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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

IDF encircles Palestinian cities

Israeli soldiers held onto positions in six Palestinian cities in the West Bank in an offensive that began after the Oct. 17 assassination of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

At least 11 Palestinians were killed in fierce weekend battles across the West Bank. [Page 3]

Lawmakers: Don't sell out Israel

Lawmakers are sending a letter to President Bush, urging him not to sacrifice Israeli interests to gain support from Arab states for the coalition against terrorism, and to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

"We respectfully suggest that when you are approached with grandiose plans for the Middle East and assertions that 'you have to do something' about Israel to sustain the coalition, you are being asked, in essence, to validate our foe's despicable lies," reads the letter, which is being circulated by Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.).

Testimony: Rabbi paid for murder

A former private investigator testified that a New Jersey rabbi paid him to kill the rabbi's wife and that the rabbi made the payment while sitting shiva after the murder was committed.

Leonard Jenoff gave the testimony last Friday in the trial of Rabbi Fred Neulander, accused of arranging the murder of his wife, Carol, who was found beaten to death at the couple's home in 1994.

Canada frees suspected terrorist

The premier of British Columbia, Gordon Campbell, criticized the Canadian province's Supreme Court for releasing a suspected Hezbollah terrorist on \$50,000 bail.

Ali Adham Amhaz, a resident of the province, was arrested last week on a U.S. warrant and may eventually be extradited.

In another development, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrested three men last week in a town in northern Alberta, ostensibly in connection with immigration-related matters in Canada and fraud charges in the United States.

But an immigration official said the three were nabbed as part of an ongoing investigation into the Sept. 11 terror attacks against the United States.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

After Arab attacks, Paris Jews are uneasy — but leaders are silent

By Andrew Diamond

PARIS (JTA) — To stroll through parts of the 19th and 20th districts of Paris on a Friday evening or a Saturday afternoon is to encounter a thriving Jewish community.

Since the beginning of September, however, insecurity and mistrust have disrupted the Sabbath tranquility for members of this predominantly Sephardic Jewish community.

During the High Holidays, the Paris police dispatched heavily armed detachments to guard synagogues throughout the city. The vigilance reflects the heightened fear since the Sept. 11 terror attack in the United States and the threat of renewed violence to mark the one-year anniversary of the Palestinian intifada.

There also were other reasons, closer to home, to fear an attack.

On the first Sunday of September, a group of fifty or sixty Arab youths attacked Jewish teenagers and tourists on Paris' famous Champs Elysees boulevard. Shouts of "Death to the Jews" and "Heil Hitler" filled the air, according to witnesses, as the assailants hurled bottles and stones at the Jews.

Fortunately, a unit of crowd control police arrived in time to prevent a clash between hundreds of Jewish and Arab teen-agers.

Jewish youths involved in the incident claimed the Arab teens had instigated a fight by groping Jewish girls.

Za'ava, a student in Paris, suggested the attack had been coordinated by Arab youths from the suburbs.

"They knew that we always go there on that day," she claimed, "and they came to start a fight."

The following Sunday, a group of Arab youths allegedly attacked the crowded terrace of a kosher restaurant in the 19th district.

At 6 p.m., as the youthful clientele of Papy Youda sipped drinks on a sidewalk lined with Jewish businesses, an Arab youth took a chair and slammed it into the restaurant's door and windows. His partner used a wrench to hit several cars that were double parked in front of the cafe.

This was hardly the first time Jewish businesses on the street had been vandalized.

But most of the previous incidents had occurred anonymously, under cover of darkness.

Such direct confrontations do not bode well for Jews in the 19th and 20th districts, who for several decades have shared their neighborhoods with "Maghrebins," the French term for Arabs of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian descent.

Both Jews and Muslims from the former French colonies poured into these low-income areas from the late 1950s through the early 1970s after the North African wars of independence.

Immigrants and their French-born children still constitute a large proportion of residents in these neighborhoods.

While relations between Jews and Arabs of North African origin have been strained in the past, anti-Semitic incidents have sharply escalated in the past year.

Many fear that the latest hostilities could signal a return to the tense situation of last October, when a wave of arson and graffiti attacks against Jewish synagogues struck Paris and its suburbs.

Since then, leaders of the Jewish community have been criticized for not speaking out strongly enough against such violence — or against a French government that has

MIDEAST FOCUS

Minister: Labor should quit gov't

Israel's trade minister criticized the Israeli thrust into Palestinian cities in the West Bank and called on her fellow Labor Party members to resign from the government.

Dalia Itzik also said Sunday that Labor officials plan to offer a proposal later this week for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and much of the West Bank.

Syria blames Mossad for Sept. 11

The Syrian defense minister claims that Israel's Mossad spy agency planned the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and told thousands of Jewish employees at the Twin Towers not to go to work that day, the Jerusalem Post reports.

The Jewish conspiracy theory on the Sept. 11 attacks has gained credence across the Muslim world. American Jewish leaders have called on the Bush administration to refute the comments, made by Mustafa Tlas in Damascus, and to condemn them as anti-Semitism.

Israel, India discuss missile sale

Israeli and Indian officials are discussing India's possible purchase of Israeli technology for Arrow 2 surface-to-air missiles. The missiles would reportedly be used for the anti-aircraft defense of the Indian capital of New Delhi.

Israeli tourists arrested for spying

Four Israelis were arrested by the Greek secret police for taking pictures of the port of Souda on the island of Crete. There is a U.S. naval base at the port, and the four appeared before a judge last Friday on charges of taking pictures of military installations.

A police commander later said the four, who had won a trip to Crete as a bonus from their company, were innocent of any wrongdoing.



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been unwilling to punish the perpetrators and a French media that has been reluctant to report on the incidents.

France's chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, responded to such complaints by focusing a meeting with Prime Minister Lionel Jospin last July on the more than 1,000 anti-Semitic attacks that had been recorded since October 2000.

"The way in which the events are reported has an influence on public opinion that is consequently negative toward the Jewish community," Sitruk told Jospin.

After the latest episode on the Champs Elysees, Jews called a radio show to express their outrage that no arrests had been made and that the only newspaper to cover the situation, *Le Parisien*, portrayed it as a brawl between youths rather than as an anti-Semitic attack.

Thus far, however, the leaders of Jewish organizations in France have remained silent about the affair.

Their reticence may indicate the continuation of a policy by Jewish leaders and French government officials of portraying such incidents as the acts of "disaffected Arab youths" rather than as a reflection of the larger Arab community. Given the youth involvement in the desecration of synagogues and the more recent physical attacks, this may not be an unreasonable approach.

Many fear that publicity would only embolden the young men who carry out anti-Jewish aggression. Many of these youths have seized upon the Palestinian cause to attain a sense of personal honor in North African communities beset by high unemployment and school dropout rates.

The danger is that, beneath the community's veil of silence, feelings of anger and fear grow among Jewish youths who encounter their Arab neighbors each day.

Reflecting on relations between Jews and Arabs in the 19th district, Sephardic teens gathered in the Buttes Chaumont park after one recent Shabbat articulated a militant but defensive posture.

"The Arabs in France are like the Arabs in Palestine, but we are not afraid," said Yossi, 18, displaying the button of a Zionist youth group on the lapel of his shirt.

His friend Mikael proudly explained how they had joined the French chapter of Betar, a worldwide Jewish youth organization, to protect the community here against terrorism.

But others in the park seemed less assured. Sabrina, 16, said her parents talked of moving to another neighborhood in Paris because their current neighborhood was too dangerous.

Another girl said her parents wanted to move to Israel, where they would feel safer.

Such sentiments suggest that Jews in Paris are bracing for the worst. Yet there are preliminary indications that the Sept. 11 terror attacks actually may have caused aggression against Jews in France to decrease.

In the five weeks since the attacks, only a few minor acts of vandalism against synagogues have been reported.

Moreover, the French paper *Liberation* recently reported a drop in both delinquency and religious activity in the weeks after Sept. 11.

This represents a departure from the period of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the months after the intifada began, when mosque attendance, delinquency and anti-Semitic violence rose rapidly.

There may be some hope, then, that the latest calls for holy war will not be heeded in Paris. Either way, the young may be the first to know. □

Anthrax threat strikes Canada

TORONTO (JTA) — B'nai Brith Canada's office was evacuated last week after a letter was received containing a suspicious white powder.

Several Jewish organizations in Canada, including the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Israeli Consulate in Toronto, have received letters from the same Canadian address containing white powder and anti-Semitic comments.

The powder is being tested for anthrax, but no employees have been given precautionary medication, according to Len Rudner, director of community relations for the Canadian Jewish Congress. □

JEWISH WORLD

Russian tycoon faces charges

A Russian media tycoon with Jewish roots is wanted on fraud, embezzlement and money-laundering charges.

Boris Berezovsky, who is currently living abroad, denies the charges against him, most of which are believed to center around money he allegedly embezzled from Aeroflot, Russia's state-controlled airline.

Petition urges PFLP's expulsion

More than 30 American Jewish leaders signed a petition to the Bush administration urging the White House to press Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to expel the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine from the PLO.

The petition, organized by the Zionist Organization of America, also seeks the closure of PFLP training camps and the extradition of terrorists who have perpetrated attacks on Israel and the United States.

The PFLP claimed responsibility for the Oct. 17 assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi in a Jerusalem hotel.

N.Y. paper apologizes for editorial

A newspaper published in upstate New York apologized for an editorial that quoted a Pakistani as saying Jews were to blame for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks against the United States.

After getting complaints of anti-Semitism, the Oneida Daily Dispatch also fired the managing editor, who wrote the editorial. In its apology, the paper said, "We understand that readers of the editorial found it offensive, poorly reasoned and based on flawed facts. We agree with those observations." The newspaper said it would soon publish a full rebuttal.

Babi Yar massacre remembered

Kiryat Gat, Israel and Chicago marked the 60th anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, in which Nazis and local collaborators in Ukraine killed tens of thousands of Jews.

The two communities are "partnered" with Kiev, where the massacre of more than 30,000 Jews took place. The State of Israel and the Jewish Agency for Israel also commemorated the slaughter with a ceremony at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. Two memorial events were also held recently in Kiev.

Jewish leader flees Uzbekistan

An Uzbek Jewish leader recently fled his country after he said a criminal case was opened against him for an article he published in a Swedish journal.

The article published in the journal *Central Asia and Caucasus* by Mikhail Degtiar discusses anti-Semitism in, and Jewish emigration from, Uzbekistan.

IDF troops circle Palestinian cities as Arafat is told to arrest terrorists

JTA Staff Report

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel has launched its biggest operation in areas under Palestinian control since the two sides signed their first interim peace accords in 1993.

Palestinian officials charged Sunday that Israel is seeking to topple the Palestinian Authority — but Israel denied the accusation.

In an offensive that began after the Oct. 17 assassination of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, the Israel Defense Force took up positions over the weekend in and around six of the largest Palestinian-controlled cities in the West Bank — in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm and Kalkilya.

"It is the most wide-scale ground operation undertaken to date against the Palestinian Authority," the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, was quoted as telling the Israeli Cabinet on Sunday.

At least 11 Palestinians were killed in fierce weekend battles across the West Bank. Israeli officials said they launched the incursions to nab Palestinian terrorists planning attacks on Israelis.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said the ground offensive would end after he was satisfied that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat had begun cracking down on terrorists.

At the same time, he said Sunday that Israel has "no interest in remaining in places where the army has entered."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres gave a similar assurance when he met Sunday in New York with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, according to a spokesman for the Israeli mission to the United Nations.

"We do not want to overthrow the Palestinian Authority," Peres was quoted as saying.

The Israeli operation has drawn international criticism and sparked disagreements within Sharon's coalition government.

U.S. officials criticized the Israeli thrust into Palestinian cities in the West Bank, but they stopped short of calling for an Israeli withdrawal.

"Israeli entries into Palestinian-controlled areas are not helpful, complicate the situation and should be halted," the U.S. State Department said.

The United States has been urging the two sides to reach a cease-fire to prevent Arab states from abandoning the U.S.-led international campaign against terrorism.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said Sunday he called leaders from both sides in an effort to end the fighting.

The same day, Pope John Paul urged Israel and the Palestinians to end the fighting in Bethlehem, site of some of the heaviest exchanges of fire during the Israeli thrust.

At least three Palestinians were killed Sunday in Bethlehem.

One of them was killed near the Church of the Nativity, the site of Jesus' birth according to Christian tradition.

"War and death arrived even on the square of the Basilica of the Nativity," the pope said in what was one his most dramatic calls for peace in the Middle East. "Violence is for everybody only a path of death and destruction which dishonors the holiness of God and the dignity of man."

Israel moved into Bethlehem and the nearby towns of Beit Jalla and Beit Sahur last Friday in an attempt to stop Palestinian fire on the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo.

Palestinian gunmen continued firing on Gilo throughout the weekend, but no injuries were reported.

The fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen erupted Oct. 18 after senior Palestinian militant Atef Abayat — who was sought by Israel for numerous shooting attacks including one last month that killed an Israeli woman — died along with two other Palestinians when their car exploded.

Palestinian officials blamed Israel for the explosion but Israel denied responsibility, saying the men were preparing a car bomb to use against Israel that went off prematurely.

Israeli officials said it was "astonishing" that Abayat was preparing a bomb, considering that the Palestinian Authority recently claimed that it had arrested him. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**Liberal rabbis in Israel optimistic despite recent legislative setback***By Jessica Steinberg*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When an American immigrant recently asked the Chief Rabbinate for permission to marry her Israeli boyfriend, the Jewish state's Orthodox establishment turned her down.

In order to marry under Jewish law in Israel, the woman, who didn't want her name mentioned, would have to re-convert to Judaism, rabbis told her. Her mother, who had converted to Judaism before she was born, hadn't had an Orthodox conversion.

Instead of taking the easy way out — a civil marriage outside Israel — the woman is undergoing another conversion.

"People don't want just a civil marriage," said Rabbi Uri Regev, director of the Israel Religious Action Center, an advocacy arm of the Reform movement in Israel. "They're brainwashed to think that would make their kids mamzerim — bastards — in the eyes of the state. They want the option of civil and also Reform and Conservative marriages."

That option still isn't available in Israel. And a recent incident in the Knesset has reopened the emotional, controversial debate over "Who is a Jew" — with a vengeance.

In late September, the Knesset Finance Committee turned down a government request for funding of the Joint Conversion Institute. The institute was set up in 1999 in accordance with a government commission to prepare candidates for conversion, with a panel including five Orthodox rabbis, one Conservative rabbi and one Reform rabbi.

The Finance Ministry had earmarked nearly \$1.6 million in funding for the institute.

But two fervently Orthodox Knesset members, committee chairman Yakov Litzman and Moshe Gafni of the United Torah Judaism Party, quickly convened the session and rejected the budget request before other committee members made it to the meeting.

"I don't think it's fair that the institute should get 7 million shekels and the Rabbinate only gets half a million, when only 15 percent of the converts go through the institute," Litzman told JTA. "Second of all, we want all converts to go through the rabbinate," since conversion "shouldn't just be given out on the street."

Litzman's figures could not be confirmed. Institute supporters were disappointed by the parliamentary trick, saying the lack of funding could severely curtail the institute's activities.

Deputy Prime Minister Natan Sharansky, who chairs the Interministerial Committee for Diaspora Affairs, called it an "outrageous move" that could "suddenly undermine the entire structure of the institute."

Around 2,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union converted to Judaism in the last year. Another 300,000 Russian immigrants are not halachically Jewish and require conversion to be considered Jewish for matters of personal status — such as marriage — in Israel. According to Benjamin Ish-Shalom, the institute's director, the institute currently has 2,500 conversion students in 140 classes throughout the country. But some activities will have to be curtailed until funds are available, he indicated.

This could happen as soon as the next Finance Committee meeting. Even if the institute gets its money, however, that won't

solve the problem, liberal rabbis say. "I don't believe the institute is the answer to the conversion crisis," Regev said. "It won't deliver mass conversions because the Chief Rabbinate won't facilitate the" large-scale "conversions of people that everybody knows aren't going to be observant Jews."

That, according to Orthodox writer Jonathan Rosenblum, is precisely the problem with the institute.

"Conversion isn't a Jewish knowledge test," Rosenblum said. Many Orthodox officials believe converts must pledge to follow a strictly observant lifestyle.

Despite the setback, Regev and Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Conservative movement in Israel, believe the latest blow to the institute might ultimately lead the courts to legalize the local Reform and Conservative movements.

That battle currently is taking place in Israel's Supreme Court. If the justices decide to officially recognize Israel's Reform and Conservative movements, it would allow rabbis of all streams to offer their full services and to practice as rabbis "like their colleagues in North America," Bandel said.

For Bandel, the institute is an important part of Israel's ongoing dialogue about religious pluralism, because it invokes Jewish unity. Yet he also thinks the only real solution will be a legal one.

Yet even if the Supreme Court ruling — which is long overdue — legalizes the Conservative and Reform movements, Bandel said he would still encourage Russian immigrants to use the government's Orthodox institutions. Only those who come to the Conservative and Reform movements out of ideological empathy would be welcome, he said. At the same time, Bandel and Regev believe many Israelis want to be part of the pluralistic movements, and support a more progressive view of religion and state.

A recent poll by the Dahaf Research Institute, commissioned by Regev's Israel Religious Action Center, showed that some 63 percent of 503 respondents said the Reform and Conservative movements should have the same status as Orthodoxy.

In addition, 65 percent of those polled favor freedom of choice in marriage, including recognition of Reform, Conservative and civil wedding ceremonies. Likewise, 56 percent favor recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions, while 62 percent want the Supreme Court to be the arbiter of issues of religion and state.

Rosenblum dismissed the poll results as misleading.

"I'm not sure how much Israeli Jews know about Reform and Conservative Judaism," he said. "If they knew what Reform is in America, if they put up an advertising campaign showing mixed marriages under a chupah with a priest, a ketubah with a crucifix, marrying assistant rabbis to their gay partners, then I think you would find less interest in the movement."

He also noted that despite the publicity the non-Orthodox movements received in recent years in their fight for religious pluralism, they remain small.

"Both are active here and they haven't attracted many adherents," Rosenblum said. "I don't think Israelis are terribly interested in Conservative or Reform Judaism for themselves."

Regev, however, drew very different conclusions from the poll results.

"We can conclude that a 2-1 ratio of Israeli Jews are saying, 'Enough is enough, we want a pluralistic Israel, we want equality and rights for all streams,'" he said. "It's clear to me we're only dealing with a question of time — not if, but when — and that's what people are supporting." □