



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 6

Wednesday, January 9, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S.: Arms were headed to P.A.

The United States acknowledged that the weapons Israel seized in the Red Sea last week were bound for the Palestinian Authority.

"We find the fact that there are Palestinians involved in shipping these weapons deeply troubling," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Tuesday.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld praised Israel's actions in stopping the ship.

"They clearly had very good intelligence that those weapons were going to be used against them," Rumsfeld said on CSPAN's "Washington Journal."

"I think that is not unusual or not uncalled for when one thinks of the magnitude of the weapon stash that was on that ship," Rumsfeld added. [Page 4]

Crown Heights ruling to be fought

The brother of the Chasidic man killed in the 1991

Crown Heights riots will fight a court decision calling for a new trial for the two men convicted of the slaying. Norman Rosenbaum told JTA that he plans to fly from Australia to New York in the coming days. [Page 1]

Pentagon sends aid to Israel

The Pentagon authorized an additional \$28 million for Israel for counterterrorism equipment.

A U.S. State Department spokesman told JTA the funds were found in the Defense Department's budget, earmarked for foreign counter-terrorism prevention.

The money will be used for robotics and X-ray machines to scan trucks and cargo containers.

Israel must purchase the items from U.S. manufacturers.

Iran: British envoy a Jewish spy

Iran called Britain's new ambassador to Tehran a Jewish spy.

According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Britain threatened to downgrade its diplomatic ties if Iran refuses to accept David Reddaway as the new British envoy.

British diplomatic sources were unable to confirm whether Reddaway is Jewish, but they said his experience as a diplomat makes him eminently qualified for the posting.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Crown Heights ruling sparks ire, but also resolve to live in peace

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish leaders are frustrated with a decision to retry two men convicted of civil rights violations in the killing of a yeshiva student during the worst recorded riots between blacks and Jews in New York.

But few expect Monday's ruling and the possibility of a new trial to reignite black-Jewish tensions in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights or elsewhere in the city.

Chanina Sperlin, executive vice chairman of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, said that while the neighborhood's Jewish community is angry at the decision, "We will stand united with all our African American and Caribbean leaders with whom we have worked closely since 1991 to help build the entire neighborhood."

"This will not take us back," Sperlin said at a news conference Tuesday with representatives from the neighborhood's Jewish, black and Caribbean organizations.

In ordering the new trial, a federal appeals court ruled that the judge in the 1997 federal trial had improperly manipulated the selection of jurors based on their race and religion.

However, the court also upheld the federal civil rights statute under which the defendants had been charged — something the defendants' lawyers had appealed.

Lemrick Nelson, now 25, and Charles Price, now 47, were found guilty in violating the civil rights of Yankel Rosenbaum, who was killed during the 1991 riots in Crown Heights, which has a large Chasidic community.

Both Nelson and Price are currently in prison.

Nelson, who had been charged with Rosenbaum's murder, was acquitted of those charges in a 1992 state trial.

Nelson and Price were part of a group of blacks shouting, "Get the Jew!" who chased down and fatally stabbed Rosenbaum, a 29-year-old Australian Jew who was studying in the United States.

The Crown Heights riots followed the death of a 7-year-old black child, Gavin Cato, who was hit by a vehicle in the motorcade of the late Lubavitch Rebbe Menachem Schneerson.

The Jewish driver of that vehicle was not charged and moved to Israel.

In Australia, Rosenbaum's brother, Norman, told JTA his "resolve for justice in seeing Yankel's killers punished has not diminished one little bit."

Rosenbaum, who has made more than 100 trips from his Melbourne home to the United States in his fight to see his brother's killers brought to justice, said he would leave for the United States within a week to explore the options for appealing the decision.

Rosenbaum, 44, also said he spoke Tuesday with Gavin Cato's father, Carmel, who was supportive of his decision to appeal the retrial.

Rosenbaum and Cato met last summer in an effort to heal old wounds.

The 1991 riots came amid long-simmering tensions among the communities, and relations have improved significantly since then, according to community leaders.

At Tuesday's news conference, leaders of all three communities said the ruling will not cause them to waver in their commitment to work together toward unity, progress and growth for the entire neighborhood.

"The bottom line is that we're going to let the justice system take its course," said Robert Matthews, chairman of the local community board and co-chairman of Project

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel: Arafat knew about ship

Israeli officials said they would release documents proving that Yasser Arafat was responsible for smuggling arms that Israel seized last week.

The officials gave few details, other than saying the documents to be released later this week would include papers on the ownership of the vessel and the weapons purchase. Arafat has denied involvement and on Monday ordered an investigation, vowing to punish those responsible.

U.S. envoy called 'Jew boy'

An Israeli legislator called the U.S. ambassador to Israel a "little Jew boy."

Lawmaker Tzvi Hendel was criticizing Daniel Kurtzer, who had said Israel was spending money on communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip instead of helping the disabled, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Peres sides with India

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres supports India's war against terrorism.

Speaking Tuesday in New Delhi, Peres drew parallels between India and Israel in their fight against terrorists. India blames two Pakistan-based Kashmiri groups for a Dec. 13 suicide raid on its Parliament.

Sharon-Netanyahu rotation?

Likud Party officials in Israel reportedly proposed rotating the premiership between Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu if the party wins the next national elections.

Likud members close to Prime Minister Sharon made the proposal for fear of a rupture in the party should Netanyahu, a former prime minister, decide to run for the party leadership, the daily Ha'aretz reported.



Daily News Bulletin

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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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CARE, a communal relations group in Crown Heights. "The communities are working together and we will continue to work together."

Daniel Botnick, executive director of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, a member of Project CARE, said the retrial decision is "positively not going to reignite tensions. Conditions are completely different from the way they were 10 years ago."

CARE is one of several projects in which Jews and other ethnic groups work together.

Botnick said the various groups in Crown Heights are now in constant contact with each other and "the lines of communication are just unbelievable and open."

The reaction to the decision among Crown Heights Jews is "pretty consistent," Botnick said.

"We're dismayed by the reversal of this decision over what appears to be a small technicality. We're very heartened by the fact that the civil rights statute was upheld, and at the same time no one's looking forward to another trial of this nature because it could open old wounds."

"In the end the justice system will do the right thing, which is see to it that a murderer doesn't walk," he said.

Botnick — who moved to Crown Heights the exact August day the riots began — is intimately familiar with how bad things were in this neighborhood during and immediately after the riots and how much they have improved since.

Although he lived several blocks away from the epicenter of the rioting, he passed by it every day on his way to pray at the Lubavitch headquarters and en route to work in downtown Brooklyn.

The subway station then was quite tense and "kids yelled at me on the street."

"The atmosphere around here is like day and night relative to that," he said, noting that "The police watch this place with a microscope to determine whether any bias activity is going on."

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York issued a statement this week describing the retrial decision as "incredibly frustrating."

"In a desperate attempt to avoid the consequences of their crime, the defendants appealed on the grounds that the jury reconstruction — of which they had affirmatively approved — violated their rights," the statement said.

However, the JCRC statement expressed pleasure that the ruling upheld the federal civil rights statute under which Nelson and Price were convicted.

"We are gratified that the court clearly agreed that Jews" are "indeed protected by the civil rights laws," the group said.

The court ruled that the federal judge in the case, David Trager of U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, had improperly allowed a potentially biased Jewish person — who had said he didn't know if he could give a fair trial — onto the jury.

However, during the trial, defense lawyers had agreed to the jury, which consisted of seven whites, three blacks and two Jews.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a group that promotes black-Jewish relations, said he doubted that the retrial will spark new tensions.

"It's 2002, not 1991," he said. "The relationship between African-Americans and Jews both in Crown Heights and greater New York has so markedly improved that this issue will not even cause a spark."

Nonetheless, he said he was disturbed by the ruling. "I question whether matters of life and death should be overturned on technical issues."

Agudath Israel of America, which represents fervently Orthodox Jews, agreed. In a statement, the group "bemoaned the tragic bottom line that a cold-blooded murder of an innocent Jew may go unpunished as a result of this unfortunate ruling."

The group, which is critical of the fact that no other actions were taken against the rioters, said in its statement, "If even that one set of convictions falls by the wayside, as may well happen in light of the new ruling, it would mean that the justice system totally failed the Crown Heights Jewish community, and all Americans and all who care about the rule of law." □

(JTA correspondent Henry Benjamin in Sydney, Australia, contributed to this report.)

JEWISH WORLD

UJC task force established to respond to Argentine needs

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — North American Jewry's federation system has assembled a task force to decide how to respond to the unhinging of Argentina and its Jewish community.

Faced with an emergency request for more than \$4 million from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella of the federation system, set up the task force last week to decipher the scope of the problem and determine how to respond.

The formation of the task force, headed by Karen Shapira, chair of the UJC's Israel and Overseas Pillar, comes as Argentina devalued its peso, sending the country into further economic uncertainty.

Argentina's economic and political collapse presents a first for the organized American Jewish world: Unlike rescuing Soviet refuseniks or airlifting Ethiopians to Israel, this operation addresses the unique challenges of saving a hearty, modern, Western community.

The challenge comes as UJC's principal overseas partners — the JDC and the Jewish Agency for Israel — which are primarily concerned with community support and helping Jews move to Israel, respectively, have been providing relief on the ground.

"This is an unprecedented historical event for the Jewish community," said Will Recant, JDC's assistant executive vice president for Latin America.

Unlike so many modern Jewish relief efforts, this isn't a poor country emerging from communism, Recant said.

This time, Jewish agencies are challenged with a new set of questions.

He offered the case of a middle-class Jewish Argentine who has lost his job and can no longer make mortgage.

"What do you do? Do you let them lose their house? Do you give them a subsidy so they can make this month's mortgage payment? Do you give them a job so they can meet their mortgage payments in the future? Or do you tell them to sell their apartment and get out of there, you can't afford to live like that anymore?"

These are the questions facing the organized Jewish community as it tries to accommodate the swell of Argentines begging for aliyah, or immigration to Israel — and others who want their old lives back.

And it's not just the 26,000 Jews living below the poverty line in Argentina who require attention.

With day schools and community centers closing and consolidating, the entire infrastructure of the 200,000-strong community has been affected.

That's not to mention the 6,000 to 7,000 Jews who are currently in the process of preparing for aliyah; applications increased threefold since the rioting broke out a week and a half ago, according to Jewish Agency officials.

Foreseeing the problems in Argentina, the JDC stepped up its work there four years ago and has been providing food and medicine in 37 Jewish centers across the country.

JDC officials say because of the emergency efforts in recent months, the resources budgeted for Argentina for this year will last approximately six more weeks.

At that time they hope the UJC will have come through with a strategy and funding — to the tune of \$4.7 million.

They are hoping the Argentine Jewish community, which has retained some of its wealth, can raise an additional \$4 million.

But this week's devaluation of the peso may prevent Argentine Jewry from coming up with that much. The JDC's local partner institutions will now be losing 30 to 40 percent of the value of their money, Recant said Monday.

Stephen Hoffman, UJC's president, predicted that the peso's devaluation will likely mean the JDC's initial request to the UJC will change.

But he also said that judging from reaction during a conference call for federation leadership last week, interest is "relatively high."

For its part, the Jewish Agency has yet to inform the UJC how much money it needs. □

Russian church investigated

Russian prosecutors agreed to open a case against the Russian Orthodox Church for allegedly inciting hatred.

In making the decision, the prosecutors in the Russian city of Sverdlovsk reversed their earlier decision not to pursue the case against a local diocese for allegedly publishing anti-Semitic materials, including "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

Jewish green party on WZC ballot

An environmental Jewish group will be on the ballot for the World Zionist Congress.

The Green Zionists Alliance wants environmental improvements in Israel and wants unaffiliated Jews to play a role in the Zionist movement.

The party wants seats in the Congress so it can influence the \$350 million budget of the Jewish Agency for Israel. The voter registration deadline for elections to the American delegation to the Congress is Jan. 18. Any U.S. Jew over the age of 18 who pays a \$4 registration fee is eligible to vote.

S. Africa to host peace meeting

South Africa plans to host a meeting aimed at reviving the Middle East peace process.

According to The Associated Press, South African President Thabo Mbeki plans to bring together Israeli peace activists and Palestinian officials. The meeting is slated to begin Wednesday at an undisclosed location.

Ex-Nazi guard loses appeal

A man convicted of having been a Nazi concentration camp guard lost his appeal to retain his citizenship.

On Monday, a U.S. appeals court ruled against Theodor Szebinskyj, who lost his citizenship two years ago after a court determined he had served as a Nazi guard.

A retired machinist living in the Philadelphia area, Szebinskyj now could face deportation.

Nazi propagandist strikes again

Hitler's favorite film propagandist is coming out with a new movie.

Leni Riefenstahl plans to release a 45-minute documentary about underwater life in the Indian Ocean in August, when she will turn 100.

Her "Triumph of the Will," which documents a 1933 Nazi Party congress, is considered a cinematic masterpiece, as well as a disturbing piece of propaganda. Riefenstahl was cleared by a postwar court of culpable support for the Nazis, but she was branded a sympathizer, according to The New York Times.

She continues to say she had no knowledge of Nazi ideology or atrocities.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES**After hesitating, State Dept. admits ship was bound for P.A.**

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After equivocating for days about Israel's capture of a boat laden with 50 tons of weapons, the United States has acknowledged that the arms were bound for the Palestinian Authority.

Analysts say the Bush administration initially hesitated because it didn't want the issue to derail a renewed U.S. peace effort in the Middle East.

The State Department acknowledged Tuesday that the weapons seized in the Red Sea on Jan. 3 were bound for the Palestinian Authority. The ship reportedly picked up the weapons from Iran and was headed for the Gaza Strip.

"We find the fact that there are Palestinians involved in shipping these weapons deeply troubling," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. "I would say we are waiting to hear a full explanation of the incident" from Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

The Palestinian Authority has denied any connection to the boat, although the captain — a senior officer in the Palestinian navy — says he received orders from a high-ranking P.A. official. American officials called the Palestinian denials "unconvincing."

The Palestinian Authority announced that it would investigate the incident and punish anyone it found responsible.

Boucher said the State Department was cooperating with senior Israeli intelligence officials, who were expected to brief the Bush administration on Wednesday.

The incident "tells us that there are Palestinians who want to escalate the violence," he said.

Even after the captain of the ship described his mission, State Department officials publicly said they were seeking more details before holding Arafat responsible for the shipment.

"We tend to like to have the facts before we draw the conclusions, so at this point, we're still talking, obviously, to the Israelis and talking to the Palestinians about getting the facts in this matter," Boucher said Monday. He called comments from the captain about his association with the Palestinian Authority and Arafat's Fatah movement "the grand speculative hypothetical that we don't try to answer."

Earlier, Bush administration officials speculated that the supplies might be headed for Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, not the Palestinian Authority. Boucher also said they were investigating reports that the shipment was loaded in Dubai, not Iran.

Israel displayed the seized arsenal in Eilat to reporters as U.S. envoy Anthony Zinni was trying to bring Israel and the Palestinian Authority closer to a lasting cease-fire. The former Marine commander returned this week as scheduled to the United States but his mission is ongoing, and the State Department was concerned that condemning the Palestinians' link to the weapons would stifle efforts to resume cooperation.

State Department officials say they are taking the issue more seriously than their earlier public statements would indicate. American Jewish groups said that, on the basis of information they received about Washington's true perspective on the incident, they had anticipated the changed tone Tuesday.

"We do view it as a serious issue," one official said. "It's something Arafat has to take action on immediately."

But the Bush administration wants to use the shipment as leverage to make the Palestinian leader carry out a serious crackdown on terrorism, rather than as a last straw forcing sanctions against the Palestinian Authority.

"He says he is not responsible. This is an opportunity for him to root out the infrastructure" of terrorist groups the official said. "He needs to take the actions that illustrate that you ensure your authority is not undermined."

Israeli and American Jewish officials were angered by the slow U.S. response.

"I cannot understand the reaction of the United States," Israeli Justice Minister Meir Sheerit said Tuesday before meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in Washington.

The weapons could not have been bound for Hezbollah because of the clandestine manner in which they were going to arrive, he said, while Hezbollah receives its weapons openly by plane in Lebanon.

Israel's transportation minister, Ephraim Sneh, told reporters in Israel that the State Department's comments were an attempt to head off possible Israeli retaliation against the Palestinian Authority or Iran.

"It appears that the problem is that those who are hearing our words are not willing to admit the full significance," Sneh said. "If you ask yourself to what destination a ship will be headed if its captain is a senior official of the Palestinian Authority and there are other people on board who also belong to the authority, any reasonable person knows where it was bound."

The prevailing view is that the State Department had hoped to leave the door open for future security talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and allow Zinni to return to the region soon.

"This is an indication of the United States wanting to bring the Palestinians back to the table," said Tom Neumann, executive director of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

He said the United States goes through stages — first expressing anger at the Palestinians for their actions, then trying to work with them.

Yet the State Department's waffling sends an inconsistent message about the U.S. view on terrorism, Neumann said, especially after Sept. 11.

"You get them back to the table by your terms, not by denying reality," Neumann said. "There have to be consequences for behavior."

Many Jewish members in Congress, among Israel's staunchest political allies in the United States, are out of the country on business. The U.S. response thus has not received the type of congressional criticism as on past occasions.

Under other circumstances, lawmakers likely would cite the incident as further reason for the United States to impose sanctions on the Palestinian Authority, which the Bush administration resists.

"They are being very, very cautious," Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) said of the State Department. Ackerman, who is traveling in Israel and is expected to meet with Arafat later this week, said he will tell the Palestinian leader that the United States wants to see more action against terrorism.

"This is proof positive that they have been bullshitting everybody all these years," Ackerman said of the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's seizure overshadowed Zinni's mission to the region, highlighted by trilateral security talks. Zinni is expected to brief Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington before returning to the region Jan. 18. □