

World news

Palestinians hijack Italian ship; take more than 400 captives

PORT SAID, Egypt (AP) — Palestinians hijacked an Italian cruise ship with more than 400 people aboard off the Egyptian coast Monday, demanded the release of prisoners held in Israel and threatened to blow up the ship if attacked, port officials reported.

They said the ship had been bound from the Egyptian coastal city of Alexandria to Port Said, entrance to the Suez Canal, and headed out into the Mediterranean Sea after the hijacking, its destination unknown.

The threat to blow up the cruise ship Achille Lauro came from the hijackers' leader, identified only by the name Omar, the Egyptian officials said.

Leading the list of prisoners demanded in exchange for the ship was a Palestinian named Samir Konaiterry, they said.

It was not known how the hijackers took control of the ship, which they seized about 30 miles from Port Said, where it was scheduled to dock at 9 p.m. (4 p.m. EDT).

An SOS was sent when the hijackers made their move, and was picked up by an amateur radio operator in Sweden, said ANSA, an Italian news agency.

ANSA and other Italian agencies quoted the Foreign Ministry in Rome as saying 454

people were aboard the 23,629-ton liner, but Egyptian officials put the number at 500.

Palestinian sources in Nicosia, Cyprus, said Giulio Andreotti, the Italian foreign minister, had appealed to Yasser Arafat, to ensure the safety of the passengers and crew.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Palestine Liberation Organization chair was consulting aides at PLO headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia.

Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini and Andreotti also were in constant touch with Egyptian authorities, the Italian news agencies said.

Nabil Amr, PLO spokesman in Amman, Jordan, said he knew nothing about the ship hijacking.

The Italian ministry said the hijackers were armed and had a large supply of explosives with which to blow up the Achille Lauro, the news agencies reported.

Floata Achille of Naples, one of Italy's largest passenger lines, operates the Achille Lauro, which is named for the company's owner.

ANSA said the Achille Lauro began the cruise Oct. 3 at Genoa in northern Italy, with 189 crew and 884 passengers aboard.

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh set to testify in court

PORTLAND (AP) — Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh has been subpoenaed to testify before a federal grand jury investigating a wiretapping operation at the guru's Oregon commune, a newspaper reports.

The Oregonian, in a story in Tuesday's editions, quoted unnamed sources as saying that a deal had been arranged Monday to delay Rajneesh's appearance for at least a month. He had been scheduled to appear before the grand jury in Portland on Wednesday, the newspaper said.

A multiagency task force has been investigating allegations raised by Rajneesh and others that focus on a dozen former top Rajneesheshe officials.

Authorities say they have evidence of a major wiretapping scheme at Rajneeshpuram. Federal officials served two search warrants related to that investigation at the commune Wednesday.

The guru joins more than 100 residents of Rajneeshpuram who have been subpoenaed before state and federal grand juries. The Oregonian reported. Other subpoenas to the federal grand jury were dated Nov. 18-19. State subpoenas for testimony in The Dalles were dated Oct. 16-17.

Rajneesh's subpoena was delivered Friday to Swami Prem Niren, 40, who is one of the 53-year-old guru's attorneys and acting mayor of Rajneeshpuram, the newspaper reported. Niren was unavailable for comment Monday.

Rajneesheshees in the past resisted efforts to compel Rajneesh to testify in civil court matters, saying such testimony would interrupt his self-imposed religious silence. Rajneesh broke his 3-and-a-half-year public silence last year.

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