



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Reform leaders in Israel threatened to bring additional conversion-related petitions before the High Court of Justice if the Chief Rabbinate refused to seek a compromise with the non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. The threat came amid a flurry of meetings aimed at resolving the ongoing battle over religious pluralism in the Jewish state.

■ Israel agreed to extradite a Maryland teen-ager to the United States to face charges of murder. After pressure from Congress, which included a temporary hold on economic aid to the Jewish state, Israeli Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein ruled that Samuel Sheinbein was not an Israeli citizen. Sheinbein, 17, whose father was born in pre-state Palestine, fled to Israel last month.

■ Four Orthodox Jewish students filed suit against Yale University. The students say the school's requirement that they live in coed dormitories impinges upon their religious freedom.

■ A Jewish nursing home in Chicago will receive \$250,000 in a settlement with the state of Illinois. Officials at the home sued after claiming that health inspectors visiting the home in 1991 made anti-Semitic remarks and urged Jewish residents to eat pork.

■ U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat in Israel and the West Bank. They discussed security issues, the proposed "time-out" on Jewish settlement activity and further redeployments of Israeli troops.

■ Israeli warplanes attacked Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanon security zone after an Israeli soldier was killed by Hezbollah fire a day earlier. Meanwhile, an Israeli Druse soldier who was injured by friendly fire in Lebanon in August has died. [Page 2]

Because of Shemini Atzeret, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Oct. 24.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Rabbis urge both traditional and targeted giving to Israel

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Despite increasing tension over religious pluralism and the fears of fund raisers at Jewish establishment charities, this year's High Holiday sermons found rabbis urging congregants to support the traditional causes: State of Israel Bonds and the United Jewish Appeal.

But based on a random sampling of rabbis from around the country, many rabbis from each of the liberal movements also urged their listeners, in language at least as strong, to give to the philanthropies that support specific causes they back themselves.

The New Israel Fund, as a result, found itself benefiting from an unanticipated High Holiday appeal.

More than a dozen rabbis requested pre-printed contribution envelopes from NIF after the liberal fund-raising group mailed to liberal and some Orthodox rabbis a resource guide exploring traditional and contemporary Jewish sources related to issues of religious diversity and Jewish unity.

The Israeli branches of the Reform and Conservative movements also expect a flow of contributions as a result of speeches from their movements' rabbis. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Judaism's New Year and Day of Atonement, are the most well-attended services of the year and the time, traditionally, when rabbis deliver their most important sermons.

The High Holidays are also the time in many synagogues for annual appeals for Israel Bonds and UJA.

It is too early to know the results of the appeals, but officials at UJA believe that they went well.

The fund-raising agency did what it could to ensure positive results, said Rabbi Doniel Kramer, director of UJA's Rabbinic Cabinet. Each rabbi in America received three mailings from UJA in the month before Rosh Hashanah, including a detailed report of what each of the religious movements in Israel receives in funding through the UJA system.

Leaders of each of the movements also urged their rabbis to support UJA in their own letters.

There had been much concern in the central Jewish fund-raising establishment that anger among many Reform and Conservative Jews over Israel's lack of recognition of non-Orthodox Judaism would create a backlash, spurring non-Orthodox religious leaders to advocate against giving to UJA.

Indeed, some liberal rabbis used the occasion to vent their anger over such issues as pending Knesset legislation that would codify the Orthodox monopoly over conversions in Israel and the assault on egalitarian prayer groups at the Western Wall.

Israeli leaders 'must feel our heat on this issue'

Reform Rabbi Harvey Fields, of Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles, used his Rosh Hashanah platform to issue a stinging condemnation of Orthodox and Israeli leaders. He warned that if proposed legislation is passed, they will risk the relationship with the majority of American Jews, who if they affiliate do so as Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist.

"They must feel our heat on this issue. They must feel it hot, and righteous, and unrelenting," he said.

But many of the rabbis who made similar points in last year's sermons this year refrained.

Instead, feeling bruised by the recent Orthodox-liberal/Israel-Diaspora battles, they said, they consciously spoke of Jewish unity in a positive way.

Rather than focus exclusively on the stress points, they framed the problems in ways that tried not to raise any questions about their fundamental commitment to Israel.

Rabbi David Wolpe, of the Conservative Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, spoke about loving Israel before criticizing it.

When children and grandchildren hear only "a constant drumbeat of criticism," he said in a phone interview, they are "going to grow up with a distance and coldness toward Israel that their parents cannot now imagine, and that's what frightens me."

In her sermon on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Vivian

Schirm borrowed from the epitaph of American poet Robert Frost when she said, "I have a lover's quarrel with Judaism and Israel."

"I love all of it, but one of the quarrels I have is with the audacity or chutzpah of one group of Jews claiming authenticity for their Jewish practice and disclaiming the authenticity of other Jewish groups," she added.

Schirm is the spiritual leader of the 220-family Or Hadash Reconstructionist Congregation in Fort Washington, Pa.

She was one of the rabbis who arranged for NIF envelopes to be distributed to her congregants, she said, because "it is important for people to be given an option to do something" about the disenchantment they feel with the establishment.

Her congregation this year had its traditional Israel Bonds appeal, "but we're starting to question it more seriously because the Israeli government is going in so many directions which counter religious pluralism and the peace process," she said.

For its part, officials from Israel Bonds spoke to all the movements before the holidays to ensure continuing support.

"We continue to enjoy the support of all branches of Judaism," said Bonds spokesman Raphael Rothstein. "We build the roads, and it's not different roads for the different branches. Bonds is for all the people of Israel."

But at least one rabbi who last year encouraged his congregants to send the percentage of their Jewish federation donation that usually would have gone to Israel through UJA directly to Reform institutions had a different message this year.

Rabbi Peter Kasdan of Reform Temple Emanu-El of West Essex in Livingston, N.J., is no less passionate on the issue now, but said he feels more hopeful about steps taken by his local federation and UJA to devote more support to the Reform and Conservative movements.

As a result, during his Kol Nidre sermon, Kasdan urged the 550 families in his congregation to support Reform institutions in Israel, but to do so through the local Jewish federation.

He, like many Reform rabbis across the country, also urged his congregants to contribute to the Reform movement's Emergency Israel Building Fund, whose first project was to help rebuild the the Reform kindergarten in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Mevasseret Zion that was burned by arsonists on Sept. 1.

"Yom Kippur is a time of return and I am returning to the fold, coming with one foot in and one foot out," Kasdan said. "Some of the things I called for have been put in motion, and now I'm waiting to see."

One of the recent steps was a decision by UJA and the federation system to help raise money for Reform and Conservative institutions in Israel beyond the regular campaign.

"I reserve judgement to see what happens this year before I come back fully and unconditionally next year," Kasdan said.

The Association of Reform Zionists of America, which is coordinating the Emergency Israel Building Fund, sent out tens of thousands of pledge cards to its approximately 850 affiliated congregations. The money raised will be used "for bricks, mortar, and anything else necessary to root ourselves in the soil in Israel, like teacher training, coalition building and political work," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, ARZA's executive vice president.

"Despite all the negative news about Israel flowing for the last year, this has been a way to convert the negative energy into positive channels, to say, 'We're not going to abandon Israel; we just have to work harder at changing things,'" he said.

The Conservative movement tried to address the same need in a different way.

Instead of creating a new fund-raising campaign, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, published a pamphlet explaining the mitzvah of charity, listing all of his movement's related institutions in North and South America and in Israel.

For their part, Orthodox rabbis who were interviewed said that when they touched the issue at all, it was to emphasize the importance of Jewish unity, even as they made clear their support of the status quo in Israel, which leaves all religious matters under Orthodox control.

"The Reform and Conservative need to address it more from their pulpits than we do, because the impetus for change is coming from their side and they need to stem the tide of anger," said Orthodox Rabbi Joel Finkelstein of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation, in Memphis, Tenn.

But even for Finkelstein, who didn't address the issue during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is coming up. He saved the sermon for the Shabbat morning during Sukkot.

Its title is "Pluralism: Can We All Be Right?" □

Hail, flooding kill five in Israel as storms rage during Sukkot

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Severe storms accompanied by flash flooding raged across southern Israel, killing at least five people, with several others missing and presumed dead.

The storms, considered the worst to hit some areas in 25 years, began last Friday and continued through Saturday.

They struck during the Sukkot holiday, when many Israelis were camping and hiking.

Thousands cut short their vacations and returned home. Dozens of hikers had to be rescued.

The storms covered Beersheba with a foot-thick carpet of hail — a phenomenon not recalled by even the city's oldest residents.

Three of the dead were traveling by car Saturday near Kibbutz Ein Gedi next to the Dead Sea when a great wave of water rushed down the mountainside and swept their vehicle off the road. Three other passengers in the car managed to climb to safety and were later rescued.

In Eilat, the storm brought 1.2 inches of rain — nearly the entire average rainfall the city gets each winter.

The storm left the West Bank town of Jericho without electricity. Nearby fields were flooded and some hothouses swept away.

Weather forecasters predicted more rain for this week. □

IDF soldier killed in Lebanon

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli warplanes attacked Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanon security zone Sunday after an Israeli soldier was killed a day earlier by Hezbollah fire.

Sgt. Ronen Hayun, 19, was killed when his tank was hit by anti-tank missiles. Two other soldiers were lightly wounded.

In a separate incident, an Israeli Druse soldier who was injured in August by friendly fire in Lebanon died Saturday.

First Sgt. Mahdi Hatib died of the meningitis he contracted after he was shot.

More than 40 Israelis have died in southern Lebanon since the beginning of the year. □

New fears of Egypt-Israel chill in wake of a dropped rape case

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Unsubstantiated charges that Egypt's ambassador to Israel raped an Israeli belly dancer may further damage already-chilly relations with Cairo, Israeli leaders fear.

The charges, which had been kept out of the Israeli media for several weeks by a court order, were published last week, when Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein announced his decision to close the investigation for lack of evidence against Mohammed Basiouny.

The attorney general also ordered the police to end their inquiries into a cross-complaint filed by Basiouny, who charged that the belly dancer and a male friend had sought to blackmail him.

Basiouny, visibly upset by the publicity, said over the weekend that he was glad that "the truth is out at last" — and insisted that he would continue at his post.

But some Israeli observers predict that because his standing has been irreparably damaged, his 15-year term as Egypt's ambassador to Israel is likely to come to an end soon.

While the dancer's allegations have not been substantiated, it is clear that Basiouny met with her alone in an apartment.

Basiouny claims that he merely wanted to give her a birthday present, that they had known each other for several years, that she frequently performed at his residence and that there was no sexual element to their relationship.

The dancer, whose name was banned from publication by the court order, is reportedly married and the mother of two.

According to Israeli media reports, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Ezer Weizman were involved in behind-the-scenes efforts to keep the story out of the newspapers and to prevent it from hurting Israel's already-tense relations with Egypt.

They also feared that the charges against Basiouny would damage chances of obtaining the release of Azam Azam, an Israeli Druse who was found guilty of spying for Israel while working in Egypt.

Azam was sentenced Aug. 31 by a Cairo court to 15 years in prison with hard labor.

Israeli leaders apparently fear that the Egyptian press, and even the country's government, may see the Basiouny affair as Israel's way of getting even with Egypt or of pressuring Egypt on the Azam case.

Despite protests from Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai that Azam was not a spy, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has refused to pardon him. □

German electronics firm balks at compensating slave laborers

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A leading German electronics manufacturer has announced it will not pay compensation to slave laborers forced to work for the company during World War II.

Hermann Franz, chairman of Siemens' supervisory board, said last week that the company deeply regretted the actions that took place during World War II in the name of the German people.

But he said salaries for the slave laborers were paid to the Nazi government, which was responsible for recruiting the workers.

Siemens employed tens of thousands of slave laborers during World War II, including Jewish workers, often under inhumane working conditions.

Another top Siemens official said Oct. 12 that the company voluntarily paid some \$29 million to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany in the early 1960s.

That money was distributed to some 2,000 former laborers.

But most of the survivors have not received compensation for their work or for the physical and emotional damage they suffered.

As Siemens celebrated its 150th anniversary on Oct. 12, hundreds of people, including some former slave laborers, protested the company's refusal to pay compensation.

The Bonn government, which has paid more than \$54 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors since World War II, has balked at paying compensation either to Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe or to former slave laborers for Nazi enterprises, most of whom live in Eastern Europe.

Most of the companies who used slave labor during World War II have likewise declined to make payments.

In an attempt to change government policy, the Green Party plans to introduce a resolution in Parliament next month establishing a government-sponsored foundation to make one-time compensation payments to all former slave laborers.

Money for the foundation could come from the German government as well as from companies that used forced labor during the war.

Legislator Volker Beck said the Bonn government has refused to take action on this issue, despite two parliamentary resolutions in the early 1990s calling for compensation to former slave laborers.

He added that he believes the government is delaying action because time is on its side.

"The longer we wait, the cheaper the solution will be," he said, "because survivors are dying every day."

The district court in Bonn is currently deliberating the case of 20 former Jewish slave laborers in a factory near Auschwitz who have asked the German government for compensation.

The court said it would issue a verdict in November. □

Extremists driven by aggression, not political ideology, says report

FRANKFURT (JTA) — Right-wing extremists in Germany are driven by youthful aggression more than by a particular program or ideology, according to a new report.

The hate crimes and attacks against foreigners in Germany are committed mostly by young thugs with unresolved personal problems, the study says.

The report, which was written by government officials in the German state of Brandenburg, concludes that most of the perpetrators of hate crimes do not want to overthrow the current government and should not be treated as political criminals.

Instead, they are motivated by an amorphous hate of foreigners and an intolerance of all lifestyles different from their own, the report says.

Contrary to popular belief, few of the extremists are unemployed, according to the report, which says the vast majority are either high school students, apprentices, army recruits or employed workers.

But their overall level of education is low, and most of the employed work as tradesmen.

The report was based on material collected from all 16 German states. □

Russian Jewish groups create umbrella to coordinate activity

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russia's Jews have a new umbrella group.

The group, known as the Jewish Community of Russia, brings together three of the community's leading Jewish organizations in an effort to streamline their activities and prevent discord.

The group, created late last month, was cosponsored by the Va'ad, the Russian Jewish Congress and the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations. "This is a moment of great symbolic meaning," Mikhail Chlenov, the Va'ad's president, told a Moscow news conference after the new body's inaugural meeting.

"It symbolizes a unity in our community that we have at last managed to achieve," he said.

Estimates of the Russian Jewish population run between 300,000 and 1.5 million, but only a small minority are actively affiliated with the community.

Since the fall of communism six years ago, a wide range of organizations and programs have been created — including day and Sunday schools, cultural societies, publications and welfare programs — to meet an increased interest in Judaism.

Chlenov said there are as many as 500 different Jewish groups currently operating in Russia.

The proliferation has led to replication of efforts and bureaucratic snafus that have hindered the community's development, particularly in some provincial centers.

Promoting further consolidation

By "calling the new organization the Jewish Community of Russia, we can promote the further consolidation of the forces that are present inside the community," Chlenov said.

Most prominent among these forces are the three umbrella groups that are cosponsoring the new organization.

The Va'ad, the Jewish Federation of Russia, was formed in 1989 as the country's first umbrella organization to represent Jewish interests.

The Russian Jewish Congress, created in early 1996 by some of Russia's most prominent Jewish bankers and businessmen, has recently started building its own nationwide structure.

The Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations, known as KEROOR, serves as an umbrella body for Russia's 60 Orthodox and Reform congregations.

According to Chlenov, most of the Jewish organizations that exist in Russia are members of one of these three groups.

He described the Va'ad as the political center of Russian Jewry, the RJC as the community's financial nucleus and KEROOR as its religious center.

Chlenov said these umbrella groups will continue to function separately, but that the new organization will help overcome potential conflicts among them.

The leaders of the three groups were elected co-chairmen of the new body: Alexander Osovtsov, executive vice president of the Russian Jewish Congress; the Va'ad's Chlenov; and KEROOR leader Adolph Shayevich, who is Russia's chief rabbi.

The newly created Jewish Community of Russia, Chlenov said will oversee three national programs:

- Overseeing the preparation of texts used in Jewish schools;
- Setting strategies for communal welfare activities; and,

- Creating an informational network to serve local Jewish organizations.

The Jewish Community of Russia was created after the Russian Parliament passed a law last year allowing minority groups to form their own groupings — known as federal and local autonomies — to serve minority interests on the national and regional level.

Since late 1996, eight local Jewish autonomies have been formed in central and southern Russia, Siberia and the Ural Mountains.

It was representatives of these groups that gathered in Moscow to establish the new organization, which will operate as the community's federal autonomy.

The Law on National-Cultural Autonomies not only grants state recognition to Jews and other minority groups to preserve their traditions, culture and languages.

The law also obliges the authorities to provide financial support for the needs of Jews and the other minorities.

Jewish leaders would not estimate how much financial assistance they might receive from the federal budget or when the assistance would come. □

Meeting with Clinton, relatives of Argentine victims press case

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — Argentina's investigations into two terror bombings that targeted Jewish sites earlier in the decade were criticized during a meeting here between local Jewish representatives and President Clinton.

The Oct. 16 meeting, which brought representatives from all major Argentine Jewish organizations together with Clinton for more than an hour, focused almost exclusively on the two bombings.

The Jewish leaders told Clinton, who was joined by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and 10 other American officials, of the need to battle terrorism.

They did not criticize the Argentine government's inability to find those responsible for the bombings.

But five relatives of the bombing victims who were present at the meeting gave Clinton a five-page letter saying, "The very poor performance of the Argentine judiciary and security agencies is an invitation to terrorism to strike again."

Last week, before the Jewish leaders spoke with Clinton, Argentine President Carlos Menem met with them and asked them not to criticize the government when they spoke with the American president during his visit to Latin America.

Menem apparently was seeking to avoid embarrassment over his government's continued inability to solve the March 17, 1992, bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the July 18, 1994, bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, also known as AMIA.

The attacks in Buenos Aires killed 115 people and left hundreds of wounded. Jewish leaders here and abroad have cited incompetence, corruption and anti-Semitism among security and government officials as causes of Argentina's inability to solve either case.

The Jewish community officials, who acceded to Menem's request, asked Clinton for information about the attacks they believe is being held by the FBI and CIA, but was never disclosed to Argentine investigators.

But the victims' relatives, who were apparently not bound by any promises to Menem, presented Clinton with the letter.

Jewish leaders, who later described the meeting as "highly positive," said Clinton and Albright had been very sensitive to their concerns and had vowed to press on with the fight against terror. □