



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, told a Knesset committee that Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon might have obtained longer-range Katyusha rockets that could reach the cities of Acre and Carmiel. Shahak also said he opposed further easing the closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip because Palestinians were angry and might attack Israel.

■ Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert proposed constructing a tunnel under a main road that residents of religious neighborhoods want closed on the Sabbath. The High Court of Justice is scheduled to rule soon on a petition against closing Bar Ilan Street. [Page 3]

■ Germany asked Italy to extradite former Nazi SS Capt. Erich Priebke, who was rearrested after being freed by a military court. Priebke was tried for his role in the 1944 massacre of 335 men and boys, some 75 of them Jews, at the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome.

■ Israeli soldiers killed three gunmen in a clash in the southern Lebanon security zone, the Israel Defense Force said. The gunmen were believed to have planned an attack on the IDF or its allied forces, or against a northern Israeli settlement.

■ Israeli security forces plan to arrest and expel up to 100,000 illegal foreign workers who have replaced Palestinians. Many of the workers came to the Jewish state as a result of Israel's repeated closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

■ Ya'acov Ne'eman, who last week resigned from his post as Israeli justice minister, was questioned by Israeli police for the first time. Police are investigating allegations that Ne'eman had obstructed justice in a case by interfering in proceedings involving Shas Knesset member Aryeh Deri.

■ The leader of France's National Front Party attacked public figures who said his party shared responsibility for the 1990 desecration of a French Jewish cemetery. [Page 4]

## ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

### As GOP forces battle for control, Jewish Republicans look to future

By Matthew Dorf

SAN DIEGO (JTA) — When George Bush lost the 1992 race for the White House, Jewish Republicans predicted a bloodbath between GOP moderates and the right wing as they fought for control of the party.

Four years later, as thousands gathered here for their nominating convention, both sides are claiming victory in the battle.

Republican Jews say the message coming from the convention hall proves that they won their quest to distance the party from the cultural war embraced by the wing of the party dominated by Pat Buchanan and the Christian Coalition.

For their part, leaders of the party's right wing point to the platform adopted here as proof that the party has not budged from its pro-life, pro-school prayer cultural agenda.

The direction of the party is especially critical to Jewish Republicans, who tend to be economic conservatives and social moderates. Many Jewish Republicans were turned off by the party after right-wing forces dominated the 1992 convention in Houston.

Believing that Bob Dole's election as president in November rests with moderate swing voters, Republican Jews are now locked in a new battle to shape the party's message. Like other party moderates, Republican Jews say the recipe for success is simple: Dole and his running mate, Jack Kemp, must ignore the platform and focus on his economic plan.

With the party hoping to unite its warring factions as it looks toward Election Day, moderates and conservatives have sought to make peace — at least in public. Pat Buchanan, who threatened to break with the party after his exclusion from center stage of the convention, has endorsed the Dole candidacy.

Jewish Republicans and the Christian Coalition also are trying to bridge the gap that has often divided their forces.

Pat Robertson, the founder of the grass-roots advocacy group, and Ralph Reed, its executive director, mixed with Jewish delegates and activists at a reception co-sponsored by the National Jewish Coalition, the pre-eminent Republican Jewish organization. But the pledges of cooperation and goodwill between the GOP's wings could not mask deep fissures that teemed below the surface in the convention hall.

Prime-time convention speakers included moderates such as Gen. Colin Powell and U.S. Rep. Susan Molinari (R-N.Y.).

But before the moderates took to the podium, social conservatives had succeeded in passing a platform that vehemently opposes abortion, urges the return of school prayer to America's classrooms, calls for legal measures to deny citizenship to children born in the United States to illegal immigrants and encourages religious institutions to administer government welfare programs. "We will continue to work for the return of voluntary prayer to our schools," the platform declares.

### Divisions over platform's significance

On the question of abortion, the platform reads: "The unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and we endorse legislation to make clear that the 14th Amendment's protections apply to unborn children."

At the same time, the platform's references to Israel and the Middle East were widely lauded. The platform also denounced "all who practice or promote racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice and religious intolerance."

But Jews here, concerned about the social issues in particular, were divided over the importance of the platform.

Some tried to downplay its significance, while others said it was exclusionary. "We have a tough sell. The platform sends a message: We are not inclusive," said Rosalie Zalis, a senior policy adviser to California Gov. Pete Wilson. Wilson refused to speak at the convention after Republican officials banned him from discussing his pro-choice views.

Highlighting the concern about the platform's tenor, Dole and many

of his supporters began to distance the GOP from the party's blueprint even before the convention began.

"I can't think of one circumstance in which Bill Clinton would hold up the Democrats' platform and campaign on it. Neither would Bob Dole," said Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.), a convention official.

"This campaign will be won or lost on the economy, crime and character."

Many Jewish delegates, who made up 3 percent of the nearly 2,000 participants, happily concurred with the message of the convention's leaders.

"The platform does not mean that much," said Nettie Becker, a delegate from California. "It's the candidates that matter. And Jack Kemp will take the message to the voters and Jews will support our ticket."

"No platform ever represents completely the views of all constituents," said Jack Stein, a delegate from New Jersey.

"The party allows everybody a voice, that's the key to the appendix," said Stein, referring to the compromise reached on abortion that allowed for a three-page appendix to the platform that includes the failed amendments of pro-choice forces.

"The Republican Party welcomes individuals on each side of the abortion issue, encourages their open discussion, solicits their active participation in the party and respects their positions and beliefs," the platform says.

But social conservatives were quick to condemn any efforts by party leaders to distance themselves from the platform that they had worked so hard to obtain.

"This represents the Republican Party. We are the pro-life, pro-family party," said Jeff Fisher, executive director of the Christian Coalition's Texas chapter and a delegate to the convention.

But Becker, a pro-choice advocate, dismissed the Christian Coalition's presence here.

"They controlled the platform process. But the majority of Republicans do not share their views," she said.

"Extremists flock to conventions. They do not represent me or the party."

#### **Championing the strong pro-Israel message**

For his part, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) slammed the platform for some of its sections on issues that are opposed by many American Jews, regardless of party affiliation.

"The Republican Party is not making this irresponsible and mean-spirited amendment part of this campaign," Specter, who is pro-choice, said of the abortion plank.

Specter also lambasted what he called the "despicable call to ban citizenship to those born in the United States" to illegal immigrants.

The same Jewish Republicans who are distancing themselves from the party's platform on social issues are championing the blueprint's strong pro-Israel message.

The platform calls for the implementation of legislation initiated by Dole when he was a senator that requires the United States to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It also commits to joint U.S.-Israeli military projects now under way.

The platform is the GOP's "best ever on Israel," said an American Israel Public Affairs Committee official who worked with the drafting committee and asked not to be named.

For his part, vice presidential hopeful Kemp told a Jewish-sponsored reception here: "I am proud to run" with a "platform that recognizes the strong relationship, common values, common ideals" that the United States and Israel share.

But Republicans acknowledge that Israel alone will

not sway the election for most American Jews. "Dole-Kemp will win this election on the strength of the message of hope and opportunity," said Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition.

"We will reach the American voter from churches to synagogues to ghettos to barrios," he said. □

#### **Republican Platform Excerpts**

##### *Upholding the Rights of All:*

... We call on all Republicans and all Americans to reject the forces of hatred and bigotry. Accordingly, we denounce all who practice or promote racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice, and religious intolerance ...

##### *A Sensible Immigration Policy:*

Legal immigrants should depend for assistance on their sponsors, who are legally responsible for their financial well-being, not the American taxpayer ...

We support a constitutional amendment or constitutionally-valid legislation declaring that children born in the United States of parents who are not legally present in the United States or who are not long-term residents are not automatically citizens.

##### *Improving Education:*

We will continue to work for the return of voluntary prayer to our schools and will strongly enforce the Republican legislation that guarantees equal access to school facilities by student religious groups. We encourage state legislatures to pass statutes which prohibit local school boards from adopting policies of denial regarding voluntary school prayer.

##### *The Middle East:*

... Israel's demonstrated strategic importance to the U.S. as our most reliable and capable ally in this part of the world is more critical than ever. That is why Israel's security is central to U.S. interests in the region. That is why Republican administrations initiated efforts with Israel to pre-position military equipment, to conduct joint contingency planning and joint military exercises. That is why we advocate continuing cooperation on the Arrow Missile, boost phase intercept, and the Nautilus programs. That is why we look toward the greater integration of Israel into our regional defense planning and wish to explore ways to enhance our strategic cooperation.

That is why we have continued to support full funding for aid to Israel despite cuts in the foreign assistance budget, and why we applaud the country's commitment toward economic self-sufficiency.

We reaffirm that Republican commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military advantage over any adversary or group of adversaries. While we fully support Israel's efforts to find peace and security with its neighbors, we will judge the peace process by the security it generates both for Israel and for the United States. In that context, we support Israel's right to make its own decisions regarding security and boundaries.

We strongly oppose the Clinton administration's attempts to interfere in Israel's democratic process.

We applaud the Republican Congress for enacting legislation to recognize Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. A Republican administration will ensure that the U.S. Embassy is moved to Jerusalem by May 1999.

We honor the memory of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and express our support for the new government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. We applaud those leaders in the Arab world, President Mubarak and King Hussein, who have spoken courageously and acted boldly for the cause of peace. □

# BEHIND THE HEADLINES

## Contemplating life on Mars: An ancient Jewish undertaking

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Evidence of primeval bacteria was discovered recently in a meteorite that apparently fell to Earth from Mars, and the news sparked excited discussion among scientists and extraterrestrial prognosticators alike.

Some wondered whether this might be the first evidence of the possibility of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

But what is the Jewish view of such news? How does it square with the Torah's story of creation, which says God created the world in six days?

Is proof of life on Mars consistent with Judaism at all? For Jewish theologians who have been working since the Second Temple era to reconcile the Bible's creation story and the mysteries of the universe, it is.

Commentary and conjecture on the very beginnings of the universe are found even in records of early rabbinic discussions, in the Talmud and midrash.

But the rabbis also instructed that too much wondering isn't allowed.

The first rabbinic dictum in "The Book of Legends," which was compiled earlier this century by Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, says:

"You are allowed to inquire concerning the things that are from one end of heaven to the other, but not concerning what is above (the heavens), what is below (the deep), what is before (the six days of creation) [of the Earth] and what is after (the world's existence)."

But that hasn't stopped contemporary Jewish thinkers from considering what the news of life on Mars might mean.

The reports of Martian bacteria reminded Rabbi Burton Visotzky of a well-known midrash: When asked what the Creator was doing before bringing the Earth into being, the rabbis said God created worlds and then destroyed them, created worlds and then destroyed them again. Only after creating the Earth did the Creator stop and say, "Behold it is good."

### 'Maybe they failed'

That midrash indicates that "there may have been many worlds out there," said Visotzky, a professor of midrash and interreligious studies at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary.

"Now we can say that there are perhaps the beginnings of life on Mars? So nu?" he said.

Visotzky also sees an ecological warning in the news. "Maybe it's good to wake up and realize there may have been other life forms. Maybe they failed and we might be a little more careful with the way we care for our own world.

"God put us on the world not only to work it, but to guard it," he said. "We can't despoil it, and maybe this message from Mars will remind us that we live in a greater universe, with a much greater design, than we tend to see."

For Rabbi Basil Herring, who is Orthodox, the news prompted consideration of whether humankind is unique in all of God's creation. He concluded that it is.

"Man's soul is a reflection of the divine and therefore man has a unique spiritual identity and place in the universe," said Herring, spiritual leader of the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach, N.Y. He said, "I don't think the Torah seems to say there are other human beings elsewhere in the universe. But I don't think Torah contradicts the idea that there might be lower forms of life" in the universe.

According to Herring, the creation story of the Creator forming the world in six days "is not really a manual on how God physically created the Earth; it's not a science primer."

The Torah's narrative of creation tells that God first created heaven and then Earth, which was a vast, empty water. Then God created light and divided it from darkness to form day and night, and then created the firmament and divided it from the waters below, then created dry land and separated it from the sea.

Then God created vegetation, and then "lights in the dome of heaven," or the sun and the moon. On the fourth day, God created living beings, which filled the waters and the skies. On the fifth, the wildlife of the Earth was created.

And on the last day of creation, before resting, the Creator produced humankind.

Even some Orthodox Jews view the creation story as being consistent with the concept of evolution, Herring said.

"There are those who follow the view that the six days are not 24-hour days but are eons, so to talk about millions or billions of years could be reflected in the days" described in Genesis, he said.

"One can comfortably reconcile aspects of scientific theory with the creation story, which starts with the ocean, progresses to the land, ends with higher life forms," he said.

"None of it contradicts the notion that there may be other life forms scattered throughout the universe," he said, adding, "Nonetheless, man remains unique because of his soul and spiritual grandeur, and his relationship with God." □

## Tunnel weighed as solution to street-closing controversy

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The adage "out of sight, out of mind" may provide a clue for resolving the controversy about whether to close a main Jerusalem thoroughfare on the Sabbath.

Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert this week reportedly suggested building a tunnel beneath Bar Ilan Street so that cars could pass unnoticed and unhindered underneath the religious neighborhoods that border the thoroughfare.

The project would cost an estimated \$15 million, according to the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot.

The presence of Sabbath traffic on Bar Ilan has led to a series of often violent demonstrations in recent weeks.

Fervently Orthodox Jews want the street closed for the Sabbath; secular Israelis view its closure as an infringement on their freedoms.

The High Court of Justice is scheduled to hand down a ruling soon on a petition against closing the street.

This followed a decision by Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy to order the closure of the thoroughfare during prayer times on the Sabbath and holidays. The court later suspended the order pending its own ruling.

John Seligman, an archaeologist in the Jerusalem district, said building a tunnel could unearth problems typically linked to building projects in Jerusalem, particularly if the archaeological excavations that are required before any such project uncovered ancient graves.

"I can't say definitely that they would be there, but it is highly likely, especially given the proximity to Sanhedria, where the tombs of the Sanhedrin are," he told Israel Radio.

Seligman said bones were found when the religious neighborhoods were initially built, but that a solution had been found to allow the construction to continue. □

## Lubavitch to build synagogue for Jews in Kazakhstan capital

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Jewish officials, government leaders and foreign diplomats gathered in Kazakhstan last week to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for a new synagogue and community center in the former Soviet republic.

"In a sense, it's the birth of the Jewish community" in Kazakhstan, said Yeshaya Cohen, an emissary of the Lubavitch movement who serves as Kazakhstan's chief rabbi.

"Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, it was not possible to practice Judaism openly. Now we are constructing a building devoted to prayer, learning and the celebration of being Jewish," he said.

More than 800 people attended last week's ceremony to witness the cornerstone-laying.

The new center, being built in the Kazakh capital of Almaty under the sponsorship of the Lubavitch movement, will be named the Beis Menachem Center in honor of the late Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

The center will house a synagogue, library, museum, social hall, classrooms, a kosher kitchen and a mikvah, or ritual bath.

Among those singing and dancing to Jewish songs at the festive ceremony were Jewish veterans of World War II.

"The new center is a very big deal for us Jews, a very big deal for the whole city," said former World War II pilot Ishak Edelman. "This whole affair has restored our pride in being Jewish."

The establishment of the Jewish center "is a sign that Kazakhstan is becoming a land of safety for the Jewish people," said Gulsha Tanirbergenova, the country's minister of education.

Historical records show that the first known Jewish community — including 48 soldiers who had completed their service in the czarist army — settled in Kazakhstan in the 1880s.

In the century since then, Jews gathered in private houses for services.

### Died in exile

Located in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the second largest republic in the former Soviet Union. The country's Jewish community numbers about 32,000, with some 7,000 Jews living in Almaty.

For many of the Jews in Kazakhstan, Beis Menachem represents a historic triumph.

During the Stalinist era, thousands of Soviet Jews were exiled to Kazakhstan for, among other things, practicing religion.

In addition, many Jews of Eastern Europe fled to Kazakhstan during the Holocaust.

Hundreds of those Jews, who died in exile, are buried in a cemetery a few blocks from where the new community center will stand.

A stone from the cemetery grounds was used in the cornerstone-laying ceremony.

Among the Jews sent into exile was Levi Yitzhak Schneerson, the father of the late Lubavitcher rebbe.

Removed from his post as chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, Schneerson was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1939.

Five years later, he passed away in Almaty. His grave has since become a pilgrimage site for many Jews.

Alexander Baron, the lay leader of the Jewish community in Kazakhstan, says many Soviet Jews moved

to Kazakhstan after the war because it was easier to find economic prosperity in remote outlying regions.

Construction costs for the project are expected to be some \$2.25 million.

The synagogue is expected to be completed within seven months, with the community center to be finished in another two years. □

## Le Pen assails officials tying him to cemetery vandals

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — The leader of France's extreme right National Front Party has hurled racial and anti-Semitic insults at three public figures who said his party shared responsibility for the 1990 desecration of a Jewish cemetery in southern France.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's remarks came shortly after four neo-Nazi skinheads confessed last week to the May 1990 desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the southern French town of Carpentras.

The four said they had desecrated 34 graves and disinterred the body of a Jewish man to pay tribute to Adolf Hitler and mark the anniversary of Germany's surrender on May 8, 1945.

The four confessed after one of them turned himself in, saying that he wanted to make a new start in life.

Last week's arrests of the four ended a highly publicized six-year investigation that had first targeted members of the extreme right, but then shifted to an investigation of children of town notables.

Shortly after last week's arrests, Henri Hajdenberg, president of the Jewish umbrella organization CRIF, former Culture Minister Jack Lang and Fode Sylla, head of the anti-racist organization S.O.S. Racism, said Le Pen was partly to blame for the desecration because his speeches repeatedly incited anti-Semitism and racial hatred.

But Le Pen, who has angered Jews here and abroad with his thinly veiled anti-Semitism, was quick to shoot back.

"Let us put aside the venomous insinuations of a few Jewish extremists like Messrs. Hajdenberg or Lang, or the rantings of the fat and crazy zebu Fode Sylla," he told reporters. A zebu is a kind of buffalo living in India and Africa. Sylla, who is black, has a heavy build.

"The National Front is a target, but is guilty of nothing," Le Pen said, accusing the government of "political machinations" against his party.

Justice Minister Jacques Toubon has asked Paris' public prosecutor to look into Le Pen's remarks to decide whether legal action may be taken against him.

The cemetery desecration caused an outrage in France and sent 100,000 people, including then-President Francois Mitterrand, into the streets of Paris in a mass protest.

Many of the protesters wore the kind of yellow stars that Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust.

The four skinheads who confessed last week were all members or sympathizers of the French and European Nationalist Party, a tiny far-right party that became known in the 1980s in connection with bomb attacks on immigrant hostels and on a left-wing magazine.

A fifth member is said to have died in a motorcycle accident.

Sources said all five were detained at the start of the probe and then released without charges.

Last year, Le Pen led his party in a march in Carpentras to demand that the state apologize for statements made by government ministers holding him accountable for the desecration. □