



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Sealed rooms suggested

Israel's defense minister advised the public to buy materials to prepare sealed rooms in case of an Iraqi attack.

"It would not hurt for civilians to have the necessary materials for a sealed room on hand," Yitzhak Mordechai said, touching off a buying frenzy.

### Ne'eman touring U.S.

Israeli Cabinet minister Ya'acov Ne'eman is on a two-week tour of the United States to convince American Jews that his committee's proposal to resolve the conversion crisis is not dead.

Reform and Conservative leaders had expressed outrage after the Chief Rabbinate apparently rejected working together on a joint conversion training institute. The Ne'eman Committee had proposed that the Orthodox rabbinate retain sole jurisdiction over conversions in Israel, and that non-Orthodox rabbis be allowed to participate along with Orthodox rabbis in an institute to prepare prospective converts to Judaism.

### Pro-Iraq demonstrations continue

Hundreds of Palestinians marched through a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip calling on Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to launch missiles at Tel Aviv.

Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department advised Americans to avoid traveling to the Palestinian self-rule areas, citing the pro-Iraq demonstrations that have been occurring there on a near-daily basis.

### Clinton signs Holocaust bill

President Clinton signed a bill to provide \$25 million to organizations that assist Holocaust survivors.

The measure, already approved by the U.S. Congress, also authorizes \$5 million for research to help with the restitution of Jewish-owned assets looted by the Nazis.

### Committee clears Netanyahu

A government-appointed committee cleared Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of responsibility for a failed Mossad assassination attempt last September on a Hamas leader in Jordan.

The commission said that the prime minister had acted appropriately, but it criticized Mossad head Danny Yatom, adding that it was up to the government to decide whether to dismiss him. [Page 4]

## PEOPLE OF THE BYTE

### Learning online provides 'spiritual lifeline' for adults

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Eleanor Gibson is a cranberry farmer in a rural part of Washington state where hers, she says with a laugh, is one of only two Jewish families in the area.

Every day — usually for an hour, sometimes for two or three — she logs onto a new, online adult education course.

At Mishpacha: A Community of Learning for Jewish Parents, Gibson learns about Judaism's views on issues as varied as food and death.

But more importantly, she says, she connects with about 10 other men and women with whom she can chew over the pleasures and challenges of living and parenting as Jews today.

"It's like an emotional, spiritual Jewish lifeline for me," says Gibson, who home schools her two youngest children and lives nearly 80 miles from the nearest synagogue.

Gibson also says that participating in Mishpacha ([www.mishpacha.org](http://www.mishpacha.org)), which means family in Hebrew, during the past few months has helped her and her non-Jewish husband, John, cope with conflicts related to their interfaith marriage.

Connecting to the forums on Mishpacha, which is sponsored by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, has allowed John to "realize he's not alone, that his questions and doubts are shared" by others, she says.

And that has led him to talk to a rabbi about the possibility of converting to Judaism, says Gibson, a Jew by choice herself.

Mishpacha, which was created by Larry Yudelson, who has been Jewishly active on the World Wide Web, and Conservative Rabbi Dianne Cohler-Esses, is one of a burgeoning number of adult education courses available online.

They run a wide gamut of technical sophistication and intellectual rigor. Many of them attract a high percentage of intermarrieds and potential converts.

At a time of intense communal concern over Jewish alienation, online learning seems to provide a powerful entree into Jewish life.

The first incarnation of online connectivity and learning, which started nearly a decade ago, took the form of electronically mailed listservs, automated systems that distribute information to a community of electronic subscribers.

Hundreds of these listservs continue to be used by tens of thousands of Jews.

Shamash, a Jewish community umbrella site on the Web, alone has 267 lists with 36,000 different people subscribing, according to Nathan Erlich, director of the Center for Information Technology at Hebrew College in Brookline, Mass., where Shamash ([www.shamash.org](http://www.shamash.org)) is based.

The Shamash-housed lists, as well as those situated on Virtual Jerusalem and other central Jewish Web sites, range in perspective from secular to the fervently Orthodox.

Participation in such lists provides experiences that range from informal to formal education, with a heavy emphasis on the exchange of information among peers.

Some are passive, allowing, for example, a subscriber to receive commentaries on the weekly Torah reading sent to an electronic mailbox.

Others are bulletin boards directed by moderators who introduce a topic and keep it focused.

Subjects can be anything from Judaism's traditional teachings about gossip to the Reform perspective on the Jewish news of the day, including Jewish perspectives on

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Netanyahu warns of Iran

Iran could soon pose a far greater threat to regional and international stability than Iraq now poses, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview with The Times of London newspaper.

"The entire world's attention is understandably and legitimately focused on [Iraqi leader] Saddam Hussein," he said. "But right across the border in Iran that country is developing freely, without any interference, without any pressure, without any inspectors, ballistic missiles and atomic weapons."

### Terrorist gets 10 years

A Palestinian court sentenced a Hamas terrorist to 10 years in prison with hard labor for involvement in the May 1996 murder of David Boim, 17, an Israeli who emigrated from New York with his family.

Amjad Hinawi, 26, pleaded innocent, saying he was driving with Khalil Sharif, 24, near Beit El, when Sharif unexpectedly pulled out a machine gun and opened fire. Sharif was one of three Hamas suicide bombers who detonated near-simultaneous explosions last September at the Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall in downtown Jerusalem.

### Gore expected in Israel

Vice President Gore is expected to visit Israel to participate in special April 30 Independence Day celebrations marking Israel's 50th anniversary, according to Israel's ambassador to Washington, Eliahu Ben-Elissar. Gore is expected to lead a large delegation including senior administration and congressional officials, as well as American Jewish leaders.

### Mortars hit Kiryat Shmona

Hezbollah gunmen fired a mortar barrage at Israeli army positions in the southern Lebanon security zone. Some of the shells landed in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, causing light damage but no injuries.

hiking, home schooling and Star Trek as well as discussions among gay Orthodox Jews.

The cutting edge of online learning today, say those involved, are adult education courses with teachers and curricula and a high degree of interactivity.

Still, there are a number of approaches.

Mishpacha's focus "is not on teaching curriculum and testing people afterwards, but creating discussion in the community as peers about what it means to be Jewish," says course creator Yudelson.

Other programs are more academically inclined.

The Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary of America, for instance, has a Distance Learning Project, which offers two courses — "Introduction to the Talmud" and an "Introduction to Jewish Theology" ([www.jtsa.edu/melton/courses](http://www.jtsa.edu/melton/courses)).

Each is tailored to different audiences. Each can be taken for college credit, and both are being shaped for use in Jewish supplemental high schools, according to Michael Starr, director of distance learning for JTS. Most people — 110 people enrolled in the Talmud course last semester — take them for adult education rather than for credit, paying \$125 for an eight week "mini-session."

Allen Olender, the father of two young children and a senior vice president for Prudential Securities, has long believed that he doesn't have time to participate in the traditional adult education courses offered at the many synagogues in West Bloomfield, Mich., where he lives.

After learning about the seminary's courses through its Web site, he took the first Talmud mini-course and is now taking the second.

Taking a class online "allows me to do it when I can, in the middle of a workday for an hour or the middle of the night," Olender says.

The course is one of the more complex Web sites for Jewish distance learning today, offering layer upon layer of information.

In one section of the "Introduction to Talmud" course, the lines of Talmudic text — a commentary on the Bible — are presented with a button that, when clicked, lets students hear the course's professor, Rabbi Joel Roth, read it aloud.

The text is also translated into English, and many words are highlighted. Click on one and it takes you to a definition or an explanation of the concept.

It also links to another Web site, independent of the seminary, which displays each page of Talmud in its entirety, so that students can get a feeling for the unique way that the Talmud is laid out.

The best aspects of Jewish online learning, participants and organizers agree, is that it makes high-level resources available to people wherever they are physically or spiritually. Students, Jewish and not, log on to the courses from all over the world, from Scarsdale, N.Y., to Israel, from Curacao to Sweden, says Starr.

Online learning is also well-suited to "people who may have had bad rabbi experiences, or who are frustrated their synagogues don't talk more about God and religion," Yudelson says.

The downside is that distance learning "is somewhat disembodied," Starr says. In an effort "to humanize the experience," he adds, course discussion leaders call North American participants during the first week of class.

But, say its proponents, these drawbacks are outweighed by the benefits of learning online. In live classes, for example, the different levels of previous exposure to the subject often makes it difficult for both instructors and the more knowledgeable students. Online course can provide layers of background information for less-knowledgeable students that the more advanced ones don't need.

While the electronic approach to Jewish learning is clearly in its infancy, what has been offered so far is receiving rave reviews.

Participants in Hebrew College's creative-writing course, "Finding Your Jewish Voice," didn't want to stop even after the eight-week term ended last year. The instructor dropped out, exhausted, after 12 weeks, Erlich says, but the group continues to meet in cyberspace.

And, ironically, the online experience is leading at least one participant back to the more traditional adult education program at his local synagogue.

"I'm much more inclined to take a local class than I would have been before" participating in the seminary's course, says Olender. By taking an online class, "my interest in Judaic studies has been piqued."

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## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, President

Mark J. Joffe, Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein, Editor

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Neo-Nazi membership growing

Membership in German neo-Nazi groups increased markedly between 1994 and 1997, according to the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. Membership increased from 5,400 to 7,500 during the three-year period, according to the magazine, which cited numbers obtained by state agencies that monitor extremist groups.

### Poland presses Germany

Poland asked Germany to pay compensation to Polish slave laborers who worked for German firms during World War II. Warsaw made the request after Germany recently said it would create a fund to compensate Jewish Holocaust victims in former Soviet bloc countries.

### Neo-Nazis march in Budapest

Some 600 black-uniformed neo-Nazis demonstrated in Budapest to mark the 53rd anniversary of the surrender of the Nazi forces in the Hungarian capital to Soviet troops. Istvan Gyorkas, the 55-year-old leader of the extremist Hungarian Movement, called on the demonstrators to "follow the example of the Nazi heroes" of the past.

### More criticism of Berlin memorial

A German Jewish leader joined the growing chorus of voices protesting the final designs for a national Holocaust monument in Berlin. Andreas Nachama, leader of Berlin's Jewish community, said the four finalists in the competition produced designs that lack focus.

### Racial incidents decline

There were 212 reported incidents of racially motivated vandalism and harassment in Canada in 1997, according to B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights.

The results represented a 13 percent decrease from the 244 incidents reported in 1996. The largest number of incidents last year, 98, were reported in Toronto.

### Tolerance exhibit opens

The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance marked its fifth anniversary by unveiling a \$1.4 million interactive exhibit.

Visitors enter a replica of a 1950s diner, with counter stools and red booths, where they can view two different videos — one probing the boundary between free speech and hate speech, the other dealing with moral choices and attitudes related to a fatal drunk driving accident. After each presentation, viewers can ask pre-programmed questions of the film's characters, then vote their personal reactions.

## Canadian museum suspends plans to build Holocaust gallery

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Plans to build a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum have been suspended after complaints from veterans groups ignited a heated debate.

The officials of the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans organizations have complained that they weren't consulted about the proposed gallery and have asserted that the Holocaust had little to do with the experience of the Canadian military during the war. The Canadian War Museum, located in Ottawa, Canada's capital, commemorates the role of Canadians in World War II — and in other wars.

Central to the uproar is a philosophical debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a defining event of the 20th century.

Some veterans organizations have suggested that the Holocaust gallery might more appropriately be housed in the nearby Canadian Museum of Civilization, a larger national institution whose board also manages the Canadian War Museum. Still others, however, including several Ukrainian-Canadian organizations, are questioning the need for any sort of Holocaust memorial.

"Our principal concern is that any facility on genocide be inclusive, covering all the groups that suffered," said John Gregorovich, a veteran who is also chairman of the Ukrainian-Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

Gregorovich noted that 14.5 million Ukrainians died during World War II.

Apparently surprised by the strong reaction, officials of the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corp., which controls the Canadian War Museum, have backed away from the plan for the gallery, which was first announced last November as part of a \$12 million museum expansion. □

## Jewish Agency head's words incense French Jewish leader

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — A war of words has erupted between the head of France's Jewish community and the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

For the second time in two months, Avraham Burg, the chairman of the Jewish Agency, criticized the French Jewish leadership for being too soft on the issue of restitution.

"For a long time the problem of banking assets, stolen art work and real estate looted from Jews has been widely known in France. However, with the exception of a few individuals who have gathered information, no one from the Jewish community organizations has done anything," Burg said in an interview with the French Jewish weekly *Tribune Juive*.

"The leaders of the French community fear a resurgence of anti-Semitism," he said.

Henri Hajdenberg, president of the CRIF, France's umbrella group for secular Jewish organizations, reacted angrily to Burg's statements, calling them "a type of provocation" and "inadmissible interference."

"What happened to the Jews of France is not the same as what happened to the Jews of Switzerland," Hajdenberg said in an interview. "What happened in France was much more serious — tens of thousands of Jews were deported and murdered and millions of dollars cannot rectify that. This cannot be treated as a mere question of money."

A government-appointed commission investigating the extent of the plundering of Jewish property in France has yet to determine how much was looted and what amount has already been returned. Hajdenberg has repeatedly said he considers the issue to be a moral one. He also says the community is not seeking compensation, an approach that differs from the one taken by Jewish leaders in pushing for compensation from Swiss banks involved in plundered Nazi gold. □

## Probe faults head of Mossad for bungled Jordan operation

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A government-appointed committee has cleared Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of responsibility for a failed Mossad operation to kill a Hamas leader in Jordan.

The commission said that the prime minister had acted in a "responsible manner, having considered and examined the plans presented to him, from every possible aspect."

The commission reserved its criticism for Mossad head Danny Yatom, saying that he and the division head in charge of operations were to be faulted for the flaws in conceiving and carrying out the operation.

But it said that it was up to the government to decide whether to dismiss Yatom.

The three-member commission, which was headed by a former Defense Ministry director general, Yosef Chekhanover, submitted to Netanyahu on Monday its report on the attempt to assassinate Khaled Mashaal last September.

Only a small portion of the report was made public, with the rest remaining classified for security reasons.

Netanyahu, who as prime minister has overall authority over the Mossad's operations, declined to say whether any action would be taken against Yatom.

"I would first like to read all of the report before making any statement on this matter," Netanyahu told reporters.

Regarding the impact the operation had on Israeli-Jordanian relations, Netanyahu said, "Israel and Jordan have an understanding on what must be done to fight terrorism."

The operation, in which two Mossad agents were apprehended by Jordanian authorities after attempting to inject Mashaal with a fatal poison, severely strained Israel's relations with Jordan, its closest friend in the region. The agents were freed after Israel agreed to release dozens of Palestinian prisoners, including Hamas co-founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

In its report, the commission did not judge the decision to carry out the operation on Jordanian territory, refusing to question the prevailing principle that no place should be a safe harbor for those who plan to carry out terrorist acts against Israel.

But the commission did propose that the government define where such actions be taken.

The main findings of the report found grave flaws in the planning and implementation of the operation.

The report noted that the operation was planned on the assumption that it was a "silent operation" with a minimum chance of failure — but that Mossad planners and their superiors had hardly addressed what would happen in the event of a mishap.

In a minority opinion, former Police Commissioner Rafi Peled said he believed Yatom should be relieved of his duties.

Likud Knesset member Uzi Landau, who is a member of a Knesset subcommittee that also prepared a report on the assassination attempt, agreed with the Chekhanover Committee's decision not to call for Yatom's dismissal. All six members of the Knesset subcommittee also came to the conclusion that Netanyahu should not be held responsible for the failed mission.

But a majority of that committee's members criticized the decision to carry out the action on Jordanian soil. □

## Rifts among prosecutors surface in war crimes trial

By Lee Yanowitch

PARIS (JTA) — As far as the lawyers for the civil plaintiffs in the war crimes trial of Maurice Papon are concerned, there is a loose cannon among them.

Already fearing that the slow pace of the trial may work against them, the lawyers for the prosecution were infuriated when colleague Arno Klarsfeld dealt a blow to their case by saying he believed the defendant's claims that he was merely obeying orders.

"In my opinion, Maurice Papon, you would not have acted without orders. I cannot believe that you wanted to see our fellow countrymen deported," Klarsfeld told the defendant last week in court. With that one comment, Klarsfeld embarrassed and angered the other prosecution lawyers by contradicting the argument of criminal intent on which their case is based.

"He's pleading in Papon's defense," said lawyer Gerard Boulanger. "It's very dangerous. Let's just hope that the jury is sufficiently convinced of Papon's guilt that whatever the Klarsfelds do won't ruin the trial."

Papon, 87, is accused of ordering the arrest for deportation of 1,560 Jews, including 223 children, from the southwest city of Bordeaux between 1942 and 1944, when he was a senior bureaucrat of the collaborationist Vichy regime.

Papon denies the charges and says he used his position to save Jews and to help the anti-Nazi resistance.

From the start of the trial, Klarsfeld and his famous Nazi-hunter father, Serge, have called for a more lenient sentence for Papon to emphasize the difference between his deeds and those of people like Klaus Barbie, ex-chief of the Gestapo in Lyon, or Paul Touvier, a leader of the fascist militia in the same city. Touvier was sentenced to life in prison in 1994 for the shooting of seven Jewish hostages, and Barbie was also jailed for life by a French court for torturing Jews and deporting them to death camps.

"The Klarsfelds have always said Papon was less important than the others," said Alain Jakubowicz, who represents B'nai B'rith and the Consistoire, the body tending to the religious needs of French Jews.

But many saw Arno Klarsfeld's tactic as a way to get back at his colleagues, who had publicly condemned him last month for abruptly revealing — without consulting them — that the judge was related to some of the Jews allegedly deported by Papon, and therefore should step down because of a conflict of interest.

Those disclosures nearly led to the judge's removal from a trial already dogged by delays.

"In 10 minutes, he got what he was looking for — revenge, right in court, against his colleagues who had denounced his offensive against the presiding judge in January," wrote Pascale Nivellet in the daily newspaper *Liberation*.

Klarsfeld has never been a team player, according to those familiar with his trial tactics.

At Touvier's trial, he sparked the ire of his colleagues by being the only one among the 17 lawyers for the civil plaintiffs to argue that the defendant had acted of his own free will when murdering Jews. The other lawyers, bound by an appellate court's controversial definition of crimes against humanity, had tried to prove that the former militia chief had been following Nazi orders. □