

**IN THE NEWS**
**Ahmadinejad writes to Bush**

Iran's president sent a letter to President Bush asking him to seek solutions to the current stalemate over Iran's nuclear program.

The letter from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came as six foreign ministers planned to meet Monday in New York to discuss a possible U.N. Security Council resolution on Iran.

The United States, France, Britain, Germany, China and Russia are participating in the meeting.

Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, but most of the international community believes Iran is building nuclear weapons.

**Peres blasts Iran**

Shimon Peres threatened Iran. "Those who threaten to destroy are in danger of being destroyed," the Israeli elder statesman and Cabinet minister told an Israeli television channel.

Peres was referring to calls by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for Israel to be wiped off the map.

**Dovish groups oppose Hamas bill**

Three dovish Jewish groups came out against the Palestinian anti-terrorism act. The U.S. House of Representatives is to vote Tuesday on the act, which severely restricts assistance to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority and non-governmental groups that assist the Palestinians.

The Israel Policy Forum, Americans for Peace Now and the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace each issued statements opposing the bill. Each group supports isolating Hamas, the terrorist group whose election to power in the Palestinian Authority sparked the bill.

The groups say the legislation is too far-reaching, targeting the Palestinian Authority no matter who governs it, and is too restrictive of presidential authority.

# WORLD REPORT

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## From Internet pals to real friends, blogs remaking Jewish community

By SUE FISHKOFF

**L**ONG BEACH, Calif. (JTA) — When birthright israel and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation were looking to bring young Jewish innovators to Jerusalem for a conference on Jewish identity-building, they used the fastest, most effective way to get out the word: a blog.

Sure, they also had a mailing list of former birthright israel students, since the July conference, called "Return on Investment," was being timed to celebrate the arrival of birthright's 100,000th participant.

But in hiring the team behind Jewlicious.com, a popular Jerusalem-based blog, to advertise and run the four-day event, organizers knew they'd get applicants from around the world and attract cutting-edge project ideas.

They succeeded: Participants are coming from Hungary, Russia, Venezuela, India, Holland and a host of other countries. Their projects range from the Genocide Intervention Network — a Web-based non-profit that has raised \$250,000 for Darfur refugees — to a Queer Shabbaton in Amsterdam.

"We were looking for people with strong opinions of what the Jewish community should be doing, or who are already putting those ideas into play," says Jewlicious co-founder David Abitbol. Even before the conference gets under way, some participants are beginning to talk to each other online, creating the basis for what organizers hope will become a community of young Jewish activists that crosses international boundaries.

It's happening all over. Blogs are how much of the under-30 crowd gets news, expresses opinions and finds friends. They're a recent phenomenon, just a few years old, but are multiplying fast, and they link to each other: Read one and you're immediately plugged into a network of similar conversations.

"It's been very quick, but it's made a tremendous impact on how people interact and how we contribute our voice to the ongoing conversation," says Laya Millman, who works on Jewlicious.com.

Each blog is unstructured, free-flowing and highly personal, but together the most popular Jewish blogs are creating a global virtual community of young, media-savvy

Jews, where people who have never met face-to-face are intimately bound up in each other's lives.

Activists increasingly are translating the Internet's organizing potential into real life.

"They're moving from being a virtual community to a physical community," says Roger Bennett, senior vice president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. Many of the participants in the July event, called ROI-120, are bringing such projects to the conference.

One participant is Ariel Beery, 26, a Manhattan-based Jewish activist and co-editor of BlogsofZion. Beery sees Jewish blogs as 21st-century versions of the European coffeehouses of a century ago, places "where people would get together, argue and write something up. Each cafe would have its own literary journal; communities were built

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**FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES**

## ■ Blogging has caught on with young Jews, creating offline connections as well

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around the written word.”

The blogging world, he says, is “developing its own language,” which he sees as the precursor for a new worldwide forum for discussion and activism.

“In the past, your Jewish community was your synagogue, your Bundist knitting circle,” Abitbol says. “Today I’m in communication more with people in different countries than I am with people in my synagogue. We’re seeing a call for a way to unite all these people over the Internet, so if something is happening in France, someone on the Lower East Side can hear about it. If a group in Hungary is seeking to redefine what it is to be a Jew, people in New York can comment on it.”

Abitbol and Millman were sharing their thoughts recently at Jewlicious@TheBeach.2, a conference for Jewish students and recent college graduates organized by Rabbi Yonah Bookstein and Rachel Bookstein, campus rabbi and director, respectively, at several local Hillels.

This spring’s conference was the Booksteins’ second effort at turning virtual communities into face-to-face friendships.

It seemed to work. All over the conference, people smiled and hugged as they put faces to the personalities they knew from Jewlicious, Jewschool, Canonist, and a dozen or so other popular Jewish blogs.

“You’re TAltman?” one young man

shouted gleefully as he outed a popular blog contributor, who acknowledged the recognition with a smirk.

The personal bonds created by these ongoing Web conversations can be strong. New York writer Esther Kustanowitz, who runs three blogs and contributes regularly to others, met several bloggers from her sites at the conference. They’d never met before, but she says they felt like old friends.

“It’s a subversion of the usual construct of celebrity,” she says. “You know people not by how they look, but from the inside out.”

At one workshop, Abitbol talked about a guy who mentioned Jewlicious on his blog and said he was about to visit Israel. The Jewlicious folks — who, like many bloggers, scan the blogosphere for references to their site — picked up his remark, got in touch with him, met him at the airport and took him to Ein Gedi. When they found out he hadn’t had a bar mitzvah, they organized one at the Western Wall.

From blogging to instant best friends. It happens a lot, frequent bloggers say.

But are those virtual ties real? Not always, Kustanowitz cautions: “The intervening layer of technology can create

false intimacy, as well as bring people together.”

Katlyn McKenna begs to differ. A communications lecturer at Beersheba’s Ben-Gurion University, McKenna researched relationship-forming on the Internet for her doctorate. She found that people who meet online reveal more about their true selves, like each other better and stay together longer than people who meet first

in person.

McKenna started her own blog a year before she moved to Israel last fall, and found herself part of a worldwide discussion about aliyah. Within 24 hours of her arrival, she was hearing from people who read her blog, and had “an instant community” of new friends.

“The federations are freaking out,” says Abitbol, who says Jewlicious.com gets

10,000 hits a day.

They needn’t feel threatened, he says, if they would accept that young Jews are scattered, secular and unaffiliated, and that the old ways of bringing them together no longer work.

“In the past, if you wanted to communicate with fellow Jews, you went to synagogue or the JCC. Now some people are uncomfortable in those traditional places; they want to get together online. We’re trying to offer a Jewish option,” he says. ■

‘They’re moving from being a virtual community to being a physical community.’

**Roger Bennett**

Senior vice president,  
Andrea and Charles Bronfman  
Philanthropies

## Asian Jewish paper launched

HONG KONG (JTA) — “Asia’s first Jewish community tabloid,” has been launched. Jewish Times Asia was started last month in response to the rapidly growing presence of Jews in China and elsewhere in the region.

The 24-page April issue includes an article on the Jewish community of Taiwan, an interview with Israel’s consul-general in Hong Kong and a feature on the 15th anniversary of Hong Kong’s Carmel School.

The paper had significant upscale advertising.

“I have had the idea for about 10 years,” publisher and founder Philip Jay

wrote in a front-page letter to readers.

“The number of Jewish residents is significantly small compared to other regions of the world. Perhaps this is why no one has ever attempted to provide this resource.

“But I think small is beautiful. It’s good to be a niche in publishing.”

Jay said Jewish Times Asia will be distributed free to all Jews in the region.

It will also be available to business executives and tourists at selected drop-off points at Jewish community centers and synagogues in China, India, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. ■

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# Olmert's snub of Russians could return to haunt him

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — By failing to include a single Russian immigrant in his Cabinet, Ehud Olmert has made a major blunder that could shorten his term in office, undermine his Kadima party and hurt his plans for separation from the Palestinians, senior Israeli pundits say.

It was the first time since 1995 that an Israeli prime minister has formed a government without a representative from the huge immigrant community of more than 1 million. It was a mistake Ariel Sharon would never have made, pundits say.

Outraged members of the Russian community speak of a sense of betrayal, and say Kadima may have lost the Russian vote forever. More immediately, Kadima's Russian-speaking Knesset members are threatening to defy party discipline in key Knesset votes.

The upshot could be that Olmert will have difficulty mustering a parliamentary majority for his most important policy initiative: his plan to withdraw from large chunks of the West Bank. And he might be forced to go for early elections that he could lose.

During the coalition negotiations, it seemed certain that there would be at least one Russian immigrant minister. If Avigdor Lieberman's mainly immigrant Yisrael Beiteinu party joined the government, there would be several; and if not, Marina Solodkin, who was sixth on Kadima's Knesset slate, was sure to be included in the party's ministerial lineup.

But in the end none of this materialized: The coalition talks with Lieberman collapsed, and Olmert failed to appoint Solodkin. "There are no more portfolios," Olmert reportedly told Solodkin the day appointments were made.

According to Solodkin, this was not just a personal slight. The entire Russian community, she says, feels betrayed, insulted and humiliated.

It's as if Kadima "slammed the door" on "hundreds of thousands of Russian immigrants looking for a political home," she told Israeli daily Ma'ariv.

Since 1992, the Russian vote has been crucial in determining the outcome of Israeli elections. The Russians have invariably voted for the winner — Yitzhak Rabin

in 1992, Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996, Ehud Barak in 1999 and Sharon in 2001 and 2003. They also have shown a readiness to defect when they feel let down or slighted: by Labor in 1996, Netanyahu in 1999 and Barak in 2001.

Barak, for example, promised a "civil revolution" to solve immigrant citizenship, marriage and burial problems, but quickly shelved it to form a coalition with the fervently Orthodox Shas Party. Ehud the first, a reference to Barak, took nearly two years to betray us, the Russians say; Ehud the second, meaning Olmert, only two days.

The Russian vote accounts for 18 to 20 seats in the 120-member Knesset. In the March 28 election, the Russians gave Olmert four or five seats: Without them, Solodkin maintains, he would not have beaten Labor's Amir Peretz, who got hardly any Russian support.

To win Russian votes, Kadima included six immigrants on its slate and had Solodkin at No. 6, high enough to signal a guaranteed ministerial post.

"The feeling in the Russian street is that they used us and then discarded us," Solodkin said.

Most of the Russian vote went to Lieberman, who got nine or 10 Russian seats. However, Lieberman's inflammatory positions on Arab issues meant that Olmert would have been harshly criticized had he included Lieberman in the coalition.

Still, some people in Olmert's camp have been implying that Solodkin, who was in charge of getting out the Russian vote, could have done better.

At the start of the campaign, Kadima's position, with Sharon at the helm, was much stronger. Polls showed Kadima winning eight Russian immigrant seats, ahead of Yisrael Beiteinu with five. Indeed, Sharon, who was extremely popular among immigrants, was planning a strategic partnership with them similar to the one Menachem Begin enjoyed as Likud leader from the late 1950s with Sephardi immigrants from North Africa.

The result of Russian immigrant pique

could be the formation of new sectarian parties primarily representing immigrant interests. If they lose the Russian vote, Olmert and Kadima could be in real trouble next time around.

Lieberman could be a major beneficiary. His spin doctor is working on a strategy designed to elevate Lieberman to the premiership, based on taking ultra-hawkish positions to capture the Israeli right and winning over immigrants by cultivating the perception that the Israeli establishment doesn't want them as equals.

Olmert's rejection of Lieberman as a coalition partner and his failure to give Solodkin a ministerial position played into Lieberman's hands, pundits say.

In the meantime, Russian anger at

Kadima knows no bounds. Party activists are threatening to return their membership cards en masse; immigrants who won Knesset seats on the Kadima slate are talking about building a power base in the party that will be able to exert leverage on the leadership; and

Solodkin says she wants to form a forum of Russian Knesset members from all parties.

More significantly, Solodkin and Michael Nudelman, another Russian immigrant legislator, reportedly are talking to Lieberman about possible future cooperation.

Should they decide to vote against Olmert's withdrawal, and recruit other non-immigrant Knesset members in the coalition who have doubts about the plan, the consequences for Olmert could be disastrous. The loss of Kadima votes would make him dependent on Israeli Arab parties, and could trigger an erosion of public and Knesset support for the plan. That could force an election that Olmert might not win without immigrant votes.

Why did Olmert get himself into this vulnerable position — arrogance? Short-sightedness? Inexperience at the highest level? Confidence that success in dealing with immigrant problems will turn things around?

As far as the Russian immigrants are concerned, it doesn't really matter. They're determined to teach the prime minister a lesson he won't forget.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

'The feeling in the Russian street is that they used us and then discarded us.'

Marina Solodkin  
Kadima

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MIDDLE EAST

### Olmert seeks Jewish majority

Safeguarding Israel's Jewish majority must be a national priority, Ehud Olmert said.

"We must ensure that the State of Israel has a definite Jewish majority, or otherwise the notion of a Jewish state will become void," the prime minister said Monday during a Knesset address in memory of Zionist visionary Theodor Herzl.

Olmert, like his predecessor Ariel Sharon, has justified his plan to quit parts of the West Bank by invoking the demographic threat posed by a growing number of Arabs.

Many on the Israeli right, however, believe further unilateral withdrawals will spur Palestinian terrorism.

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, in his own remarks to the Knesset, said Herzl's legacy should prompt Israel to fight threats to its existence.

### King pessimistic on peace

Jordan's king said time is running out for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

"Everyone has to remember that the time available to us for a peaceful settlement is around two years, and I fear if this short time is over and we don't reach a settlement, that there will be nothing left for the Palestinians to negotiate over," King Abdullah said Sunday in an interview with Al-Arabiya television.

Abdullah voiced concern over Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's plan to annex some West Bank settlements in the absence of peace talks with the Palestinian Authority.

But he also urged the new P.A. government under Hamas to abandon its hard line against the Jewish state.

"We hope our Palestinian brothers, and especially our brothers in Hamas, deal with everything that relates to the Palestinians' cause with complete realism," he said.

### World Bank gloomy on Palestinian economy

The World Bank said Palestinian areas could soon become ungovernable because of a severe financial crisis. In a memo obtained by Reuters, the World Bank said the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis is worse than it thought.

In March, the World Bank estimated that Palestinian poverty would rise to 60 percent and unemployment to 40 percent by the end of this year.

The memo was leaked ahead of Tuesday's scheduled meeting of the diplomatic "Quartet" working to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace.

### Restrictions on Palestinians eased

Israel is easing a ban on Palestinians entering from the West Bank. In one of his first moves since taking office last week, Defense Minister Amir Peretz said he would soon sign an order allowing 12,000 Palestinian laborers and merchants from the West Bank to work in Israel.

The permit largely would reverse a closure in place since March.

There currently are no plans to open up the border with the Gaza Strip, given the high level of terrorist activity there.

### Hamas and Fatah clash, killing three Palestinians

Three Palestinians were killed in clashes between Hamas and Fatah militiamen.

Monday's street battles in the southern Gaza Strip were the bloodiest between the factions since Hamas crushed Fatah in Janu-

ary elections and assumed power. Hamas said its gunmen opened fire to defend comrades kidnapped by Fatah in the town of Khan Yunis.

At least nine people were wounded.

The violence followed failed weekend talks between Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah leader, and Hamas' prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh, on resolving power-sharing disputes.

### Israel's sweet revenge

Israeli agents used poisoned chocolate to assassinate a senior Palestinian terrorist in the 1970s, according to a new book.

"Striking Back," an expose of Mossad reprisals by Israeli intelligence veteran Aaron Klein, contains a chapter about the killing of Wadi Haddad, chief of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Wanted for masterminding several airline hijackings, Haddad took refuge in Iraq in 1976. But Mossad intelligence agents, using a Palestinian turncoat, slipped him Belgian chocolates coated in a slow-acting poison that killed him over the course of a few months, Klein claims.

## WORLD

### German memorial draws millions

Millions have visited Germany's national Holocaust memorial since its unveiling last year.

The memorial, close to Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, has received 3.5 million visitors since it opened last May, the Jerusalem Post reported.

### French Jewish leader honored

A French Jewish leader received one of the country's highest honors.

Claude-Gerard Marcus, a longtime French legislator, was made an officer of the Legion of Honor in a ceremony last week in Paris, the European Jewish Press reported.

Marcus is leader of the Judaism and Liberty group, which once worked to help Soviet Jews emigrate, and more recently has been involved in fighting anti-Semitism in France.

### Exhibit opened in Belgium

Belgium's prime minister inaugurated an exhibition in memory of Belgian victims of Auschwitz.

The exhibition inaugurated Sunday reveals the depth of a "regime of hatred, nationalism and racism," Guy Verhofstadt was quoted as saying by the Polish News Agency.

"Every story about the Holocaust must be passed on, every detail must be retained, and every fact must be brought to light," he said.

Out of the 30,000 Belgian Jews killed by the Nazis — about half of the Belgian Jewish population — 25,000 were murdered at Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp located in Poland.

### Matisyahu takes Europe

Matisyahu began his European tour with a midnight show in Dublin.

The Chasidic reggae performer played Saturday to a sold-out house at the Temple Bar Music Centre in the city's cultural quarter. It was the singer's first appearance in Ireland.

Promoters scheduled the unusual time to accommodate Matisyahu's observance of Shabbat.

Matisyahu stayed with local Chabad emissaries. The tour has been booked to promote Matisyahu's new album, "Youth," which was released in Europe last Friday.