they are doing what they want," the text reads.

"Our paper was closed because we were dangerous for Zionists," it says, adding, "They own all the keys to power in Russia and dictate their own laws."

Another article focused on "The Jewish Question in Russia," while another piece, by the publisher, parodied the government's political party Our House is Russia by renaming it "Our House is Israel." The article faulted the Russian government for wearing "the face of Zionism."

The vice chairman of the Russian State Press Committee, which had closed down the paper, said he sees "undeniable signs of anti-Semitism in the new edition."

"I'm certain that we'll be taking measures to prosecute any new violations of the law," said Valery Sirozhenko.

But real action depends on Russia's prosecutors, who often are loathe to invoke the laws.

An article in a previous issue of Al-Kods, which called explicitly for the murders of several human rights and democratic activists, was overlooked by the office of the prosecutor general, which said the piece was not a detailed enough incitement to homicide. □

IDF reservists oppose accord with threat to boycott service

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Voicing their opposition to expanded autonomy in the West Bank, a group of Israeli reserve officers and soldiers has announced that its members would not show up for reserve duty.

Reserve Capt. Danny Hoffman, the informal spokesman for the group, called the redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank, part of the Interim Agreement, "an immoral order."

The agreement, signed in Washington on Sept. 28, calls in part for the redeployment of the Israel Defense Force from Palestinian population centers in the West Bank.

"We are a group of officers and soldiers, about 10 people at the moment, who want to serve in the army by defending the State of Israel," Hoffman told the daily newspaper Yediot Achronot.

In a letter to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the group said it would no longer serve in the reserves because the army's job is to help build the country, "not to be the trustee over a collapsing national concern."

An IDF spokesman responded, saying that refusal to do reserve duty was against the law.

Government and opposition members alike criticized the group's stand.

Rafael Eitan, leader of the right-wing Tsomet Party and a former IDF chief of staff, said all soldiers are required to follow orders.

He added that a failure to do so would lead to the collapse of the country's defense forces. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Actions by O.J.'s attorney distress some Jewish leaders

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The Jewish community, like most of the nation and world, had followed the twists and turns of the O.J. Simpson trial for nearly nine months, with varying degrees of fascination.

But it was not until the final days of arguments and in the week after the jury's "not guilty" verdict, that specifically Jewish sensitivities came into play.

Jewish passions were engaged, and continue unabated in Los Angeles and elsewhere, by a number of developments:

- The overwhelming grief of the family of murder victim Ronald Lyle Goldman, expressed with particular poignancy and anger during Yom Kippur services at their synagogue.

- The invocation of Hitler and the Holocaust by lead defense attorney Johnnie Cochran Jr. in his final appeal to the jury.

- The post-trial attack by Jewish defense lawyer Robert Shapiro on Cochran for playing the "race card."

- Cochran's use of bodyguards from the Nation of Islam.

Speaking to hundreds of fellow congregants from Temple Beth Haverim at a rented church hall in suburban Westlake, Fred Goldman grieved for the death of his son Ron.

Cochran "single-handedly, with his 'Dream Team,' managed to shove a wedge between the races that's larger than we could ever have imagined," said Goldman.

Goldman said, "We, as a nation, have been turned upside down — gone from being concerned about victims, and their families, to being more concerned about defendants and criminals."

Cochran prompts Jewish groups' outrage

Despite the solemnity of the Yom Kippur service, worshipers leapt to their feet and gave Goldman a standing ovation.

Earlier, Jewish agencies were outraged when Cochran, in his final summation to a jury that included nine African Americans, compared Mark Fuhrman, former Los Angeles Police detective, to Hitler, and drew an analogy between the detective's taped wish of burning all blacks and the Holocaust.

"The metaphor trivializes a profound historical tragedy," said the Anti-Defamation League in a statement. The ADL reported that it had been besieged by callers outraged by the "Fuhrman-Fuhrer" analogy.

Also deeply offended was defense lawyer Shapiro, who turned on his colleague Cochran within hours of the verdict.

"To me, the Holocaust stands alone as the most terrible human event in modern civilization," Shapiro said in an ABC television interview with Barbara Walters. "To compare [Hitler] in any way to a rogue cop, in my opinion was wrong."

Shapiro also said the defense, paced by Cochran, not only played the race card, but "we dealt it from the bottom of the deck." Shapiro did not respond to requests for additional comments.

Cochran, in turn, attributed Shapiro's ire to sour grapes at having been replaced as the defense's lead attorney by Cochran. The other Jewish defense lawyers, Barry Scheck, Peter Neufeld and Alan Dershowitz, did not join in Shapiro's protest.

Citing death threats against himself, Cochran surrounded himself with eight burly bodyguards whenever

he left the courtroom during the last week of the trial. At the office building housing Cochran's law firm, other occupants complained that they had to pass through a phalanx of guards to get to their own offices.

The guards were members of the Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan, which "in past years engaged in crude and vulgar racism and anti-Semitism," said Abraham Foxman, the ADL national director.

By his choice of such bodyguards, Foxman added, Cochran "legitimizes them and their attitudes."

Once the Holocaust became part of the post-trial debate, emotional tensions rose sharply, adding a Jewish dimension to the clear polarization between blacks and whites emerging from the trial.

The question of whether Jews or African Americans had suffered more in the past decades and centuries, and who, indeed, "owned" the Holocaust, took on a sharper edge.

Charles Lindner, a Jewish lawyer, who helped Cochran fashion his closing argument, said "for those who say that Hitler is proprietary to the Jews, he isn't."

The ADL's Foxman, a Holocaust survivor, disagreed strenuously. The Fuhrman-Hitler analogy "was outrageous and an insult to the millions of innocent victims of Nazism," Foxman said. "The metaphor trivializes this profound historical tragedy."

In contrast, Karen Grigsby Bates, a black Los Angeles social commentator, told Time magazine that by clinging to the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Jews are saying that "our suffering counts more than yours. And the reaction among black people is, 'don't you dare.' There is such a groundswell of resentment among African Americans toward that attitude."

Los Angeles Rabbi Harold Schulweis objected to the entire concept of relative victimhood.

"All such comparisons are invidious and irrelevant," he said.

By almost every measurement of public opinion, the Simpson trial and its outcome have exacerbated racial tensions in this country.

Schulweis called for understanding of the African American viewpoint: "As Jews, we must ask ourselves how we would deal with a beleaguered black community, and how we would have reacted if Mr. Simpson were Jewish or if a Jonathan Pollard had been the defendant."

Harvey Fields, another leading Los Angeles rabbi, said that "the agony that has grown out of the trial shows the depth of racism that still exists in our society." □

Men sentenced in Sachsenhausen blaze

By Gil Sedan

BONN (JTA) — Two German neo-Nazis were sentenced to prison last week after a retrial on charges that they had set fire to a Jewish museum at the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

The state court in the eastern German city of Potsdam found the two guilty Oct. 5, after a juvenile court released the defendants in October 1993 after a trial that drew widespread condemnation.

Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, termed the new verdict "correct and important." Bubis said he had been "astonished" at their acquittal in the earlier trial.

After the first trial, the Federal Appeals Court, Germany's highest criminal court, ordered a retrial of the two, who were accused of the September 1992 arson attack on the Jewish museum, which was located in a former concentration camp barracks.

The museum was completely destroyed in the blaze. □