



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The executive director of the Christian Coalition extended an olive branch to American Jewry. Speaking before the Anti-Defamation League, Ralph Reed said it is wrong to call the United States a "Christian nation." He also said his group would not support prayer in America's classrooms. [Page 2]

■ Vice President Al Gore urged Jews to dedicate themselves to environmental concerns as part of their effort at tikkun olam, or improving the world. Gore made the remarks in a national telephone conference sponsored by the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. [Page 3]

■ An Israeli shop owner canceled plans to auction off Holocaust memorabilia — including a bar of soap said to have been made during the Holocaust from Jewish remains — after news of the auction set off a wave of protest across the country. The store owner said he had gotten the bar of soap from the son of a former inmate of the Buchenwald death camp. [Page 4]

■ A convicted Nazi war criminal released from prison in the Netherlands will not be allowed back into Canada, Canadian officials said. Jacob Luitjens, 75, was a member of the Dutch Nazi Party and the paramilitary unit that assisted the Gestapo in rounding up Jews and resistance fighters in occupied Holland. [Page 3]

■ The German Parliament approved the transfer of a submarine to Israel, the last in a set of three the Germans have been building for the Israeli navy. The Germans are paying the full \$630 million cost of two of the submarines. [Page 4]

■ Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met in Jericho to discuss elections in the territories. The Israelis presented the Palestinians with census information that will serve as the basis for voter registries.

■ Israel and Jordan signed a tourism agreement, the first accord to regulate bilateral ties under the Oct. 26 peace treaty. The agreement is the first in a series covering a number of areas to be signed by August. [Page 3]

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Americans vote for a Jew? Specter's bid raises possibility

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, April 4 (JTA) — When 89 percent of Americans surveyed in a poll a few years ago said they would vote for a Jewish presidential candidate, most thought they were answering a hypothetical question.

But with the entry of Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) into the race for the Republican presidential nomination, the American voter could face that question head on.

With his announcement last week, the 65-year-old three-term senator became the first Jew to make a serious bid for the nation's highest elected office.

Other Republicans who have formally declared their candidacy are: Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, commentator Pat Buchanan and radio talk host Alan Keyes.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas plans to announce his candidacy on April 10, and Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana on April 19. California Gov. Pete Wilson has also indicated that he intends to run.

Although Specter is widely known as a moderate politician, a staunch supporter of Israel and the only pro-choice Republican currently in the field of candidates, he has yet to garner significant support in the Jewish community, which overwhelmingly votes Democratic in national elections.

Still, Specter's candidacy has generated some excitement among Jews.

"It's good for the community to have a national Jewish candidate," said Charles Brooks, executive director of NATPAC, the National Political Action Committee, the largest of the pro-Israel political action committees.

NATPAC has already given Specter \$5,000, the maximum allowed under federal law, said Brooks, a former Specter aide who acknowledged that the candidacy was a longshot.

### 'Jewishness has become irrelevant'

But many seasoned political observers say that overall, Specter's Jewishness will not be a significant factor for either Jews or non-Jews.

"Jewishness has become irrelevant," said Hyman Bookbinder, the former Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee.

"In my lifetime I have seen an absolutely remarkable change in the achievements of Jewish Americans," said Bookbinder, a founder of the the National Jewish Democratic Council.

He cited as examples of Jewish accomplishment the two Jewish members of the current Supreme Court and the nine Jewish senators.

"Someone's Jewishness will not and ought not become a contributing factor," he said.

At the same time, however, Bookbinder did not totally discount the Jewish factor. "There's no doubt for some American voters that his Jewishness will be a negative factor. And surely he will pick up some additional Jewish votes because he is Jewish."

Jerome Chanes, co-director for domestic concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, disagreed that Specter will gain any Jewish support because of his religion.

When asked whether there will be a favorite son attitude toward Specter, Chanes said, "There is none, period."

"A Jew is running for president. My reaction is: So what?" he said.

Specter himself has said his religion should not become a factor in the race. "America showed that we could have a Catholic president some 35 years ago, and I believe that Americans are tolerant and understanding and will judge a person based on his qualifications," Specter said in an interview with CBS last week after announcing his candidacy.

"But I also think that America's ready for a Jewish president. And if America is not ready for a Jewish president, it should be," the senator said.

A Gallup poll conducted periodically since 1958 has asked Americans whether they would vote for "a well-qualified man for president" if "he happened to be a Jew."

According to the results published in the American Jewish Commit-

tee's study, "Anti-Semitism in Contemporary America," 89 percent of Americans answered yes in 1989, the last time the survey was taken.

Six percent of Americans said they would not vote for a Jew, and five percent said they did not know.

The latest figures show a rise in support for a Jewish candidate from the first time the poll was conducted. At that time, 62 percent said they would vote for a Jew for president and 27.6 percent said they would not.

The poll has consistently shown that more Americans would vote for a Jew than for an atheist or an African American male.

Although Specter has garnered some support from Jewish Republicans, Jewish GOP powerhouses such as Max Fisher have flocked to Dole, the early favorite.

Big Jewish money may not be forthcoming in the early stages, but Specter supporters say backing will come if and when he can show that he is a serious candidate.

"If he becomes a more viable candidate he will get more Jewish support," said Herbert Linsenberg, a longtime supporter who also serves as treasurer of the National Jewish Coalition, the leading Jewish Republican organization.

"Everybody loves a winner," said Linsenberg of Philadelphia, who sits on Specter's campaign finance committee.

Observers say that if Specter or one of the other three candidates wins the nomination, some of the big Jewish fund-raisers could come on board late and still gain a favorable ear. But doing the reverse — backing other candidates and then turning to Dole in the late stages of the campaign — would prove more difficult, they say.

Specter could also find support from Jewish Democrats at the ballot box.

In his last re-election bid for the Senate, a significant number of Jewish Democrats in Pennsylvania cast their vote for Specter.

In presidential primaries, a handful of smaller states allow voters to choose the primary in which they want to vote. As a result, if President Clinton goes unchallenged for the Democratic nomination, some Jewish Democrats may choose to support Specter in the primary, observers predict. □

## Christian Coalition offers olive branch to U.S. Jews

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, April 4 (JTA) — Only time will tell whether all evangelical Christians will share the olive branch extended to the Jewish community this week by the Christian Coalition.

At a speech before the Anti-Defamation League's National Washington Leadership Conference on Monday, Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, said, "Some religious conservatives have at times been insensitive to and have lacked a full understanding of the horrors experienced by you as a people."

Reed also said it was wrong to call the United States a "Christian nation."

And in a marked shift in public policy, Reed said his organization, claiming a membership of 1.5 million Americans, would not support prayer in America's classrooms.

Sounding the desire to end a feud that erupted last summer, Reed called on both Jews and evangelical Christians to "move beyond the pain of the past and the uneasy tolerance of the present towards a genuine friendship in the future."

The feud centered around a scathing report of the religious right published by ADL. The report accused the

Christian Coalition and its founder, religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, of being the primary force behind what it called the religious right's "assault on tolerance and pluralism" in America.

The Christian Coalition fired off an equally harsh report, accusing ADL of "defaming" religious conservatives. Over the past five months, the two groups have met periodically and exchanged letters in an effort to tone down the rhetoric. But the debate erupted again recently with new media attention focused on Robertson's 1991 book, "The New World Order."

Robertson is the president and founder of the Christian Coalition, which he founded after his unsuccessful bid for president in 1988.

Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director, and others have taken Robertson to task for Robertson's reference to a conspiracy by "European bankers," naming prominent Jewish financiers.

Robertson has denied that his references were anti-Semitic, and Foxman has challenged the conservative to remove those passages from his book.

In stark contrast to the past debates, Reed's words this week drew praise from Foxman.

### 'A very courageous beginning'

Foxman praised Reed for making a "very courageous, meaningful and significant beginning," which has "the potential to lead to major changes in the relationship between our two communities."

At the same time, however, he called on Reed's organization to go even further.

"I hope that in this new dialogue and this new spirit of sensitivities that you can convince Pat Robertson to take one more step to purge himself of conspiracy theories, which, while not intended, are part of the landscape of anti-Semitism throughout history," Foxman said.

During his speech to ADL and during a follow-up question period with three Jewish journalists, Reed said it is a "blatant wrong" for conservative evangelical Christians to call America a "Christian nation," and pledged to work to end the practice.

"The Christian Coalition believes in a nation that is not officially Christian, Jewish or Muslim," he said, "a nation where the separation of church and state as an institution is separate and inviolable."

Referring to the debate over school prayer, Reed said that even though he supported prayer at school functions, it did not have a place in the classroom.

It should not be "in compulsory settings like classrooms, but would be at non-compulsory settings like high school graduations or assemblies or things like high school football games," he said. At the same time, he added, any prayer in the school should be "voluntary, ecumenical and non-denominational."

Reed also distanced himself from fellow conservative Christians who he said use their support for Israel as a way of getting around other Jewish concerns, such as school prayer.

There is a "false belief that being pro-Israel somehow answers for all other insensitivity to legitimate Jewish concerns," he said. At the same time, Reed placed himself in the camp that supports the Jewish state for humanitarian reasons and "because Israel has come to symbolize the democratic values that we hold in America."

At the end of the day, some were left wondering where Reed's words would lead, and whether they would extend to his own grass roots.

"Beyond such welcomed words, concerns still remain how this new sensitivity will be implemented locally," Foxman said. "Will we still witness conflict and insensitivity?" □

## Conference featuring Gore urges Jews to work on environmental issues

By Steven M. Zeitchik

NEW YORK, April 4 (JTA) — Against the backdrop of a political atmosphere increasingly hostile toward environmental concerns, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life held a national telephone seminar to educate local communities and invigorate Jewish interest.

"There is an urgency in responding to the current efforts in the U.S. Congress to dismantle the regulatory tools we have developed to protect the environment," said Mark Jacobs, program coordinator for the coalition and organizer of the telephone conference.

The March 29 conference, titled "Renewing Jewish Lives and Values: A Focus on the Natural World," looked at environmental concerns from a uniquely Jewish perspective.

It featured prominent lay and spiritual leaders from across the country, ranging from Reconstructionist rabbis to Orthodox ones; from sisterhood presidents to the vice president of the United States.

"We are now in a tremendous struggle to protect the environment," said U.S. Vice President Al Gore, a staunch supporter of environmental, as well as of Jewish, causes.

"Anyone who loves God's creations and feels a commitment to the environmental cause ought to feel a sense of urgency and passion and conviction right now," he said.

"I know tikkun olam [improving the world] is critical to your group," Gore added, urging the religious community to "lift up the moral dimension of this issue" for the purpose of involving more people in the cause.

One underlying theme of the seminar was the strong environmental strain present in Jewish religious teachings.

"According to Genesis, we are the 'guardians of the Earth,'" said Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, executive director of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot.

### Ethical relationship with Earth

"There is nothing that is more to the core of Torah than our relationship with the Earth and that that needs to be an ethical relationship," Liebling said.

Echoing his sentiments, Rabbi Saul Berman, a professor at Yeshiva University, stressed God's ownership of everything in the world. He said, "In every use of nature and material goods, we need to stop for a moment and ask ourselves: 'Is this how God wants His property used? Does this use of God's property favor Her goals of holiness and ethical values?'"

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, emphasized the importance of environmental awareness in Jewish tradition. He quoted Chasidic Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, who said, "Every blade of grass sings poetry to God."

The evening conference contained several poignant moments. The absence of scheduled speaker Carl Sagan, the renowned astronomer, was noted and explained by the fact that he was recovering from a bone marrow transplant.

And in emphasizing the pressing need for environmental activism, Liebling related his own wife's struggle with breast cancer, invoking disease prevention as a fundamental reason to continue waging the war on behalf of the environment.

But the evening was not without its lighter moments. After the vice president's phone hookup from Air

Force II failed, United Israel Appeal Chairman and co-moderator Shoshana Cardin wryly remarked that "the environment is working against him."

COEJL, which organized the event, is a group dedicated to promoting environmental "education, effort and advocacy in the American Jewish community," according to program coordinator Jacobs.

"The program provided an opportunity for people who had no previous knowledge of Jewish environmental traditions to learn about them from some of the most prominent members of the Jewish community as well as [from] the vice president," he said.

The day after the telephone conference, Schindler, along with seminar co-moderator Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, joined other Jewish and non-Jewish religious leaders on Capitol Hill to lobby against proposed regulatory reform. □

## Canada bars war criminal from his former homeland

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, April 4 (JTA) — A convicted Nazi war criminal released from prison in the Netherlands will not be allowed back into Canada, immigration officials here have said.

Jacob Luitjens, 75, was freed from prison last week after serving 28 months of a life sentence for "aiding and abetting the enemy in time of war."

A former botany instructor at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Luitjens was extradited to the Netherlands in 1992 after years of legal wrangling in the absence of any extradition treaty between the two countries.

He had been tried in 1948 in the Netherlands in absentia. During World War II, Luitjens was a member of the Dutch Nazi Party and the paramilitary unit that assisted the Gestapo in rounding up Jews and resistance fighters in occupied Holland.

He has applied to the Canadian government to return to Vancouver, where his wife lives, said Wiebe Alkema, Dutch Justice Ministry spokesman. He also could reapply to immigrate or seek a special ministerial permit.

Neither attempt would be fruitful, however, officials maintained. "He is inadmissible on the basis of war crimes," said Pam Cullum of the Canada Immigration Department.

He was stripped of his Canadian citizenship in 1991 for having concealed his Nazi ties when he emigrated from Paraguay in 1961 to Canada. He also concealed his past when he applied for citizenship a decade later. □

## Israel, Jordan sign tourism pact

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 4 — Israel and Jordan have signed a tourism agreement, the first accord to regulate bilateral ties under the Oct. 26 peace treaty.

Israeli Tourism Minister Uzi Baram and his Jordanian counterpart, Abdallah Al-Khatib, signed the accord Tuesday at a ceremony in a state guest house on the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley.

The accord calls for broad coordination, including the marketing of joint travel packages abroad, an exchange of information and the cooperation between the two national airlines, officials said. Baram said joint tour packages have already been sold in the United States and Europe.

The agreement is the first in a series covering a number of areas — including trade, security and energy — to be signed by August. □

## After outcry, Israeli cancels proposed sale of Holocaust soap

By Uriel Masad and Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, April 4 (JTA) — A Tel Aviv shop owner has canceled plans to auction off Holocaust memorabilia — including a bar of soap said to have been made from Jewish remains — after news of the auction set off a wave of disgust in the country.

Menashe Meridack, owner of the Zodiac Stamp Shop, said Tuesday that he had canceled the planned auction in the wake of the public outcry. He also said he had returned the soap to its original owner, the son of a former inmate of the Buchenwald death camp.

"I run two auctions a year, and always have some things from the Holocaust on sale," he said. "I don't buy these things. People bring me stuff, like yellow patches, badges, Nazi documents, and I put them up for sale."

"The soap entered the catalog by mistake. I was not aware of the sensitivity that surrounded the soap. When I heard it reported on the news, I returned the soap and all other Holocaust items to their owners," said Meridack.

The auction catalogue of the Zodiac Stamp Shop, which specializes mainly in international postage stamps, was stocked with Holocaust memorabilia, including the yellow Stars of David the Nazis forced Jews to wear, Nazi deportation orders and death certificates stamped with swastikas. The soap had a starting asking price of \$300.

Meridack had originally planned to hold the auction April 25 — two days before Israel marks Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Meridack said the person who had sold him the soap, Moshe Yahalom, had offered the item for auction because he had fallen on hard times.

Yahalom, appearing on Israel Television, said he was destitute, having just been released from prison after serving a jail sentence for rape and indecent acts.

According to Yahalom, the charges against him were trumped up, and he had just wanted the money from the sale of the soap to enable him to leave the country.

News of the auction elicited an outcry of protest from Holocaust survivors, politicians and religious leaders, including Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, a survivor of Buchenwald.

The controversial bar of soap has been pictured on the front pages of Israeli newspapers and was featured on television and radio reports.

### Vow to stop sale, even if by force

Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo vowed to stop the auction, by force if necessary.

Likud Knesset member Dov Shilansky, himself a Holocaust survivor, strongly criticized Yahalom's decision to sell off what his father had given him.

"How can he live with himself, selling soap made from his ancestors?" Shilansky told Israel Radio. "His father kept it as a reminder, so he would never forget."

Shilansky said he would discuss in the Knesset the idea of enacting legislation to prevent the sale of Holocaust memorabilia in Israel.

But there are those who maintain that despite the many atrocities the Nazis did commit, they did not make soap from Jewish remains.

This was "a poor-quality soap issued to German troops," Yehuda Bauer, a respected Holocaust historian, told Israel Radio.

"There were many instances in which the Nazis told their victims, 'We will turn you into soap,' until the Jews began to believe it. But it is a myth," Bauer said.

Avner Shalev, chairman of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, concurred.

"There is no supporting evidence that the Nazis ever made soap of human fat," Shalev said in an interview. "They threatened Jews that they would make soap of them, but there is no evidence that they ever did."

Shalev said he was "personally shocked" by the planned auction.

"These items are part of our Jewish fate and have become symbols. How could anyone trade in them? We ask of people who have such items in their homes to donate them to Yad Vashem if they don't want to keep them," said Shalev.

According to Shalev, Yad Vashem is about to embark on project "Rescue Collection" in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and the Steven Spielberg Survivors of the Shoah Foundation.

The project will include the collection of personal items relating to the Holocaust, the completion of lists of those who died in the Holocaust and the recording of survivors' testimonies on video. □

## Germany approves transfer of third submarine to Israel

By Gil Sedan

BONN, April 4 (JTA) — The German Parliament has approved the transfer of a submarine to Israel, the latest in a set of three the Germans have been building for the Israeli navy.

The \$630 million total price tag for two of the submarines will be covered by the German government, with the cost of the third to be shared jointly by Israel and Germany, said Helmut Schaeffer, secretary of state in the German Foreign Ministry.

He said a deal to provide Israel with submarines had been worked out in 1989. But after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, he said, Germany agreed to cover the cost of two vessels.

Schaeffer said the decision to give Israel two of the submarines was a sign of appreciation for Israeli restraint during the Gulf War, when Israel refrained from responding to Iraqi Scud missile attacks.

Schaeffer also attributed the gift to the German government's embarrassment at the fact that German companies were involved in the development of chemical-warfare capabilities in Iraq.

In New York, Gideon Mark, consul for communications and public affairs at the Israeli Consulate, confirmed the details of the submarine transfer to Israel.

He said the submarines are due to arrive in Israel about 1997.

In Parliament, Norbert Gansel of the opposition Social Democrat Party questioned whether the decision to sell Israel the third submarine was an attempt to cover up secret arms transactions on the part of the German government to adversaries of Israel.

Although Schaeffer denied that Germany had at any time approved such sales; he admitted that some German companies had been involved in illegal arms transactions in the past.

But Schaeffer assured the Parliament that such illegal transactions were no longer taking place.

Germany boasts of having one of the "strictest control measures" against illegal sales of arms, he said.

Meanwhile, at a Parliament session, Heinrich Kolb, secretary of state at the Ministry of Economics, was asked about the possible involvement of German firms in the transfer of nuclear-weapons technology to Iran, a sworn enemy of Israel. Kolb assured the Parliament that Germany was determined to limit exports of such equipment. □

(JTA staff writer Mitchell Danow in New York contributed to this report.)