



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 140

Wednesday, July 28, 1999

82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Barak, Arafat confer on Wye

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat met Tuesday at the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip to discuss implementation of last October's Wye agreement.

During their second face-to-face session in two weeks, Barak sought amendments to the agreement to allow the start of final-status talks before Wye is fully implemented. Arafat plans to respond to the request in two weeks.

### Clinton urges Assad to start talks

President Clinton urged Syrian President Hafez Assad to "seize the moment of opportunity" and open peace negotiations with Israel.

Clinton told Assad in a letter delivered over the weekend that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is preparing his people for "painful compromises" and said "this is a moment of opportunity to be taken advantage of."

### Moscow shul gets bomb threat

Police evacuated a Moscow synagogue Tuesday after an anonymous caller phoned in a bomb threat. No explosives were found at the Lubavitch-run Bolshaya Bronnaya shul, where a powerful bomb was found and safely detonated Sunday.

In Washington, Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin gave a vague reply when asked Tuesday what his government is doing to combat the rise in Russian anti-Semitism.

His appearance at the National Press Club came hours before he was slated to meet with American Jewish organizational leaders, who were expected to press him to combat the trend.

### U.S. eases sanctions

The United States formally eased sanctions on Iran, Libya and Sudan on Monday to allow U.S. companies to sell billions of dollars of humanitarian supplies, including food and medicine.

All other dealings with the countries remain restricted by U.S. laws as a result of their place on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. Some members of Congress recently said they would seek to block grain sales to Iran if 13 Jews held on charges of espionage are not released.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### War refugees return to Kosovo, leave behind love for Israeli hosts

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Never in his wildest dreams did Astrid Kuci believe that he would fall in love with Israel.

In fact, he hardly knew anything about Israel.

"I used to know that you are a country in the Middle East which is constantly in a state of war with its neighbors. I used to think of you in terms of a large military camp."

Ironically, it was war — in his native Kosovo — that brought Kuci, 24, to Israel.

He had just two months to go before completing his dental studies at the University of Pristina when Serbian forces moved in last April and forced thousands of Kosovar Albanians out of the province.

Driven from his home, he worked with an Israeli medical team that had been dispatched to the Stenkovec refugee camp in Macedonia.

He later found himself among the 217 Kosovo refugees who received temporary shelter in Israel.

When Israeli officials first issued the invitation, they had a difficult time finding any Kosovars willing to fly to the Jewish state. Germany and the United States were far more popular havens.

On Wednesday, 145 of the refugees were scheduled to return home — all of them now enthusiastic friends of Israel.

"All that they told me in Stenkovec about Israel is true," said Kuci, as he was escorting a group of refugee children Tuesday aboard a bus making a farewell tour of Tel Aviv. "I was lucky twice during the war. Once that my home in Pristina was not destroyed, and then that I had the opportunity to get to know Israel."

Israel's Kosovo refugee aid project was launched last Passover at the initiative of Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The agency was also responsible for sending an airlift of 12 planes loaded with humanitarian aid to the refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia.

Following the successful absorption of refugees from Bosnia seven years ago, the Israeli government decided to take in Kosovar refugees as well.

A first group of refugees landed in Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael on April 12. On May 26, another group was absorbed at Kibbutz Kramim.

Along with the non-Jewish Kosovars, Israel also absorbed some 274 Jews from elsewhere in Serbia. Most of them have returned home, but some 95 made aliyah. A group of 40 young Serbian Jews are now staying at youth villages in the Negev.

Seventy-two of the Kosovars — six families — have not yet returned home. They are planning to remain for the full six months that were granted them by the government and are expected to go home in October.

During the Kosovars' stay in Israel, two children were born — Kosovar "sabras," as native-born Israelis are called.

Kuci came here with his entire family, his parents, a brother and sister.

During their stay, his brother, Pritom, fell in love with an Israeli army officer.

Astrid reserved his love for the country itself.

"I traveled from place to place, from Eilat to Tiberias, from Haifa to Jerusalem. I just could not get enough. I had never imagined that the country was so beautiful, the people so nice."

The refugees worked on the kibbutzim and also went on cross-country tours hosted

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Submarine docks in Haifa

The first of three German-made submarines docked Tuesday in Haifa.

The new Dolphin-class submarines are superior to anything currently in Israel's naval arsenal, according to Israeli officials. Some reports indicate that the submarine has been modified to carry cruise missiles with nuclear warheads.

### Are Syrian peace talks near?

Israel agrees that peace talks with Syria can resume where they broke off more than three years ago.

Syria's official newspaper welcomed the indication, stating in a front-page editorial, "This is no doubt something good."

But Danny Yatom, chief security adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, said in a recent television interview that differences remain between the two countries over what negotiators had agreed to when talks broke off in 1996.

### Shin Bet head discusses rifts

Israel's security is threatened by growing societal rifts, the head of the Shin Bet domestic security service was quoted as telling a conference last week at Tel Aviv University. Israeli society is "polarized" between Arabs and Jews, secular and religious Jews, and right- and left-wingers, Ami Ayalon said Tuesday.

### Study focuses on disparities

Israeli Jews of European descent continue to have higher levels of educational achievement than their Sephardi counterparts, according to a new study.

Some 23 percent of Sephardi Israelis have a post-secondary education, compared with 53 percent for Ashkenazi Israelis, according to the report conducted on behalf of the Israel Democracy Institute. The researchers attributed the ongoing gap to such factors as economics and staffing disparities in schools.

by the Jewish Agency. Some learned Hebrew in the kibbutzim; extra classes were given to the children.

Initially, the plane bringing the Kosovars home was scheduled to leave Monday for Skopje, Macedonia. But the plane needed to fly over Egyptian air space, and Egypt refused permission.

"An hour before we were to board the plane we were notified that the flight was postponed for two days," said Astrid Kuci. "It was very, very disappointing. I so much wanted to go home."

To make up for the delay, Israeli officials gave the Kosovars a farewell trip to Tel Aviv on Tuesday.

"I am very excited to return home, but I am also very sad. I will miss Israel," said Kuci, who then offered a comment that would be music to the ears of those Israelis who have grown weary of the decades of tensions with their Arab neighbors: "For the first time in my life, I felt peace."

Kuci, who described Israel as his "second home," also found a second family during his stay.

When the first group of Kosovars arrived in Ma'agan Michael, the local newspaper in neighboring Zichron Ya'akov published an advertisement urging local people to aid the refugees.

Shelli and Avi Mautner of Zichron Ya'acov went to the kibbutz with a parcel of donations and began talking to the refugees.

First they met Pritom Kuci, then Astrid. They invited the young Kosovars home and have been in touch ever since.

"They are like family to us," said Avi Mautner.

Astrid Kuci echoed the sentiment. "They helped me, they comforted me at time of distress. Without them I would not have managed."

Before leaving Israel, all of the Kosovars were given financial aid to ease their return home. Every adult received \$200, every youth \$100 and each of the infants got \$30. The aid came from public contributions made at the beginning of the temporary resettlement effort.

Astrid Kuci, who radiates so much love toward Israelis, possesses a far different sentiment for his Serb neighbors in Kosovo.

"One day they were friends, the next day they turned enemies," he said, adding, "No, I am not ready to receive them again as neighbors. Not now, at least. Perhaps in the future." □

## Australian Jews remember Maccabi victims on 2nd anniversary of tragedy

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY (JTA) — Some 800 local Jews have turned out to remember the Australian athletes who were killed or injured two years ago during a bridge collapse at the Maccabi Games in Israel.

To mark the anniversary, public officials joined the community Sunday in dedicating a nature reserve to the victims of the tragedy. The reserve was named in honor of Warren Zines, one of four members of the Australian team who died in the bridge collapse during the Games' Opening Ceremonies.

Peter Wertheim, president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, the umbrella organization for 40,000 Jews, devoted his speech to remembering the personal qualities of those who lost their lives and the trauma and hardship endured by their families. He highlighted the case of Sasha Elterman, a teen-age tennis player who has had over 30 operations to solve problems associated with her fall into the polluted river.

A number of speakers, including Wertheim, repeated the Australian Jewish community's demand that the leaders of the Maccabi World Union step down until the completion of an inquiry into the cause of the bridge collapse.

Zionist Federation President Ron Weiser said the refusal of Maccabi organizations in the United States, Britain, Canada and elsewhere to back Australian Jewry's efforts was "to their undying shame." □



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JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Russian mayor backs neo-Nazis

The Communist mayor of a city in southern Russia backed Russia's largest ultranationalist organization, giving credence to the group's claims that it has supporters in high places.

Stavropol Mayor Mikhail Kuzmin reportedly voiced his support for the paramilitary Russian National Unity movement during a meeting earlier this month with Russia's interior minister, Vladimir Rushailo.

In a related development, Russian prosecutors charged a Russian National Unity leader with inciting ethnic hatred.

Pavel Rozhin is charged with organizing a campaign in the Siberian city of Tomsk in which leaflets were stuffed in mailboxes, allegedly written on behalf of the fictitious International Jewish Committee, calling on "the sons of Israel" to encourage conflicts among ethnic Russians so that Jews could accrue power.

### Lawyer to pressure German firms

A lawyer who is suing German companies on behalf of Nazi-era slave workers is planning to post research on his law firm's Web site detailing how the companies allegedly profited from their ties to the Third Reich.

"We intend to increase the stakes," said Michael Hausfeld, who has charged that the firms are blocking efforts to reach a settlement of the Holocaust survivors' suits.

Hausfeld's comments came as settlement negotiations are scheduled to resume Thursday in Washington.

### Fund indexes top Israeli firms

A mutual fund was launched that will invest in the 35 largest Israeli companies that trade in Tel Aviv and Wall Street.

Information about the no-load AMIDEX 35 Mutual Fund is available on the Internet at [www.amidex.com](http://www.amidex.com)

### Greek named Righteous Gentile

A Greek woman who sheltered a Jewish family during World War II and whose daughter later married a member of the family was posthumously declared a Righteous Gentile by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Zvi Kazansky, who was sheltered by Sophia Kritikoy, moved to the Jewish state after the end of World War II.

He returned to Greece in the 1960s and married Sophia Kritikoy's daughter, Agapi.

The couple then moved to Israel, as did Sophia Kritkoy, who died in 1995 at the age of 100.

## Documents reveal Britain blocked U.S. plan to save Holocaust victims

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — The British government blocked a secret U.S. plan that would have saved thousands of Jews from Nazi concentration camps because Britain feared they would settle in Palestine, according to newly released British documents.

The plan would have involved the exchange of captive Jews in Germany and German-occupied territory who held South American passports for German nationals in Latin America.

But Britain's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, rejected the June 14, 1944, proposal because he feared the freed Jews would stir up trouble for Britain if they emigrated to Palestine, a Foreign Office document shows.

Eden was also concerned that the return of able-bodied Germans might contribute to the Nazi war effort.

Britain's refusal to contemplate the exchange plan angered Washington, where politicians had been shocked by the malnourished, emaciated condition of prisoners from Bergen-Belsen who had been released in an earlier civilian exchange.

U.S. officials suggested the plan after diplomats noted that many Germans were interned or under effective house arrest in Latin American countries, while thousands of concentration camp inmates were Latin American citizens or their dependants.

Eden, however, was unimpressed with the plan.

"Most of the holders of these documents [Latin American passports] are of the Jewish race who have been accepted as immigrants to Palestine," he wrote in November 1944 to the British ambassador in Uruguay, Gordon Vereker.

He added that "the passports are good for a journey thither provided the holders succeed in leaving enemy or enemy-occupied territory."

"In these circumstances, it appears doubtful that it will ever be possible to carry out the exchange envisaged by the United States Government."

Eden expressed the hope, however, that "the German Government will abstain from exterminating these people and will keep them in camps open to outside inspection" if it was made aware that they might be exchanged for Germans.

British diplomats in South America also argued about the lists of German citizens prepared by the United States.

"All of them are capable of rendering services to Germany if in that country," Vereker wrote. "Many have qualities that would render them of considerable value to Germany."

"For instance, it seems absurd to suggest sending to Germany," he added, "highly trained employees of the German bank who otherwise are languishing here doing nothing but draw their pay."

"Any such action," added Vereker, "would certainly be misunderstood and give rise to all sorts of ideas that we have gone all soft and sentimental over the Germans."

In February 1945, the U.S. State Department was so exasperated by Britain's procrastination that an emotional memo was sent to London.

"The department has received most distressing reports regarding physical conditions of the unfortunate persons from Bergen-Belsen camp who were released in the latest exchange of civilians, and it will be noted that five of them died of malnutrition during a short period after their arrival in Switzerland. A sixth has died this week."

"It is therefore a matter of the greatest humanitarian urgency that cleared lists of Germans in this hemisphere available for exchange be compiled and that they comprise enough persons to permit the release from confinement and otherwise certain death of the several thousand unfortunate bearers of Latin American passports whom the Germans are holding under such conditions."

However, by the time Lord Halifax, then British ambassador in Washington, sent the note to Vereker, progress in the war had made the plan "of academic interest," according to a document.

Ironically, after the war, Britain's diplomats in South America found themselves frustrated by U.S. obstruction of plans to expatriate "obnoxious Germans." □

## FOCUS ON ISSUES

## Interested in studying Torah? It's just a telephone call away

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Every weekday morning, around the time most people are taking their first coffee break, Benjamin Lederer takes a half-hour away from the phone-ringing, jewel-cutting clamor of his Manhattan Diamond District office.

Quickly walking down 47th Street, he passes bearded, black-hatted traders like himself and sparkling jewelry store displays before he reaches the quieter office of an old friend from his yeshiva days. In this makeshift sanctuary, Lederer removes his hat, pulls a Talmud tractate off the bookshelf and picks up the telephone, rapidly dialing familiar digits.

On the other end, in Denver, attorney Serge Herscovici answers, ready to practice his Hebrew skills and explore what the Talmud says about witnesses and evidence.

The two are among 550 pairs of Torah learners keeping long-distance wires buzzing with Jewish conversations, sometimes once a day, sometimes once a week.

Pirke Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, urges Jews to find a same-gender partner with whom to study Torah. But it doesn't say the study sessions have to be face to face. So two years ago, Partners in Torah, an Orthodox-sponsored program that brings together Jews of different educational levels for weekly study in a Beit Hamidrash, developed an offshoot: Tele-Partners.

"Many people are looking to connect to Jewish life and learning, but don't feel comfortable enough walking into a synagogue or participating in adult education programs," explained Rabbi Eli Gevitz, the national director of Partners in Torah.

"For them it entails a commitment which they're not sure they're ready to make."

"Students," or Jews with weaker religious backgrounds, are matched with "mentors," observant Jews who have more extensive Jewish knowledge. Together, the two develop a course of study and schedule phone meetings at mutually convenient times.

Many of the students drawn to the program are secular or liberal Jews either seeking to incorporate tradition into their lives or looking for insights to guide them through day-to-day concerns.

The sponsor, Torah Umesorah, the national association of Orthodox day schools, foots the phone bill, providing phone cards worth some \$75,000 last year.

"We're trying to remove all the obstacles," said Gevitz. "By making it as convenient as we do and by paying for the phone time, all people have to do is join in and gain as much from the sessions as they can."

Gevitz says Tele-Partners is growing rapidly across the country, adding approximately 10 learners each week.

Some students gravitate to Tele-Partners because the scheduling is flexible and there's no need to travel. Others choose it because they live in small Jewish communities where few classes are offered. Although the focus is on texts, conversations often digress into more personal matters.

Tele-Partners tries to match people with similar interests, and selects only mentors who are "non-judgmental, enthusiastic and excited about their heritage," said Gevitz. The hevrotot, or pairs, often end up becoming friends as well as study partners.

"I bargained for a nice person to learn with who liked me and I liked him, who would teach me things," said the 40-year-old Herscovici. "What I really got was a guide, friend, mentor, counselor and new family."

Shortly after Herscovici and Lederer, 57, started studying together, the student came on a business trip to New York, where he met his partner and was wowed by his hospitality.

During the whirlwind year that followed their first off-line encounter, Herscovici got married, receiving help from Lederer at every step of the way. Lederer invited his student for several Shabbat visits, helped him pick out a wedding ring and coordinated a pre-wedding celebration.

Jeralyn Goldman, 53, of Las Vegas, describes her phone mentor, Chana Greenblatt, as a "resource," noting that because Greenblatt lives in the fervently Orthodox community of Monsey, N.Y., she can also consult posekim, or rabbinic scholars, on halachic questions that arise in their discussions.

"I feel close even though we've never met," said Goldman, adding that the program is particularly popular among newly observant Jews in Las Vegas, where the Orthodox community is rapidly growing, but still relatively small.

Mentors and students praise the convenience and intimacy of the program. Havivah Zeltzer, 30, of Boston, got involved in Tele-Partners to have a weekly "connection with Judaism."

A professional singer, Zeltzer — who learns with 35-year-old Aliza Bulow of Long Beach, N.Y. — likes that "you can have a session of Torah without having to go anywhere" and that partners "get to know each other on a one-to-one basis."

Mentors say that they, too, learn from the exchanges and that their students often pose questions they have never considered.

"I've learned I have to get my thoughts straight before I start and do some extra preparing, because he's really brilliant and thinks sharply," Lederer said of his partner, Herscovici.

Zeltzer's partner, Bulow, who also learns with another student, said the experience has forced her to seek explanations for things she had just accepted on faith.

"Being forced to explain brings things from nebulous consciousness into concrete awareness," Bulow said.

Nathan Leibster, 43, of Passaic, N.J., agreed. "It creates a whole different view of Torah when you see it through the eyes of someone for whom it's new."

Leibster, who mentors two people, said the experience has taught him "not to be shy about being frum," or observant.

Although many Tele-Partners students are ba'alei teshuvah, or newly observant, Leibster stressed that the program is not about "notching holes in the belt, saying I've made this many ba'alei teshuvah. This is about creating a place where both people can grow and hopefully that leads to greater observance on both parts."

The telephone isn't a perfect vehicle. Participants complain that it is often easier to forget a phone appointment than a face-to-face one. They say that phone calls don't allow for visual cues and sometimes make text study challenging.

"When you meet face to face and are geographically closer, there's so much more follow up you can do," Bulow said. "You can invite your learner over for Shabbas or bring over soup when they're sick."

But as a mother of six, the phone sessions are considerably easier to balance with other demands, she added. "You make a call at 9 and you're finished at 10." □