

JEWISH NEWS BRIEFS

JERUSALEM, Israel (JTA) - A Tel Aviv court has extended the remand of an Israel suspected of smuggling billions of dollars worth of marijuana and cocaine from Colombia to North America and Europe.

Roni Mann, 50, has been jailed in Israel since December awaiting trial. His remand was extended recently by 15 days.

A day earlier, Israeli police disclosed that they had arrested Mann on suspicion of being a contact between people in Europe and the Cali cartel leaders in Colombia.

Police said the case could be the largest drug smuggling case ever uncovered in Israel, with the help of immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

JERUSALEM, Israel (JTA) - The government committee on Israel-Diaspora relations declared in its recent, first meeting that Israel still had a role in offering "spiritual" rescue to world Jewry.

After World War II, Israel provided a "physical" rescue for Jewish refugees from the Holocaust, said Rabbi Yehuda Amital, the minister without portfolio who heads the committee.

Today, Israel can help Diaspora Jews find answers to questions about their spiritual identity, the rabbi said.

Other committee members include: Yossi Beilin, minister without portfolio in the prime minister's office; Ehud Barak, foreign minister; Yair Tsaban, absorption minister; Uzi Baram, tourism minister; Shulamit Aloni, communications minister; Shimon Shetreet, religious affairs minister; Avraham Burg, Jewish Agency chairman; and Ehud Olmert, mayor of Jerusalem.

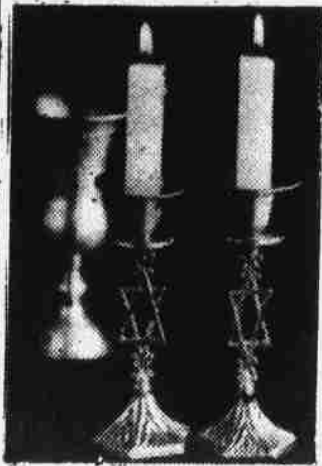
WASHINGTON, DC (JTA) - Threatened with U.S. economic sanctions, Australia's largest corporation has pledged not to participate in a project to build a gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan.

The Australian venture would have flown in the face of legislation working its way through Congress that seeks to impose sanctions against foreign firms with substantial investments in Iran's energy sector.

Iran has been desperately seeking \$7 billion in foreign investment to bolster its declining oil industry, to bail out its economy and to finance a nuclear buildup.

KINDLE THE SHABBAT CANDLES

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 Friday, March 1 5:17 P.M.
 Friday, March 8 5:24 P.M.
 Friday, March 15 5:30 P.M.



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JERUSALEM, Israel (JTA) - After nearly six decades of providing artists, writers, politicians and tourists with a romantic hangout, Jerusalem's Cafe Atara is closing its doors.

The cafe on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall has been bought by Pizza Hut, an American fast-food chain.

Cafe Atara was founded in 1938 by Heinz Greenspan, who fled the Nazis during the Holocaust.

The cafe's art deco interior was frequented by such notables as Moshe Dayan and Nobel Prize winning author S.Y. Agnon.

It also was featured in a scene in Israeli write Amos Oz' novel, "My Michael."

JERUSALEM, Israel (JTA) - Citibank opened an office recently in Tel Aviv, becoming the first U.S. commercial bank with a presence in Israel.

Citibank Vice Chairman William Rhodes, who was on hand for the opening, said it took place as a result of the growing stability in the region.

"Citibank's arrival in Israel reflects a recognition of both the improvement in the macro-economic conditions and the growing regional stability and business opportunities unfolding from the peace process," he said.

Citibank already has branches throughout the Middle East.

BALTIMORE, Maryland (JTA) - Two years after Baltimore's Zionist Organization of America chapter broke away from its national parent body, a small circle of local Zionists have initiated a new ZOA group.

"We're all a bunch of volunteers working out of our homes and making calls to get things going," said Zev Gershon, a local attorney who serves as the chapter's president. "We're in the organizational stage."

The new chapter was granted a charter Jan. 15.

Gershon, 36, said he and several of his friends and associates were inspired to start the chapter last month, after attending a lecture by Morton Klein, ZOA national president. Klein had encouraged them to form the group.

JERUSALEM, Israel (JTA) - An Israeli soldier was moderately wounded in southern Lebanon recently when missile fire was directed at his convoy in the central sector of the security zone.

Army officials said the soldier was wounded not by the explosive itself, but when the vehicle in which he was traveling turned over.

Israeli forces returned fire at members of the Islamic fundamentals Hezbollah movement, who initially attacked the convoy.

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