

**NEWS AT A GLANCE**

■ Most Jewish groups applauded President Clinton's effort to head off the drive for a constitutional amendment on school prayer. But some expressed concern that his directives to the nation's schools could adversely affect Jewish and other minority students. [Page 1]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin nominated Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin to become minister of economic affairs and former Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Ehud Barak to become Israel's new interior minister. The Cabinet and Knesset are expected to approve the nominations later in the week.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said he would insist that the Tomb of Rachel remain under Israeli administration after responsibilities for Bethlehem are transferred to the Palestinians in the next phase of self-rule. Settlers groups had demanded that Israel never hand over the sacred site to a Palestinian administration.

■ A number of American Jewish organizations appealed for an urgent return to civil discourse in the debate over the Israeli government's current peace policies. Groups on the right, on the left and in the middle urged less vitriol in the community's discussions. [Page 2]

■ The American Jewish Committee released a report to mark the first anniversary of the terrorist bombing of the AMIA Jewish community building in Buenos Aires. The report paints a bleak picture of Argentine government efforts to catch the perpetrators of the attack, which killed 86 people and left at least 300 others wounded.

■ Norway decided to launch an investigation into claims that Norwegian Jewish property was confiscated by Nazi collaborators during World War II, a World Jewish Congress official said. The Liquidation Committee for Confiscated Jewish Property had completely or partially seized property belonging to 12,000 people by the end of the war, the Norwegian media has reported.

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Clinton's initiative on prayer could increase religion in school**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, July 17 (JTA) — President Clinton's move to head off the drive for school prayer could backfire as religious right activists vow to use the initiative to push for more religion in America's classrooms.

The guidelines are a "road map" for bringing religion into the schools, said the Rev. Lou Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, a church lobbying organization based in Anaheim, Calif., and a chief architect of the highly controversial "religious equality amendment."

"The president helped us because he raised the level of the issue," said Sheldon, a born Jew who converted decades ago at the age of 15 after "seeing the light" at an evangelists meeting in his native Washington, D.C.

It was largely in an effort to stave off Sheldon and other religious rights activists — and especially their congressional backers — that Clinton last week issued a set of guidelines defining the vast array of religious activity legally permitted in public schools.

Jewish groups mostly applauded the president's initiative, but some said they are looking for some fine-tuning to avoid a backlash against Jewish and other minority students.

The guidelines, which the president said "borrows heavily" from a recently released study on the subject by a coalition spearheaded by the American Jewish Congress, spell out what forms of religious expression are currently allowed in the schools.

Noting that nothing in the First Amendment "converts our public schools into religion-free zones," the guidelines address such issues as student prayer and religious discussion, teaching about religion and the wearing of religious garb.

The administration hopes that once Americans realize the extent of the protections under current law, politicians will abandon their efforts to amend the Constitution.

**Clinton vows to send guidelines to all school districts**

Clinton, who unveiled his guidelines in a speech at a Virginia high school last week, vowed to send the guidelines to all of America's 15,000 school districts before the beginning of the school year.

"The Constitution protected the free exercise of religion, but prohibited the establishment of religion," Clinton said in his speech.

"It does not, as some people have implied, make us a religion-free country," he said.

While many Jewish activists — concerned most with averting the enactment of a constitutional amendment — praised Clinton for his initiative, some suggested that some changes are necessary to help clarify what is prohibited in the schools.

"It's a fair criticism of the presidential memo that it did not state unequivocally what is prohibited," said Marc Stern, co-director of the legal department of AJCongress and the primary author of the guidelines on which Clinton's directives were based.

"It would have been nice had the president emphasized more of the prohibitions," he said.

Stern acknowledged the possibility that the effort could galvanize the right, but, he said, "We can't resist acknowledging what law is because someone might distort it."

"This may be the lesser of two evils, but I don't see the Jewish community in the position of arguing against religious freedom protected in current law," he said.

Stern said AJCongress would try to convince the Department of Education, the White House and the attorney general to add language on forbidden religious expression "so what is sent out is clear."

Among the Orthodox community, Agudath Israel of America said it "commended the thrust" of Clinton's remarks, but expressed concern that the emphasis on legally protected religious speech "could create problems for children of minority faiths, including Jewish children, in public schools."

Despite some concerns, several Jewish groups said they believe that

the guidelines will be an important tool for educators trying to navigate the complex nature of religion in school.

The guidelines "give some clarity to schools and communities about what is and is not allowed," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center.

"Yes, this will lead to more religion, but, no, I don't believe it will be coercive," he said.

Clinton's move "really undermines the argument for a constitutional amendment," Saperstein added, giving voice to the biggest fear among Jewish and other religious groups.

How the Clinton initiative will impact the debate over a constitutional amendment on Capitol Hill is still an unknown.

Congress wrapped up a series of field hearings on the "religious equality amendment" this week as religious right activists and members of Congress feverishly worked to complete language on an amendment before lawmakers recess for August.

Although the actual text of an amendment has yet to be introduced into Congress, Sheldon has drafted a broad amendment that, among other things, would allow students to lead their classmates in prayer during the school day. The Christian Coalition, the pre-eminent organization of the Christian Right, has also made passage of a constitutional amendment the centerpiece of its legislative agenda.

Sheldon has vowed to use Clinton's initiative to push for the amendment. The guidelines are "too little, too late," Sheldon said.

"The whole process and system needs to be flushed out and not just by the Secretary of Education," he said, adding, "It is ludicrous to think [Clinton] is a pope that can shed an ex cathedra message to his community," Sheldon said, referring to a papal order.

As the debate continues, Clinton left no doubt in his speech last week about his opposition to school prayer.

"When I was in junior high school, it was my responsibility either to start every day by reading the Bible or get somebody else to do it," he recalled.

"Now, you could say, well, it certainly didn't do any harm; it might have done a little good," he said.

But, he added, "I can tell you that all of us who were in there doing it never gave a second thought" that "there were Jews in the classroom who were probably deeply offended by half the stuff we were saying or doing, or maybe made to feel inferior." □

## Orthodox groups, others urge civility in peace process debate

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, July 17 (JTA) — After two years of increasing rancor in the debate over Israel's peace process policy, a growing chorus of American Jewish organizations are appealing for an urgent return to civil discourse.

Six leading Orthodox Jewish organizations declared last week that "there can be no excuse or justification for the extremist verbal attacks directed against the elected leadership of the State of Israel."

The statement was issued jointly by Amit Women, Emunah of America, Mizrachi — Religious Zionists of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, Poale Agudath Israel and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

The Orthodox groups came together apparently in response to Orthodox Rabbi Abraham Hecht, who last month declared it acceptable under Jewish law to assassinate Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

At the same time, the New Israel Fund recently brought together several other groups to discuss how the

community should respond to Hecht's statement and similar remarks.

"Silence in the face of this accelerating breakdown in civil discourse is unacceptable," NIF warned in a statement last week. "The atrocity in Oklahoma City should have alerted us again to the potentially catastrophic consequences of verbal violence," the statement continued.

The NIF statement highlighted recent incidents in which it said "some opponents of the peace process have crossed the line from legitimate debate and criticism to inflammatory rhetoric, incitement to violence, and to physical violence itself."

In addition to the Hecht statement, NIF also referred to a June call by Israeli settlers in the West Bank for armed resistance against the Israeli army should their settlements be evacuated, and the alleged punching of Israeli Communications Minister Shulamit Aloni by an organizer of the New York Salute to Israel Parade.

In contrast to NIF singling out of the peace process' opponents, the Orthodox statement emphasized the attachment of the groups to Israel and the "right of every Jew to live in all parts of Eretz Yisrael."

It protested "the demonization and delegitimization" of the Jewish inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza in the media and by some Israeli government officials.

It also condemned "the ongoing destructive verbal statements by many Arab leaders opposing the very existence of the State of Israel."

### 'Public statements have consequences'

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which first began discussing the question of civility and rhetoric after bombs were placed in front of the buildings housing NIF and Americans for Peace Now in January 1994, is in the process of getting approval for a statement of its own.

In its draft version, the statement warns that "public statements have consequences."

"Those who engage in verbal or physical violence, demeaning characterizations and other excesses violate basic Jewish as well as standards of decency while endangering the interests of the community. They will not go unchallenged," according to a draft obtained by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Malcolm Hoenlein, Conference of Presidents executive vice chairman, said the statement is important, because "it declares where the community stands."

Although virtually none of those who engage in the name-calling belongs to the conference, members "have to declare they reject that kind of discourse," Hoenlein said.

The debate over the peace process "is really getting into very serious issues that have serious consequences. It's important that the focus be on the substance of issues," he said.

Not waiting for the conference to issue its statement, several groups have chimed in with their own statements, modeled after that of NIF.

They include the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress.

"Unfortunately, some people who should be [condemning incivility] aren't. But maybe if enough responsible, legitimate organizations will speak out on civility, the uncivil will get the message," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Foxman said some of the words being tossed by opponents of the peace process at its supporters, such as "quisling," are "beyond the pale of debate."

Had the comments been made by non-Jews, "the community would have been very much up in arms, certainly decrying them as anti-Israel if not anti-Semitic," Foxman said. □

## Chirac hailed for recognizing French state's role in Holocaust

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, July 17 (JTA) — Jewish leaders here and abroad are hailing a speech by French President Jacques Chirac, who this week became the first French leader to recognize publicly the responsibility of the French state in the deportation of thousands of Jews to their death during World War II.

French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld described Chirac's speech as a "historic statement" that clearly separated Chirac from his immediate predecessor, Francois Mitterrand.

"This is what we always wanted to hear," Klarsfeld said of the speech. "Chirac's predecessor came twice to the commemoration of the Vel d'Hiv roundups, but he never spoke, and he always refused to recognize the responsibility of France in the arrests and the deportations. President Chirac just did that."

The speech also drew praise from European Jewish Congress President Jean Kahn, who said Jews and everyone who fought against the Nazis "must have been delighted to hear these words."

In Germany, Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, called on other European leaders to follow Chirac's example and acknowledge their countries' collaboration with the Nazis.

"This collaboration actually took place in all countries occupied by Hitler Germany, with the exception of Denmark and Bulgaria," Bubis said in a radio interview.

"But such a clear admission as that from Jacques Chirac has otherwise come only from the Dutch Queen [Beatrix]. So I am surprised," said Bubis.

### 'Dark hours tarnish our history forever'

The plaudits for the French president followed a speech Chirac made Sunday at ceremonies marking the 53rd anniversary of the first mass arrests of Jews in Paris. The deportations were undertaken by the Vichy collaborationist government in power during the war.

"There are moments in the life of a nation that hurt the memory and the idea one has of his country," Chirac said at a monument located near the Velodrome d'Hiver, the now-demolished cycling stadium where French police held some 13,000 Jews during the infamous July 16-17, 1942, roundups.

About 4,000 of the Jews, those without family, were sent to the Drancy internment camp near Paris. They were then deported to Auschwitz. The remaining 9,000, which included 4,000 children, were kept at the Vel d'Hiv for a week and then sent directly to the Auschwitz camp.

"It is difficult to evoke them, because those dark hours tarnish forever our history, and are an insult to our past and our traditions," said Chirac. He then added the words Jewish leaders had never been able to elicit from his predecessor: "Yes, the criminal folly of the occupier was assisted by French, by the French state."

"France, homeland of the Enlightenment and of human rights, land of welcome and asylum, France, on that very day, accomplished the irreparable," he said. "Failing her promise, she delivered those she was to protect to their murderers."

The comments by Chirac, who was elected to the French presidency less than two months ago, stand in stark contrast to the position of his predecessor regarding France's wartime past.

During a television interview last year, Mitterrand sought to distance the actions of the collaborationist Vichy regime from the French republic. Mitterrand was an officer in the Vichy regime in 1942, but later worked with the

Resistance. "The republic had nothing to do with all that. I do think that France is not responsible," he said. "Those who are accountable for those crimes belong to an active minority who exploited the [French] defeat. Not the republic and not France. I'll never ask for forgiveness in the name of France."

Mitterrand also drew the ire of many for failing to apologize for his postwar friendship with Rene Bousquet, the Vichy regime's chief of police who ordered the infamous Vel d'Hiv roundups.

In his speech Sunday, Chirac attacked "the spirit of hatred" that not only marked the Nazi era, but could be found in present-day France in the form of the extreme right-wing National Front, headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The "racist crimes" perpetrated nowadays by such groups as the National Front, Chirac said, "stem from the same sources" as Nazism. The anti-immigrant National Front scored surprise victories in France's nationwide municipal elections last month, winning mayoral races in several cities.

In the southern city of Toulon, the Jewish community boycotted the local commemoration of the wartime Jewish deportations because they were presided over by the newly elected National Front mayor, Jean-Marie Le Chevalier. To show their defiance, members of the French Union of Jewish Students replaced a wreath laid by the mayor with one of their own.

In his speech, Chirac also referred to the situation in Bosnia, where humanistic values "are today held up to ridicule in Europe itself, by the supporters of ethnic cleansing."

Chirac, who in recent days called upon Western nations to form a rapid reaction force to drive rebel Bosnian Serbs back from U.N. safe havens they recently overran, drew a clear parallel between events in Bosnia and the Nazi Holocaust. "Let us draw the lessons of history. Let us not agree to be the passive witnesses or the accessories of the unacceptable," he said. □

## Rabin letter read at cemetery in Australia after desecration

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, July 17 (JTA) — More than 1,000 people crammed into a cemetery in South Australia to express solidarity with the Jewish community of Adelaide, where more than 60 graves and headstones had been vandalized earlier this month.

Among those conveying their concern was Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who sent a letter expressing his "utter disgust" at the anti-Semitic attack that occurred there.

Yehuda Avner, the Israeli ambassador to Australia, read aloud the letter sent by Rabin.

"Given our history, our common heritage, our mutual faith, the desecration of the Adelaide Jewish cemetery could not but touch a nerve in the emotions of us all," the letter said. "It revives painful associations."

A message from Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating also was read at the event, called the "Service of Solidarity." Keating said in the message that this "mindless behavior" has "no place in a tolerant society."

The government of the state of South Australia said it would provide funds for the "full restoration of the tombstones that have been damaged," matching an earlier commitment by the federal government.

Isi Leibler, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, also addressed the crowd, saying that what took place "is tantamount to one of the worst examples of desecration to have happened in any Western country." □

## Genealogy project aims to save and rekindle Polish Jewish life

By Marta S. Halpert

VIENNA (JTA) — A leading New York businessman has initiated an effort to sustain Jewish life in Poland and other Eastern European countries.

"We have a small window of opportunity to save the legacy of a thousand years of vibrant Jewish life in Poland before it is lost forever," said businessman Ronald S. Lauder, who recently established the Ronald S. Lauder Genealogy Project at the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland in Warsaw.

"What a tragedy it would be if the legacy of one of history's greatest, most highly developed Jewish communities were finally destroyed — not by Nazis, not by Communists, not by natural disaster, but simply by our own indifference and neglect," said Lauder.

Lauder has founded an expanding collection of educational programs and institutions in parts of Eastern Europe since 1987.

A large amount of genealogical material long thought lost or destroyed has been found in Eastern European archives. The findings include documents that have never been cataloged.

Before World War II, more than 3 million Jews lived in Poland. Only 10 percent survived. Today, between 15,000 and 20,000 Jews live in Poland.

"Fifty years after the war's end, many survivors, their children and grandchildren are returning to Poland looking for their family history, their ancestral roots," said Yale Reisner, who will direct the project.

"This is a most exciting program, designed to assist researchers and privately interested individuals in rediscovering their family histories and the complexity and richness of Jewish life in Poland and beyond," Reisner said.

Some reunions of Jews separated during the war already have occurred, he added. □

## Israeli cellular phone company recovers from fiasco in service

By Larry Luxner

WASHINGTON, July 17 (JTA) — An upstart Israeli cellular venture — which tried to beat the competition with low prices and aggressive marketing — is finally emerging from one of Israel's worst telecommunications embarrassments in years.

Cellcom, a \$300 million joint venture between Atlanta-based BellSouth International, Israel Aircraft Industries, the Safra Banking Group of Brazil and the Israel Discount Bank investment group, won a 10-year government concession last December after promising to offer its customers the world's lowest rates for cellular service.

With its only competitor, Pele-Phone Communications Ltd., charging 22 cents a minute during peak hours and 11 cents a minute during off-peak hours, it is no wonder Israelis rushed to sign up with Cellcom, which charges less than 3 cents a minute.

"There was an unbelievable demand," said Ya'acov Solan, president of Solan Telecommunications & Computers Ltd. "In four months, they gained 80,000 customers."

"But they don't have enough capacity in their system," Solan added. "They are not covering all the country, and they face many technical difficulties."

The biggest difficulty surfaced a few months ago, when Cellcom customers began complaining about getting recorded announcements saying the cellular numbers they

were calling were busy, even when nobody was talking. "People weren't able to contact each other and didn't understand the reason. They thought maybe Cellcom overloaded the system with too many phones, too fast," said Ohad Marani, economics minister at the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

"Now they discovered that it's not the system's fault but a problem in the chip of the cellular phones themselves," he said.

Cellcom officials say their network, which used TDMA digital technology, is blameless. Rather, the company is pointing fingers at what it claims is a software malfunction programmed into certain Alpha and Micro-TAC Lite phones manufactured in Motorola's Libertyville, Ill., factory.

Pacific Link, a cellular operation in Hong Kong, has experienced the same problems with Motorola phones, Cellcom asserts.

"The source of trouble does not lie in any particular telephone. It affects an unknown group out of the tens of thousands of cellular telephones made by Motorola," according to a Cellcom company news release.

Jim Caille, marketing vice president of Motorola's Cellular Subscriber Group in Schaumburg, Ill., said the problem surfaced in Israel because customers there — in the absence of a national paging system — tend to leave their phones on all the time, treating it as a wireless home phone with mobility.

Pele-Phone has not encountered similar problems because its network uses a completely different technology, according to company spokeswoman Ayelet Gradman. Founded in 1986, Pele-Phone is a 50-50 joint venture between Motorola and Israel's state-owned telephone company, Bezek. Pele-Phone, which means "miracle phone" in Hebrew, today has 170,000 customers throughout Israel.

Oren Most, Cellcom's vice president for marketing, said his company concluded that the phones were to blame after randomly stopping Cellcom customers in public places and discovering that their handsets were inadvertently jamming the system.

That followed a thorough investigation of the network infrastructure.

"We came under tremendous criticism from consumers, the media and the Knesset, but that was before the root cause was identified. Immediately after we found out, we announced a halt to our sales," Most said, adding, "It has nothing to do with the capacity of the system."

## Rents largest basketball stadium

In late April, Cellcom announced a temporary freeze on new line connections and phone sales.

In a move aimed at preventing customers from switching to the competition, Cellcom also agreed not to bill current subscribers for air time until the freeze is lifted. That is costing Cellcom tens of thousands of dollars a day, Most said.

The company is reprogramming the phones with new software, Most said. The urgent reprogramming of 63,000 Motorola phones — the rest have not been affected — is a logistical nightmare by any standard.

Cellcom has rented Tel Aviv's largest basketball stadium and fairgrounds for an entire month. There, 500 Cellcom representatives are doing the software upgrade — an operation that takes 10 to 15 minutes per telephone — for about 1,500 to 2,000 customers a day.

Customers are given a free Motorola battery pack worth about \$75, and free food and drinks while they wait.

Cellcom officials declined to speculate how much this fiasco ultimately would cost their company. The Israeli daily, Ha'aretz, recently put the figure at \$50 million. □