



Daily News Bulletin

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81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel, U.S. differ on response

The United States would "very strongly urge" Israel not to fight back if attacked by Iraq, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen said in a television interview.

In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement, "Israel retains the right to defend itself and will operate according to its security interests. This position has not changed."

Britain details Iraqi weapons

Britain presented a case for military action aimed at forcing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to allow U.N. weapons inspectors unrestricted access in their search for weapons of mass destruction.

The British Foreign Office detailed the inventory of weapons that the U.N. inspectors have destroyed and the lethal quantity of non-conventional weapons that Saddam is suspected of concealing. [Page 3]

Arafat names successor

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat told President Clinton when they met at the White House last month that his successor would be Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, according to the authoritative London-based newsletter, *Foreign Report*. Abu Mazen is now Arafat's second-in-command. [Page 4]

Insurer hit with subpoena

One of Europe's largest insurance companies was hit with subpoenas by the State of California and with a \$135 million suit by a family for allegedly stonewalling demands for payment on policies taken out by Holocaust victims and survivors. California's insurance commissioner said at a news conference that Assicurazioni Generali was guilty of avoiding its responsibilities to Jewish policy holders and their heirs.

Papon judge may step down

The judge in the war crimes trial of Maurice Papon may have to step down because his credibility has been tainted, according to legal observers.

The assessment came after a prosecution lawyer called on the judge to remove himself because he was related to Jews whom Papon allegedly deported during the Vichy regime. If Judge Jean-Louis Castagnede does step down, the trial could be threatened.

PEOPLE OF THE BYTE [PART III]

Finding love in all the right cyberspaces

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — You might say Jan and Joel have fate to thank. Or perhaps, they owe it all to IBM.

It began with an Internet connection.

Too hyper to sleep one Saturday night after going out dancing, Jan turned on her computer and started browsing the personal ads in the Jewish Matchmaker area on America Online.

She was taken with Joel's photo and bio. Only one problem. He was what's called — in the lingo of cyber dating and elsewhere — GU: geographically undesirable. He was living in Hawaii, a long commute from Peekskill, N.Y.

She wrote him a short note: "It's a shame you're half a world away."

Joel wrote back: "If you face West and I face East when we pray, we'll meet."

They began corresponding regularly through e-mail. Before long, Jan was making plans to visit Hawaii, and Joel was inviting her to stay with him.

"It may not have been love at first sight, but the second sight undoubtedly worked its magic," Joel says of the two weeks they spent touring the island together and taking in sunsets. Even before leaving New York, Jan says she knew Joel was her "bashert," telling a friend, "I'm going to marry that man."

Her prediction will prove true when the two exchange vows this summer.

Jan, 55, and Joel, 61, are among a growing number of Jewish couples who, with the help of online Jewish singles forums, are making their way from cyberspace to the chupah.

On American Online, the Jewish Community Online maintains a "matchmaker" area (keyword: Jewish Singles), one of the more popular online Jewish singles venues.

In December, as many as 34,000 different users, most of them between the ages of 20 and 45, visited the singles area, spending a total of 10,600 hours there.

Currently, there are more than 1,500 matchmaker profiles listed on the AOL site, along with a sampling of 30 success stories. Dozens of other web sites for Jewish singles, many serving specific regions of the country, can be found through simple searches using Yahoo! or any other Internet search engine.

While there generally is no cost to simply browse around and check out personal ads listed online, most services charge a fee to post your own.

So, how are Jewish singles turning Internet connections into lifelong partnerships?

In a typical cyber courtship scenario, someone places an ad, often with a photo, into particular age and geographic groupings within a designation such as "women seeking men."

"Woody Allen type seeks his soul mate," "Cultured, classy, charismatic cuddler," and "Your mother will love me" are some of the headings for ads recently posted in the Jewish Community Online's matchmaker area.

Responses come by way of e-mail, allowing a chance for both people to read about each other and perhaps check out each other's online profiles before they begin corresponding.

"You feel in control," says Rela Mintz Geffen, a professor of sociology at Gratz College in Philadelphia who dabbles in the online dating scene. "You can control your own destiny."

In other instances, people might come into contact through real-time communica-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israelis remain edgy

Israeli citizens continued to flock to gas mask distribution centers, despite assurances from their government that the probability of an Iraqi attack on Israel is low.

Meanwhile, Israel Radio reported that Holland will supply Israel with a shipment of gas masks.

Israel mulls settlement list

The Prime Minister's Office in Israel is considering a plan to declare dozens of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "confrontation line settlements," a status that would grant them special budgetary priority, governmental support and tax benefits.

At the same time, settlements located in the Arava would no longer be defined this way, because of the peace treaty signed between Israel and Jordan.

Arabs protest neat Efrat

About 40 Palestinians staged a protest near the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

The demonstrators protested Israel's decision to confiscate Arab-owned vineyards to build a road.

Reports due on Mossad failure

Two committees in Israel are expected soon to complete their reports on last September's failed assassination attempt on a Hamas leader in Jordan by Mossad agents. The two reports are expected to address the operational and political implications of the assassination attempt.

Debaters meet in Israel

Some 200 students from 26 countries gathered in Israel for the 10th World School Debating Contest.

The semi-finals were held at the Jerusalem City Hall, prompting some to observe that the respectful mode of debate demonstrated by the contestants could set an example for City Council members.

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Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
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tion channels. "What will happen is, you'll be in a chat room, you'll see someone who says something that interests you, then you instant-message them and have a private conversation, a one-on-one chat," says Tsilli Pines, a producer for Jewish Community Online who manages the singles area.

The opportunity to correspond with a prospective date often proves disarming, online matchmaking gurus say, and it carries a distinct advantage over the more traditional practices of responding to personal ads in newspapers or going through computerized dating services.

"It's less intimidating because it gives you time to think about how you want to approach them," Pines says. "You can sort of test them out before you divulge" personal information.

"It's restored the art of letter-writing, and in a way, it makes for an almost more old-fashioned courtship," Geffen says.

Erika and Jason got to know each other slowly over a period of several months, regularly chatting online before exchanging phone numbers.

She was living in Florida, he in New York, and it wasn't until they spoke that they discovered they grew up in the same neighborhood in Brooklyn, attended the same elementary school and were in the same kindergarten and first grade classes.

"Figuring it was fate, Jason flew to Florida three weeks later," Erika says. "It was love at first site!"

Cross-country romances are not uncommon in this emerging global village of Jewish singles.

Indeed, online singles forums have succeeded in removing geographical boundaries, effectively opening up a range of new possibilities for Jews on the prowl.

"For Jews living in remote places who find it hard to even find other Jews, it's a really important way to connect with other Jewish people," Pines says.

"Then in somewhere like New York — which is brimming with Jews" and can feel "overwhelming because it's a big city — it's a way to connect with a small community of people."

Susan went online around 3 a.m. one morning in search of just that — a small community. Heartbroken and on the verge of breaking up with her boyfriend of two years, she struck up a conversation with three people in a chat room, all of whom agreed she should throw her boyfriend out.

One of them was Warren, who followed up with her a week or so later to see how she was doing. They began corresponding, and soon after Susan invited him to take her to a Jewish singles party in Atlantic City — no small proposition, considering he was living on the West Coast. "This wonderful man took a plane and flew out 3,000 miles for a 'blind date,'" Susan says. "We spent four glorious days together and fell in love."

Before long, Warren was making the drive across America, belongings in tow, to start a new life out East. "We both feel that this is a mitzvah," he says, "that has been arranged on another level." □

Hate crimes down in Australia

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Anti-Semitic hate crimes decreased in Australia last year, according to Australia's central Jewish group.

Some 246 such acts were reported last year, down from 300 in 1996.

The president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Diane Shteinman, said, "Harassment of Jewish individuals in Australia continues at an unacceptable, high rate."

Among the incidents that the Council identified as being of particular concern during 1997 were fires at a Jewish educational center, graffiti on Jewish gravestones, swastikas painted on the door of a major Jewish community center and anti-Semitic graffiti at a Jewish day school.

Shteinman welcomed the fact that there was a substantial decrease in the incidents of violence, property damage and vandalism in 1997.

But there was no discernible drop in incidents of threatening and abusive telephone calls, hate mail, poster and leaflet distribution and anti-Jewish electronic mail. □

JEWISH WORLD

D'Amato moves against banks

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) is urging Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan to block the proposed merger of the Swiss Bank Corporation and Union Bank of Switzerland in the United States.

D'Amato, who chairs the Senate Banking Committee, said the merger should not be allowed to take place until the banks provide Holocaust victims and their heirs a full accounting of assets deposited during the World War II era.

Shareholders of the two banks this week overwhelmingly approved the merger, first announced in December.

Holocaust memorial criticized

A group of 19 prominent German intellectuals and academicians issued an open letter calling on Germany's chancellor, Helmut Kohl, to abandon plans for a monument in the heart of Berlin to Jews killed during the Holocaust.

They said the large scale of the planned memorial would not create the "place of quiet mourning" the promoters envisioned.

It also said the monument should also recall other groups persecuted by the Nazis, including Gypsies, gays and Soviet prisoners of war.

German president apologizes

Germany's president apologized for the death and destruction caused by German troops in Ukraine during World War II. Roman Herzog, who is on a four-day visit to the capital of Kiev, said on Ukrainian Television that he suffers "together with the victims and their families, and I am ashamed of what was done."

Moderation urged on Farrakhan

The Canadian Jewish Congress called on organizers of a mass rally in Toronto to have Louis Farrakhan moderate his comments when he addresses the rally later this month.

The CJC warned that the Nation of Islam leader should not make statements that would violate sections of the criminal code dealing with the willful promotion of hatred.

UJA receives \$1 million

The United Jewish appeal received a \$1 million donation from an evangelical Christian leader to help Jews from the former Soviet Union emigrate to Israel.

The Rev. John Hagee, pastor of the 16,000-member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, presented the check to UJA at the National Religious Broadcaster's Conference in Washington.

The donation is expected to help more than 3,300 Jews relocate to Israel.

Britain details inventory of Iraqi weapons capability

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Britain this week presented the most comprehensive and compelling case for military action aimed at forcing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to allow U.N. weapons inspectors unrestricted access to search for weapons of mass destruction.

In a nine-page document, the Foreign Office detailed the inventory of chemical and biological weapons that the U.N. inspectors have destroyed and the lethal quantity of non-conventional weapons that Saddam is suspected of continuing to conceal.

Britain's foreign secretary, Robin Cook, described the document as "a tale of repeated deception," adding: "Anyone who does not grasp the gravity of this issue should read it."

According to the document, the U.N. weapons inspectors are concerned that "Iraq may still have operational Scud-type missiles with chemical and biological warheads.

"Critical missile components, warheads and propellants are not accounted for," it says. "Nor are 17 tons of growth media for biological weapons — enough to produce more than three times the amount of anthrax Iraq admits it had." Saddam initially admitted Iraq had produced 169 gallons of anthrax; the accepted figure is now nearly 2200 gallons.

Also unaccounted for are: some 4,000 tons of chemical weapons precursors, sufficient to produce several hundred tons of chemical weapons agents, which could fill several thousand munitions; over 31,000 chemical weapons munitions; and over 600 tons of VX precursors, which could produce 200 tons of VX nerve gas. One drop of VX can kill a person; 200 tons could wipe out the entire population of the world.

The document says the U.N. weapons inspectors must also continue monitoring Iraq's facilities, which can be used for manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. "Given the chance, Iraq would undoubtedly resume WMD production," it says, using the acronym for weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq has four plants that have been used to produce chemical weapons munitions and 30 which could be converted to produce chemical weapons materials. "These factories cannot be destroyed because they have legitimate alternative civilian uses," notes the document, "but it is important that they are monitored closely."

Without monitoring, it warns, Iraq could produce chemical and biological weapons in weeks, a long-range missile in a year and nuclear weapons in five years.

It could also produce up to 91 gallons of weapons-grade anthrax each week — enough to fill two warheads — and it could also produce mustard chemical weapons agents within weeks. The document also details episodes to support its charges of "Iraqi deceit, concealment, harassment, and obstruction":

- Iraq claimed that its VX nerve gas project had failed, but U.N. inspectors discovered Iraq had developed the capability to produce VX on an industrial scale and had, in fact, produced four tons of the nerve gas.
- Iraq was working on a number of other agents, including sarin and mustard gas.
- Iraq claimed that the huge al-Hakam factory was used to produce animal feed, but in fact it was found to be used for manufacturing biological weapons and had produced 13,000 gallons of anthrax and botulinum. If 220 kilograms of anthrax were released from the top of a tall building, it could kill up to 3 million people.
- Iraq, despite denials, was found to have produced over 4,900 gallons of botulinum, nearly 2,200 gallons of anthrax, 572 tons of aflatoxin, which produces liver cancer, and clostridium, which produces gas gangrene. It had filled ballistic missile warheads and bombs with the first three of these agents. These have since been destroyed.

The document notes that the weapons inspectors have so far destroyed: 38,000 chemical weapons; 124,800 gallons of live chemical weapons agents; 48 operational missiles; six missile launchers; 30 missile warheads adapted for chemical and biological weapons; and hundreds of items of equipment used for the production of chemical weapons. □

\$64,000 question answered as Arafat names successor

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA). — Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat appears to have answered the \$64,000 question: Who will be his successor?

The answer, according to the authoritative London-based newsletter *Foreign Report*, is Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, Arafat's deputy and a key player in the Palestinians' Oslo negotiating team.

Abbas was born in a village in what is now northern Israel and fled with his family in 1948. He was a founding member of Arafat's Fatah movement in Kuwait and now lives in an opulent villa in the Gaza Strip.

The news was apparently conveyed to President Clinton by Arafat himself when he visited the White House last month for talks on ways to break the current stalemate in the Middle East peace process. This is the first time Arafat is known to have spoken openly of his successor — certainly to a foreign leader — and while the report was denied by some Palestinian officials, senior Arafat aides declined to comment.

Basing itself on American sources, the newsletter quotes Arafat telling Clinton: "When my time will come, I will be replaced by my brother, Abu Mazen."

In the course of their conversation, Arafat is also quoted as saying: "We can never give up. The Palestinian struggle will continue and the struggle will carry on for generations if it will be needed.

"As far as I am concerned, the end of the process will be the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and in order to achieve this goal I am willing to be flexible here or there as long as I know that the result will be this one," he said, meaning an independent state.

"We have agreed to a division of historical Palestine, but we will never accept a division of the West Bank or give up part of it."

There has been widespread speculation about Arafat's failing health, but the newsletter reports that he received a clean bill of health from a recent checkup at a U.S. hospital. Aides, however, say his mood is bleak. □

Israeli minister resigns from jubilee committee

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Tourism Minister Moshe Katzav has resigned as government liaison for Israel's 50th jubilee celebrations, citing negative comments about him from the Prime Minister's Office.

Katzav told a news conference that he had also intended to step down from the Cabinet, but received an apology from the Prime Minister's Office minutes before convening the conference.

Saying that "two horses cannot lead one carriage," Katzav added, "I think from all this, the prime minister's office should do some real soul-searching," Katzav said.

Katzav's resignation is the latest snag in preparations for Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations.

Three chairmen of the committee that was created to plan the events have stepped down during the past year, citing rancorous relations with Katzav, whom they accused of meddling.

Another turned down the position last week, two days after it was offered to her.

Committee members and Katzav have clashed with them on a number of issues, ranging from budgets to when and how the jubilee celebrations would be kicked off.

Israeli media reports, meanwhile, cited sources in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted to remove Katzav from his duties as government liaison for the celebrations, saying he had shown "ineptitude" in all the dealings on the matter.

This week, after a fourth candidate to chair the jubilee committee turned down the job, the prime minister appointed Doron Shmueli, a former member of the Tsomet Party, as chairman. □

Jerusalem mayor appeals for return of shul in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

SAMARA, Russia (JTA) — The mayor of Jerusalem has visited the Russian city that his family left soon after the 1917 Revolution.

On his tour, local officials promised Ehud Olmert to resolve a synagogue dispute in this city of 1.5 million people, which is home to 15,000 Jews, including some prominent intellectuals and entrepreneurs.

At the turn of the century, Samara's burgeoning trade and industry earned the town a nickname as a "Russian Chicago." At the time, the highly visible Jewish community had three synagogues — including the Choral Synagogue, which held over 1,000 worshipers and was one of the biggest in the Russian Empire.

The Choral Synagogue was confiscated by Bolsheviks in the early 1920s and later turned into a bakery that still occupies the building.

Last year, the local administration decided to return the property to the community, but the bakery refused to leave. Samara officials promised Olmert they would soon resolve the issue.

Today, the community uses a small synagogue that was constructed in the 1880s and returned to the Jews three years ago.

The Lubavitch movement broke the community's spiritual isolation in 1996 by sending a permanent rabbi from Jerusalem to the city, which is on the banks of the Volga River about 600 miles east of Moscow. Until the fall of communism, foreign visitors were banned from Samara because it was a center for military industry.

Olmert attended the dedication of a Jewish kindergarten that is co-sponsored by local authorities, the Lubavitch movement and local Jewish entrepreneurs.

Some Samara Jews are still afraid to identify with the community, which now boasts two dozen Jewish organizations, two monthly newspapers and a radio show that is on the air 8 hours a week. Despite this fear, and an emigration rate of about 500 people a year, the Samara Jewish community has a future, says Zisi Weitzman, editor of the Samara-based *Volga Jewish Gazette*.

"As long as economic reforms keep going, there is a future for us," he said. □