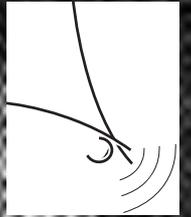


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December 2001 6751 حدة ك

**Show me the
Money!**

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***Nakosha* was established in 1997 with the view of advocating free speech and establishing a social link among our Australian and worldwide communities, especially those in our homeland.**

***Nakosha* is growing with a contemporary generation of Assyrians who are aware of their identity, with an understanding and appreciation of our culture, language and heritage.**

***Nakosha* is a non-profit publication. Holding a neutral stand within the community, its views are not religiously or politically motivated – they are based on human values not sectarian beliefs.**

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editorial



A bomb has hit the Assyrian community. Maybe not exactly like one of those daisy-cutters dropped over Afghanistan, but one with equally destructive effects. The devastation is one that will affect generations of Assyrians, not only financially, but also in terms of self-confidence and morale.

We are, of course, speaking of Karl Suleman and his companies, in particular Karl Suleman Enterprises (KSE). Once touted as a man who will raise the name of Assyrians to new levels, who has "donated generously" to Assyrians of all

backgrounds, his company has instead managed to destroy thousands of Assyrians and create hatred, paranoia, mistrust and jealousy in a community that was only tenuously united to begin with. The saga has the potential to tarnish the names of many respected community leaders.

How did Assyrians – of every imaginable background, from priests, doctors, lawyers, accountants and successful businessmen, to pensioners and the unemployed alike – fall for what is now a clear scam of complex proportions? Our report, pieced from legal documents, the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, individual anecdotes and personal experience, plus interviews with Suleman's ex-employees, will be the first in a series looking at a case which may take years to finally unravel totally.

In a state of affairs as sensitive as this, names of some creditors and ex-employees will be protected. ■

"What Australia should do is try ... to encourage international cooperation to address those root causes which are forcing people so desperately to make their way to Australia."

Irene Khan, secretary-General of Amnesty International, strongly criticises Australia's stance on refugees.

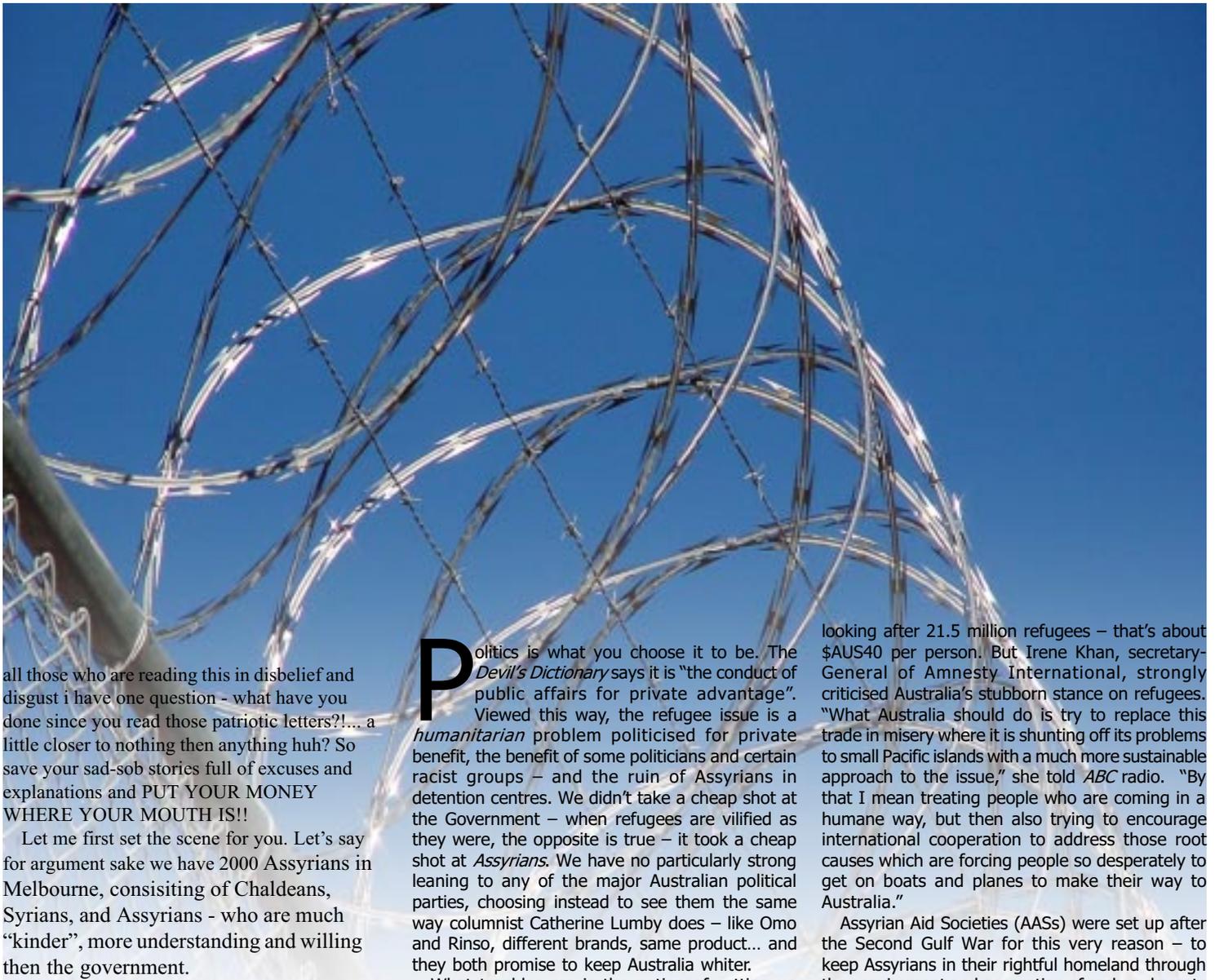
This is an unedited email to Nakosha.



Dear {Nakosha}

Letters to political parties?! talks with asylum seekers?! Cheap shots at the Government?! ... talk about selective journalism!!! I have plenty to say for you, about you, to you. But all i'll say is I'm so disappointed in you! My reasons are many but insignificant! I haven't got more then that i want to say to you.

Now for your superficial, hypocritical and "fake" society!!! Newsletter after Newsletter, there's this rhetorical cry for unity, a better future for Assyrians, ... "need to politically and financially" support our fellow Assyrians! To



all those who are reading this in disbelief and disgust I have one question - what have you done since you read those patriotic letters?!... a little closer to nothing than anything huh? So save your sad-sob stories full of excuses and explanations and PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS!!

Let me first set the scene for you. Let's say for argument sake we have 2000 Assyrians in Melbourne, consisting of Chaldeans, Syrians, and Assyrians - who are much "kinder", more understanding and willing than the government.

PEOPLE	\$/per week	Total p/a
2000	\$2/50	\$200,000
2000	\$5/50	\$500,000
2000	\$10/50	\$1,000,000

With this money you can establish some sort of fund to help people migrate

LEGALLY to Australia, this money can be used for families who want to bring their family to Australia. Perhaps charge a 10% flat interest rate (e.g \$50,000 borrowed must be returned with in "x" amount of time with a total of \$5,000 interest rate over the duration- the interest may be returned by the actual person who was helped). And as we grow more and more perhaps so will the fund.

But who will be the Fund official- which "sita"? which church? Which committee? Who's family will be helped first? who's deciding? You're the one who wants to help - politically and economically ... let your people decide.

If this sort of fund is established, with about 2000 separate identity donations, by this time next year I will publicly eat my words ... otherwise stop your pathetic empty notions of patriotism. You feel nothing more for those refugees than the government, at least they're not making empty promises and vicious remarks!

"Cassandra Ry".

Politics is what you choose it to be. The *Devil's Dictionary* says it is "the conduct of public affairs for private advantage". Viewed this way, the refugee issue is a humanitarian problem politicised for private benefit, the benefit of some politicians and certain racist groups – and the ruin of Assyrians in detention centres. We didn't take a cheap shot at the Government – when refugees are vilified as they were, the opposite is true – it took a cheap shot at *Assyrians*. We have no particularly strong leaning to any of the major Australian political parties, choosing instead to see them the same way columnist Catherine Lumby does – like Omo and Rinso, different brands, same product... and they both promise to keep Australia whiter.

What troubles me is the notion of setting up "some sort of fund to help people migrate LEGALLY to Australia" – legal migration has never been an issue. Australia is morally obliged to share the control of damage to innocent Middle Easterners who have nothing to do with any regime, neither in the Middle East nor the West. The culture of people having to buy their way here is wrong, and the problem needs to be addressed at its core, not just the symptoms controlled. While organisations and funds to help Assyrians settle in their new homes are necessary, we do not agree with setting up an official body run by churches or a "sita" (committee) to bring refugees here "legally".

Moreover, money is not the issue. The key issue here is funding these refugees not so that they can come here but rather the opposite – to stay in their homeland. Most diaspora Assyrians, I'm sure, would actually prefer to be in their homeland if it were a safe and economically viable place to be. Those Assyrians in the diaspora are advantageously placed to assist their homeland counterparts to do just that – stay put where they are, build and re-build their lives and an infrastructure so that Assyrians *do* have somewhere to call their own, and don't *have* to become wretched refugees no better than political pawns in the hands of politicians in an unfriendly land far from their own.

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock recently accused the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of an "obscene waste of resources" in the way it dealt with asylum seekers. He said the UNHCR spent just under \$AUS1 billion

looking after 21.5 million refugees – that's about \$AUS40 per person. But Irene Khan, secretary-General of Amnesty International, strongly criticised Australia's stubborn stance on refugees. "What Australia should do is try to replace this trade in misery where it is shunting off its problems to small Pacific islands with a much more sustainable approach to the issue," she told *ABC* radio. "By that I mean treating people who are coming in a humane way, but then also trying to encourage international cooperation to address those root causes which are forcing people so desperately to get on boats and planes to make their way to Australia."

Assyrian Aid Societies (AASs) were set up after the Second Gulf War for this very reason – to keep Assyrians in their rightful homeland through the acquirement and generation of cash and assets to create and develop businesses, educational institutions, health care networks, agricultural industries and a strong social infrastructure.

The Tree of Life, the Australian AAS's quarterly publication, keeps its roughly 200 members here in Australia informed about ongoing developments and projects. You may have noticed this month's *Nakosha* is a little thicker than usual – that's because from now on *Nakosha* and *The Tree of Life* will be published together, reaching not only the AAS's members but *Nakosha's* readers too. *Nakosha's* targeted distribution of 1,500 hard copies and 1,000 soft copies per month by the end of this year means that the merger will provide the AAS with a strong distribution network from which to reach potential new members on a monthly basis.

Zinda Magazine, the major financial contributor to *Nakosha*, has also agreed to increase its monetary assistance. "*Zinda Magazine* funds *Nakosha* because it is a magazine with high visual appeal, youthful energy and maturity. Its recent merger with *The Tree of Life* in Australia will save money that can otherwise be used in Bet-Nahrain for other worthy causes. I hope other AAS chapters will soon consider utilizing the distribution powers of *Nakosha* and *Zinda Magazine*," said Wilfred Alkhas, editor of *Zinda Magazine*.

In this separate section you'll learn what the AAS does, hear about the latest developments from Bet-Nahrain and contribute if you so wish.

Now at least we can ask our reader Cassandra to put her money where *her* mouth is! ■

Sennacherib Daniel



In 1968 the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) was created: a world-wide organisation seeking to spread, uphold and enhance the Assyrian name in the world, to secure the human rights of the Assyrian people in their homeland...

Above : Key speaker, Senator John Nimrod, before the Melburnian crowd

AUA

Origin of the Assyrian flag

In 1968 the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) was created: a world-wide organisation seeking to spread, uphold and enhance the Assyrian name in the world, to secure the human rights of the Assyrian people in their homeland and to attain an autonomous state in the Assyrian ancestral homeland. The AUA held its annual meeting here in Australia over two weeks in early December. Melburnians were privileged to hear speakers from the group on the 9th December at the University of Melbourne.

Dr Narden Yaghoubi gave the first speech, answering the question, "How do Assyrians see themselves in 50 years?"

Assyrians often see themselves as a nation on the brink of destruction and dissolution he said, but this is far from the truth. There are Assyrians working all over the world in areas of importance – in fifty years, Assyrians will be even stronger. But Assyrians need to dream, and have grand dreams. Assyrians need to be more educated than the French, political than the English, technical than the Germans and more scientific than the Americans, he said. Assyrians used to walk barefooted from one village to the next 50 years ago, and today they have instantaneous communication from one part of the globe to the next. Assyrians are now absorbing knowledge from more than 50 nations around the world – their only challenge is to spread that wisdom better.

Mr Yura Tarveedi, Treasurer for the AUA, gave us an insight into his work with Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) [<http://www.unpo.org/>]. The AUA has been participating for years in United Nations meetings. This participation has become more effective since the AUA became a Member of the UNPO in 1991. The Peace Action Counsel, of which the Dalai Lama is one of the Board of directors, would aim to send peacekeepers to areas of conflict. The ancient Assyrians are incorrectly known from biblical descriptions as bloodthirsty warmongers – modern Assyrians on the other hand would be known as peacemakers. How much easier it is to send three or four peacekeepers to resolve wars rather than sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers to destroy lives, said Mr Tarveedi.

Since 1996 the AUA's Australian Chapter has been present at many of the meetings of the Working Group on Minorities. The Working Group on Indigenous populations was set up in 1982, and is a group of the Sub-Commission on Prevention and Protection of Minorities. Last year more than 1000 participants took part in the session. Indigenous issues are varied yet they all share in the common struggle against displacement from their native land.

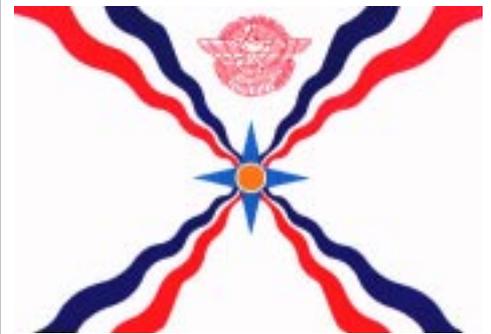
AUA's representatives at the meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which

took place between 24-28th July 2000, were Senator John Nimrod (Secretary General of AUA from USA), Miss Suzy David (the International legal adviser to the Secretary General) and Mr Hermiz Shahen (AUA Secretary - Australian chapter). Suzy David and Hermiz Shahen also attended the preparatory meeting of the Indigenous Populations held on 22 and 23 July 2000 at the premises of the World Council of Churches, Geneva.

Mr Shahen gave a run-down of his work with the AUA. Assyrians need to find a common binding ideology, he argued. In 1968 the first step was taken. We need to agree on one language, no matter what we call it – be it Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian or Aramaic; one name; one leader and a state. After 33 years, he said, we can see just how important these binding ties are. If we don't accept them, there is no way forward. We have a right to land – a state, where self-determination and the maintenance of language and culture is possible, so that we don't have to beg for what is rightly ours. But to achieve this, the world and governments need to know who we are. At a recent meeting for Indigenous peoples, for example, where the Assyrians were present, a sweater was presented to all who attended – on it were the names of 900 or so indigenous people, except for the Assyrians. If we don't mix and make our case known, argued Mr Shahen, how can we expect our rights? In response to the AUA's demand for rights, an Iraqi representative denied the allegations that Iraq declines Assyrians their rights. Iraq accused the Assyrians and Kurds of being militia groups fighting each other, and denied that they are the indigenous peoples of Iraq. The government has spent millions of dollars on Assyrians, now they speak against the government the Iraqi representative said. By working with governments in the diaspora, the AUA hopes to uphold the rights of indigenous Assyrians.

Senator John Nimrod concluded with an update on the AUA's work in the last year, which as always has been aimed at making the name of Assyrians known to worldwide governments. He spoke of the origins of *Kha B'neesan* and the Assyrian flag (see picture, right). He along with the AUA have travelled 13,000 miles in the last year spreading the name of Assyrians, attempting to undo the greatest problem faced by Assyrians – recognition. The AUA is working to trace our origins back to the ancient Assyrians; so far they've gotten back to the 1st century AD. Finnish assyriologists are working on the same project, known as the Melammu Project, but from 612 BC forward – hopefully, the two groups will meet somewhere in the middle... at which time, Senator Nimrod said, we can finally sue those who hold Assyrian relics – we won't necessarily get any of them back, but at least we'll get recognition! ■

Sennacherib Daniel



The flag was designed by the AUA in 1968. All elements in the design come from symbols from Assyrian reliefs. Assyrians (and non-Assyrians who recognize the Assyrian "nation") universally accept it as the official flag.

The Assyrian flag has at its centre a golden circle representing the sun that generates heat and light to sustain the earth. The four-pointed star surrounding the sun symbolizes the land, its light blue colour tranquillity. The wavy stripes extending from it are the three major rivers of the Assyrian homeland – the *Diglat*, *Prat* and *Zawa*. The dark blue represents *Prat*, a word derived from *Per-U-Ta* (abundance). The red stripes represent *Diglat*; their blood red colour stands for courage and glory. The white lines in between the two great rivers are *Zawa*. White stands for peace. Some interpret the red, white and blue stripes as the highways that will take the scattered Assyrians back to their ancestral homeland. Above the blue star is the image of the Assyrian god Ashur, who is guarding the country, the flag and the nation it represents. On top of the flagstaff is the standard of King Sargon I, who established the first Assyrian empire. During the ancient times this insignia stood by the king's side to let everyone know of his whereabouts. ■

EARTHQUAKE JOLTS HAKKARI

Courtesy of the Xinhua News Agency

(ZNDA: Ankara) An earthquake measuring 4.2 on the Richter scale jolted Turkey's southeastern province of Hakkari Sunday evening, 2nd December. Officials of the Bogazici University Kandilli Observatory Centre and Seismology Institute in Istanbul said that the quake took place at 7:05 p.m. (1705 GMT) and was centred on 19 kilometres northeast of Hakkari. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the region. In 1999, two major tremors killed more than 18,000 people in northwestern Turkey.

ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT SECRETARY GENERAL VISITS GERMANY

(ZNDA: Berlin) Oct. 27. On his way back from the United States, Rabbie Yacob Yosip, General Secretary of the ADM visited the Assyrian community in Germany and met with

a few German officials. *Zinda Magazine's* Adrin Takhsh has compiled a report on Rabbie Yosip's travels in Germany:

Mr. Yonadam Kanna (Rabbie Yacob Yosip) spoke on the political situation of the Assyrians in Northern Iraq and Assyrians in international politics on Oct. 28 in Wiesbaden and on Oct. 29 in Augsburg.

On Oct. 30 he visited Fraunhofer Institute, an institute for Digital Communication. Here he met with Mrs. Elvira Gershauser (Head of Public Relations) and Mr. Ernst Eberlein (Chief Scientist). Mr. Aryo Toma (ADM representative in Middle Europe), Mr. Ashur Olca (ADM representative in Germany) and Ms. Adrin Takhsh (ADM PR-Representative in Germany) accompanied Mr. Kanna on his visits. Mr. Kanna also visited the Evangelical Churches and humanitarian organizations, such as Churches help Churches, Bread for the World, Evangelical Church of Baden Wuerttemberg and Evangelical State office in Bavaria. In his reports he referred to the humanitarian work of the Assyrian Aid Society in the homeland. Later on he was interviewed by IDEA-SPEKTRUM, a magazine of the Evangelical Church.

On November 1, Mr. Kanna along with his ADM delegation from Germany visited Prof. Dr. Udo Steinbach, Director of German Oriental Institute in Hamburg. They discussed the Assyrians in northern Iraq and in the diaspora, their national identity and situation today. The next day Mr Kanna visited the Assyrian

communities in Bad Oeynhausen, Muensterland and the surrounding regions. On Nov. 3, he gave a speech in Guetersloh, and on Nov. 4 he spoke in Eschede in Netherlands. This time he addressed his speech in Suryoyo (west Syriac) and discussed our people's situation in the homeland and the Assyrian Coalition (*Awyoota*). This is a coalition of several Assyrian groups that include the Assyrian Democratic Organization, ADM, Assyrian Universal Alliance, and Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party. He emphasized the importance of an Assyrian joint action group and discussed the Coalition's visit to Washington D.C. on October 11 where they met with U.S. officials and Congressional representatives.

On the 5th day of November, Mr. Kanna visited Berlin and met Mr. Dietmar Blass, Chancellor of the Middle East and North Africa, and Mr. Raymond Dequin, an official in the Middle East Affairs in Foreign Affairs Ministry. Mr. Kanna spoke about our people and political

situation in the homeland and the expected developments in the region, exchanging views with the German authorities.

The same day Mr. Kanna and the ADM delegation met with the Human Rights and the Humanitarian Affairs Committee in the German Parliament from both political factions. Mrs. Angelika Graf and Mrs. Monika Brudlewski were among the German Parliament representatives. Mr. Kanna addressed the humanitarian situation of our people and Iraq in general under the sanctions and the regime of the Iraqi dictator.

Mr. Kanna left Germany to return to Northern Iraq on Wednesday, November 7.

UPHOLDS ASSYRIAN RIGHTS

(ZNDA: Sulaimaniya) During a meeting with the leadership of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM, or *Zowaa*) the Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani, reaffirmed his party's support for the rights of Assyrians, solidarity with Assyrian aspirations and continued cooperation and coordination between PUK and the ADM.

The ADM delegation was led by Secretary General Yonadim Yousif Kanna, and high ranking leaders of ADM: Toma Khoshaba, Salim Kako, Anmia Yuqa and Ishaq Ishaq. Both groups agreed to continue the close consultation process between PUK and ADM on a regular basis.

ANCIENT BEER PRIMER UNEARTHED IN HASSAKEH, SYRIA

Courtesy of the Associated Press (Nov 13)

(ZNDA: Damascus) A Syrian-Belgian-British archaeological mission has unearthed 3,800-year-old Babylonian beer-making instructions on cuneiform tablets at a dig in north-east Syria.

According to Abdel-Massih Baghdo, director of the Hassakeh Archaeological Department, 92 tablets were found in the 14th layer of Tel Shagher, a site just north of Hassakeh. He said the tablets showed beer-making methods and tallied quantities of beer produced and distributed in the region. This area was under the control of the Assyrians until the early part of the 7th Century B.C. The Hassakeh region, 650 kilometres northeast of Damascus, is known these days for its wheat production and is home to several Assyrian communities.

TURKISH LEADER DECLARES MAY 15

GENOCIDE DAY OF THE TURKS

(ZNDA: Ankara) Last week Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit in a statement broadcast on the Turkish State TV channel TRT 2 declared May 15th as the genocide day of the Turks of western Anatolia. The move was made in retaliation to the Greek government's earlier acknowledgment of September 14th as the Asia Minor Genocide Day.

Mr. Ecevit made the following statement: "Greece's decision regarding Asia Minor is so illogical and such a ridiculous allegation that Greek officials tried to conceal this decision for a long time. They were practically ashamed of it. In the end, of course, the decision was revealed. As you noted, we are also doing whatever is necessary, and we will continue to do so in the future as well."

POPE CALLS FOR AN END TO EMBARGO AGAINST IRAQ

Courtesy of Dow Jones International News & BBC Monitoring (Dec 11)

(ZNDA: Vatican City) Pope John Paul II called last Tuesday for an end to the embargo on Iraq and said the Church would share in the "unjustly inflicted" suffering of Iraqis on Friday, a day of fasting for Catholics. "I implore the Lord to enlighten the understanding and hearts of those nations

Assyrian W

responsible (for the embargo), so that they may open in favor of re-establishing a just and lasting peace in this region,” John Paul told prelates of the Chaldean Catholic Church visiting from Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and the U.S.

The pope has frequently called for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions which were imposed against Iraq by the U.N. after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990. U.N. resolutions say the sanctions can't be lifted until the U.N. Security Council is convinced Iraq has rid itself of its weapons of mass destruction. While many countries have pressed to lift the sanctions, the U.S. has refused, seeing the embargo as key to preventing the Iraqi government from threatening its neighbors. The pope didn't mention the U.S. by name in his comments. John Paul invited Catholics around the world to make last Friday a day of fasting and to pray for peace and justice in the world in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. He has noted the day falls in the holy month of

Suleman's group and personal assets. That includes loans to the Froggy Group companies of about \$13 million.

To recover the missing assets liquidators Paul Weston and Neil Cussen have said they will undertake a "massive" asset-tracing effort overseas, in particular North America and Asia. Tens, perhaps hundreds of Assyrian investors, are believed to be residing in North America. Mr. Suleman was present at the recent Assyrian National Convention in San Jose, California where he and his "bodyguards" were actively soliciting personal investments. Many of such investors had mortgaged their homes to invest in Mr Suleman's pyramid scheme.

Last week over 20 Assyrian investors showed up on the 11th floor of Sydney's CBD court behind Karl Suleman's legal advisor Suzy David. Ms. David is also the sister of Karl Suleman's business partner, Fred David. Mr. Suleman chose not to appear in court, just like he had chosen not to appear at the Karl Suleman Enterprises creditors' meeting on

Mobiles and Froggy Music. Mr. Suleman owns some 60 percent of Froggy.com. The court barred him and his wife from managing corporations in the future.

BUSH ADMINISTRATION DECIDED AGAINST ATTACKING IRAQ, FOR NOW

Courtesy of Knight Ridder News Bureau, Article by Warren P. Strobel

(ZND: Washington) President Bush and his top advisers have decided, for now, against launching a war to overthrow Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in the next phase of the U.S.-led war on terrorism, according to senior U.S. officials and Western diplomats.

With the al Qaida terrorist network all but vanquished in Afghanistan, speculation has been growing that Bush would turn his sights on Hussein, a longtime U.S. nemesis who is known to have chemical and biological weapons. Iraq also is believed to be working on obtaining nuclear weapons.

World News

Ramadan, the month-long holiday of fasting and purification for Muslims. He said the fast would also enable the Catholic faithful to know what it's like to suffer and be closer to those who are deprived of food.

KARL SULEMAN AND WIFE TO APPEAR IN COURT IN JANUARY

Courtesy of Sydney Morning Herald (Dec 17)

(ZND: Sydney) Karl Suleman and his wife Vivian will be examined by the liquidator of Karl Suleman Enterprises as early as January 2002 over their failed pyramid-style scheme. They will be allowed to sell some of their assets under a Supreme Court order made last Friday and the proceeds of those asset sales are to go into the trust account run by the liquidator to the failed Karl Suleman Enterprises. Mr. Suleman's personal assets include suburbs properties, a Ferrari and a Lamborghini cars and some aircrafts.

Mr Suleman raised more than \$130 million from members of the Assyrian community and more than 2000 others during the past 18 months. The scheme promised returns of up to 16 per cent a month on parcels of cash of more than \$25,000, and money from new investors was used to pay old investors.

About \$65 million is now missing. Another \$45 million has been returned to original investors and another \$20 million-odd is estimated to be recoverable from Mr.

previous Friday.

Sydney Morning Herald's Kate Askew writes: "With designer sunglasses perched expertly so as not to disturb her perfectly blow-dried and bobbed coiffure, David sat behind the horde of barristers and put her head down, taking notes as the matter was heard between ASIC and Karl Suleman Enterprises, Suleman's company that housed his brilliant pyramid-style scheme... Walking back into the courtroom after morning tea break with her Louis Vuitton tote slung over her shoulder, David, who is known not only for her legal work but for her position in the Assyrian social scene, found a bursting courtroom and Justice Campbell already into the matter. Demanding that someone in the back of the courtroom get out of her seat, she then pushed the swivel chair back across the room and sat down to keep taking her notes. It didn't take long before the matter had been dealt with and, in her black patent stilettos, she headed for the door. But not before her sunglasses fell off her head as she bowed to the judge as she left the room (that must be why one never sees any of the legal contingent with sunglasses in their hair and certainly not in the barristers' wigs), sending another waft of her perfume around the court."

The Court set down the date for the hearing of a winding-up application by Australian Securities and Investments Commission for the Froggy group of companies for February 14. This includes Froggy Holdings, Froggy

But the officials and diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Bush's top advisers are nearing a consensus that there is insufficient international backing for a war in Iraq and uncertain prospects of military success. And without evidence tying Iraq to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, "it would just look like it's our excuse" to finish off Saddam, said a senior Bush administration official.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who has been a leading advocate of trying to oust the Iraqi leader, said Tuesday that after Afghanistan, the U.S. military will target "places where we think senior al Qaida might be trying to escape to or those places where we have tentatively identified possible al Qaida people hanging out."

Those countries are thought to include Somalia, Yemen and Sudan.

"Although there's a lot of discussion going on within the administration, there's no serious military planning being done for some kind of campaign against Iraq," added a European diplomat in Washington.

Courtesy of

Zinda
magazine
"Think Assyrian"

www.zindamagazine.com



Karl Suleman Enterprizes

Shopping trolleys and fast cars, frogs and Ponzis, American Presidents and Jesse George, rabbis and the church... the rise and fall of an Empire.
PART 1

612 BC, 24th April 1915, 7th August 1933, ... add another date to the list of Assyrian tragedies - 12th November 2001, a date that will be remembered as a day of financial genocide of over 2000 Assyrians, predominantly in Sydney, Australia, but also to a lesser extent Melbourne, Europe and America. The story of Karl Suleman Enterprizes (KSE) is a classic tale of how materialism, greed and jealousy created a huge financial scam, a monster that grew out of control, sucking in even well educated, prosperous Assyrians and now threatens to undermine a community.

The word about Karl Suleman first got to Melbourne, Australia in early 2001. The stories about him seemed more urban legend than fact. "A thirty-something successful Assyrian businessman with peroxide blonde hair, who has converted to Judaism, is the 135th richest man in Australia and is donating money to Assyrian charities, churches and needy Assyrian individuals." The first I heard of him was that he had donated \$25,000 to a local Melburnian Assyrian church.

Earlier on, at The Assyrian Australian Academic Society's (TAAAS) Annual Ball in 2000, Karl Suleman, along with two rabbis, donated \$5,000 each to the Society. A speech by one of the rabbis told of how impressed he was of TAAAS' work. Karl Suleman seemed to be building bridges for the Assyrian community with the world at large. Stories of donations kept flooding in - he had bought an Assyrian school in Northern Iraq a minibus, had donated over \$150,000 to the first totally Assyrian private school in the diaspora (St Hormizd Assyrian School) - and on and on the donations went.

Then we started seeing blue skies with *Froggy.com.au* written in huge puffs of white smoke. Children started boasting to their friends. "See that? A rich Assyrian owns Froggy," they would brag to their friends. For the first time, it seemed, Assyrians were "making it" to the big time. More and more impressive public events would take place as Mr Suleman, along with respected Assyrian community figures, attend a charity dinner in Sydney, sitting beside ex-US President Mr Bill Clinton. The tickets cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and were all sponsored by Suleman. Mr Clinton reportedly "promised" to look at some of the Assyrian issues raised at the dinner.

Soon after, in mid-2001, Suleman opened a branch of KSE here in Sydney Rd., Melbourne. The small, modest office, still smelling of freshly painted bright pastel blue paint, offered incredible, unbelievable returns. One hundred thousand

Continued page 10

The Anatomy of a scam

**Ponzi yesterday,
Suleman today?
Lessons poorly learnt.**

In the summer of 1920, Charles Ponzi and his Boston-based postal coupon enterprise was the talk of the East Coast. Was he truly a financial wizard, or merely an accomplished swindler? The latter was eventually revealed to be true, but before his investment bubble burst, Charles Ponzi had collected \$9,500,000 from 10,000 investors by selling promissory notes paying "fifty per cent profit in forty-five days."

The Ponzi Scheme, Mark C. Knutson



That was more than eighty years ago. The story of Ponzi seems to have been a valuable lesson not learnt. The Suleman story could almost be a word for word reprint of Ponzi's life.

Ponzi claimed he was giving investors just a portion of the 400 per cent profit he was earning through trade in postal reply coupons. As Ponzi paid the matured notes held by early investors, word of enormous profits spread through the community, whipping greedy and credulous investors into a frenzy. Investigation later revealed that there were no coupons or profits – earlier notes were paid at maturity from the proceeds of later ones. Ponzi's fraud was simple. Money paid to investors, described as income, was actually distribution of capital. Bankruptcy Referee Olmstead observed: "It was another instance of robbing Peter to pay Paul, of which the past affords examples," and described Ponzi's business as that of "Borrowing money from investors at usurious rates of interest". Judge Anderson has explained, "His scheme was simply the old fraud of paying the earlier comers out of the contributions of the later comers".

"Ponzi schemes are investment schemes where returns are paid to investors entirely out of the incoming funds of new investors entering into the scheme.

Ponzi schemes are not 'pyramid schemes'. They operate under false pretences about how the money is being invested and are operated by a central company or person. Pyramid schemes involve a hierarchy of investors with profits distributed according to the investors' position within the hierarchy"

ASIC

Although the economics of such schemes are simple, contemporary swindlers conceal this fact with sophisticated marketing. Bankers, lawyers, and wealthy investors are routinely taken in by multi-million dollar Ponzis. Exuding a relaxed confidence in front of investors, he would frantically scramble behind the scenes for funds.

In many cases these agents found their best argument in asserting that while banks made very small returns to their depositors, the banks themselves were able to make enormous profits by frequent turnovers of the money of their depositors. It was proposed by some agents that small investors share in these big profits by permitting their savings to be invested for them.

The swindler shrouds his simple scam in mystery. "My secret is 'How do I cash the coupons?' That is what I do not tell." Because the coupons were merely a cover, alluding to a mysterious mechanism worked fine.

Ponzi's operation expanded dramatically in May, June, and July of 1920. As word of early investor's profits spread, people flocked to his offices. By July he was taking in about \$1,000,000 a week. The operation soon expanded to several other north-eastern cities.

Federal and State officials, suspecting Ponzi's business had no legitimate basis, and that the postal coupons did not support his declared profits, were nonetheless unable to identify concrete evidence of illegality. Apparently, all investors had thus far been fully paid in a timely manner.

"ASIC is constantly warning consumers to seek professional advice before investing in schemes which offer higher than usual returns. These types of scams are far too prevalent in our society, causing serious loss and distress to consumers"

ASIC

Without any substantial case against Ponzi, the District Attorney met with him to discuss his business. Pelletier convinced Ponzi to quit accepting deposits from new investors starting Monday, July 26, until an auditor could verify the soundness of his operation. Pelletier admitted the agreement was not based on any specific law, but rather on "public policy." Hundreds of eager investors were turned away with money in their hands. It was estimated that Ponzi had been taking in \$200,000 a day of new investments prior to the halt.

Ponzi assured investors and law enforcement personnel that he had millions in banks here and

abroad, far in excess of his liabilities. Ponzi's motives in entering into this agreement can only be a matter for speculation. While in retrospect his demise seemed inescapable, Ponzi may have expected he could eliminate law enforcement pressure and continue his scheme, at least for a time. In some respects, he very nearly succeeded in doing so. It may also be that as a respected and wealthy man, this former table-waiter and convict simply wanted to delay the inevitable, and savour his moment of glory.

Ponzi assured investors and law enforcement personnel that he had millions in banks here and abroad, far in excess of his liabilities

Normally in a scheme of this sort, it is the perpetrator's objective to abscond with the funds as the scheme is at its peak. While authorities eventually had Ponzi watched to prevent his premature exit, his failure to flee in late July remains inexplicable. Three weeks would find Ponzi in jail, but he was able to project a facade of respectability right up to the last few days of freedom. During the nineteen days preceding his incarceration he demonstrated a remarkable charm and facility for deceit as he manipulated his finances, investors, investigators, reporters, and the general public.

The criminal complaint that formed the basis of Ponzi's federal arrest alleged that Ponzi devised a scheme to defraud investors by claiming he could pay 50 per cent interest every forty-five days on their notes, when in fact he was not able to pay such interest and intended to keep their money. In imposing the maximum five year sentence for a mail fraud count, Judge Hale added his own stern pronouncement: "The defendant conceived a scheme which on his counsel's admission did defraud men and women. It will not do to have the public, the world, understand that such a scheme ... could be carried out without receiving substantial punishment." With his wife sobbing on his shoulder, Ponzi wrote: "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi," (thus passes worldly glory) on pad of paper and passed it to reporters.

Ponzi died at age 67, a poor man. ■

Suleman's shopping trolley full of mystery

Suleman in different spotlight

Froggy boss at heart of \$60m losses

Above: Karl Suleman appeared almost daily in major Australian newspapers

From page 8

dollars invested with KSE would bring back a mind-boggling return of \$8,000 a fortnight for three years – a total return on investment of over \$500,000 in three years. Fifty thousand dollars would see a return of \$4,000 “injected” fortnightly into your chosen account. It was unbelievable, but with reputable Assyrians behind the man, the general feeling was, he must have been doing *something* right. Speculations ran wild as to where this money was coming from. Money laundering, prostitution, drugs – you name the illegal venture, they were all queried. But the Melbourne office of KSE reassured us that Mr Suleman has “many businesses, runs the largest trolley service in Australia, is heavily into property, owns an internet service, mobile phone company...and is even the producer of the up and coming *Godfather IV*”. (All these, it turns out, were “smoke-screens” – one of the *Godfather IV* crew was paid to come to Australia, but the deal never went ahead; Internet services were badly in the red; property developments were non-existent). Still, we’d like to see a prospectus. “There’s one coming soon,” we were informed. Are trolleys *really* enough to make this sort of money? “When you ‘own’ all the trolleys in Australia they are,” we were told.

At about the same time, probably on hearing that “competition” had been set up in Melbourne, Mr Jesse George, formerly of *Quick Loan Service*, William St Fairfield, NSW, now allegedly in hiding in the USA, made a business trip to Melbourne to begin “recruiting” creditors. He was running his show from the Southern Cross Hotel on Swanston St, Melbourne. The man’s reputation, though, made it to Melbourne well before he did. I just had to meet the man in person – after all, how can such a nice guy as Karl Suleman employ an alleged criminal? (George holds a record with the Australian Federal Police

for numerous accounts of fraud). If you want to know a man, look at his friends. So I went to see Mr George.

George’s secretary opened the hotel door for me. The room was dimly lit, and seated at the end of it was a balding man, with pockmarked face and black-on-black suit. Creepily, and despite the dim lights, he was wearing dark sunglasses. Fair enough, I thought, so maybe he’s a migraineur – running around collecting other people’s money is enough to give anyone a headache. Or maybe he’s had recent eye-surgery.... Or maybe he’s just a member of the Assyrian Mafia. After he started talking, I was *convinced* there were no medical reasons for his bizarre appearance and affect.

“So where is all this money coming from? Can I see a prospectus please?” I asked incredulously. “.... This contract states the business to be invested in is a trolley service.... Are trolleys enough to bring in the sort of cash-flow you are promising us?” What exactly do you do with the trolleys...push money around in them or something? I thought to myself.

“It’s top-secret,” George said peering at me through his sunglasses. Very well, so I’m investing in a top-secret business. The two appeared to get more confused as I was asking other questions. I wanted to know more, but George appeared to become agitated and his responses became more like “who are you to question this man who owns so much and has done so much? Colonel Sanders never revealed his eleven secret herbs and spices, why should Karl?”

Just as I left the room, George gently grabbed me by the arm. The other guest was now out of earshot. He whispered, “If you can get your friends to invest over 100,000, I will give you ten percent.” Now I started seeing more clearly how these people worked.

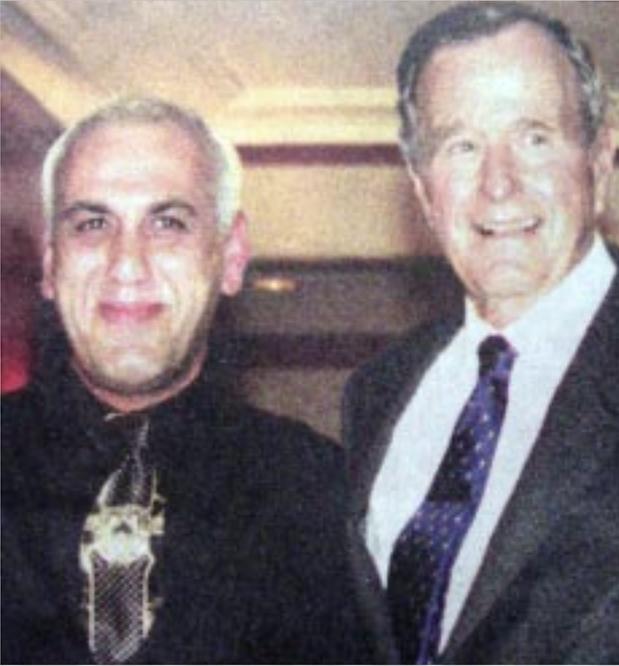
By November 2001 more than 2060 investor contracts had been signed with a gross investment value of more than \$130,000,000, and there were still other investors involved but without contracts. Around twenty individuals have received lucrative commissions and will be investigated by the courts. By 29 November Mr Suleman sent a letter to creditors stating that there was no way to save KSE, and that it should be “wound up”, leaving investors with a deficit of at least \$60,000,000.

How did Karl Suleman manage to create his empire in four short years and ruin the financial lives of so many?

Karl Suleman, aged 40, born in Iraq to the esteemed Iraqi air-craft pilot, has lived most of his life in Sydney. An excellent musician renowned for his skills as a drummer, he was respected by many who saw him as a genuine and honest man. His early business ventures were in convenience stores and butcher shops. Those who knew him still cannot believe he is capable of dishonesty. “He saved my dad years ago from financial ruin,” says a close friend, “for no personal gain.” The largesse of this man was legendary. A female parking-officer, complementing Suleman on his ring, became its lucky owner – the ring is worth \$5000.

One man who noticed the writing in the sky was Sydney’s impresario Max Markson. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mr Markson said Karl Suleman is “a lovely guy and very generous. As far as I’m concerned he’s got a triple-A credit rating. He’s a very humble man ... he never wanted any personal profile.”

Suleman’s investment scheme was registered as KARL SULEMAN ENTERPRIZES PTY LTD,



Above: Armani well spent... A versace-clad Karl Suleman cavorting with American ex-presidents.

ABN: 40090895364, at1 RESTWELL ST WETHERILL PARK NSW 2164, ACN: 090 895 364 on Friday, December 17, 1999. It was never licensed nor registered with ASIC. The actual scheme started earlier than that, with Suleman leasing part of his trolley business to a very few select individuals. The investment scheme itself somehow originated later, probably because he saw the potential of raising funds to go into a bigger business (telecommunications and internet), or because he was advised by some who saw the potential for a Ponzi scheme - an individual respected as honest with a community willing to back him up [see box].

The first contracts started as a 10-year deal with a return of 20% per annum. During 1999 and 2000 Suleman was still very selective as to who he allowed into the scheme, and as far as we can tell it was only Assyrians at that time. Contracts cost \$700 to complete. In early 2001, however one of Suleman's associates advised him to change the scheme from 10 to 5 years in order to attract more potential investors. The idea was that people who invest \$200,000 and more would have the option of entering into a 5-year contract. But agents such as Jesse George found a way around it by grouping 4 investors of \$50k each and drawing a contract for each. The solicitor at the time was Suzi Denkha-Isho.

Around April, contracts were ceased altogether. (Probably because Suleman realised the outrageously large bill - over 2 million dollars per week - was untenable, or probably because Phan & Associates offered to do the same contract for \$300 each). Some of KSE's employees tried to do the right thing and keep the deal as originally planned but were over-powered by others in the company.

After much debate, the 3-year contracts were

proposed in July 2001. These contracts started with the idea of attracting big investors of around 1 million dollars. Exactly who came up with the idea is unclear at this stage. The scheme chugged along and started and stopped around 4 times, until the last few months of the scheme when contracts were running hot. Yet again some agents found a way of getting around the problem of finding creditors by grouping people with different amounts to reach at least \$750k in order to enter them into 3-year contracts. By September this year, the 3-year contract was offered to investors of any amount down to \$25,000.

Complaints were received by ASIC around April, 2001. ASIC suspected that KSE, Suleman Investments (SI) Ltd, Karl Suleman and his wife Vivian Suleman were involved in breaches of the Corporations Act, including operating an unregistered investment scheme. On 8th November ASIC sought orders from the Supreme Court against the persons and companies mentioned above. On 12th November, Suleman went into voluntary administration. Messrs Paul Weston and Neil Cussen of Horwarths, accountants, were appointed joint administrators of KSE and SI. On the 13th the Supreme Court restrained the operation of the businesses and froze the Sulemans' assets. Mr Suleman surrendered his passport.

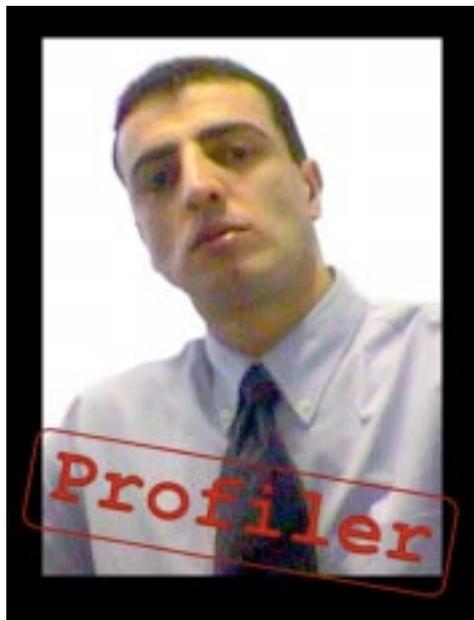
Incredibly, many agents, Jesse George among them, were still selling contracts to unknowing Assyrians even after ASIC ordered KSE to cease its business. Mr Cussen said that in the first week since their appointment, as much as \$1.5 million in bank cheques had flowed in from investors in KSE. One group launched a class action against Suleman in late November. Solicitor Frank Hammond said there might be a chance of retrieving their money - \$553,000 - as they had

entered the game so late. Others may not be so lucky. The best-case scenario is 25 cents in the dollar returned years down the track - the worst, 5 cents in the dollar.

Early on, many Assyrians remained supportive of Suleman, believing that it was ASIC's tall-poppy syndrome that wanted to see a successful Assyrian businessman go down. This support was so strong, in fact, that Suleman's offices put out a document for individuals to sign stating that they the creditors are willing to write off their debts to Suleman - the idea being that many of his assets are hidden and he would repay the money indirectly. Jackie Khamis from Melbourne was one of those who obtained such a letter from an acquaintance in Suleman's Sydney office. At a meeting on the 23rd November, Ms Khamis suggested that Assyrians all stick together as a community to get out of the mess with their money back. "In the beginning when we had that meeting, I thought I was doing a favour for the community," she told *Nakosha*, "but all I got was a kick up the backside." Rumours started to spread that she was involved with the scheme. "Everything I did was voluntary." Even now, Suleman maintains the creditors will get their money back. But Ponzi (See page 9) maintained the same claims even at the end too.

Jacob Haweil, head of broadcasters of the Assyrian programme at 3ZZZ and broadcaster of the Assyrian and Arabic Middle Eastern programme on 87.6 FM, is "very disappointed. We didn't expect all this to happen, we were happy to see the community doing well. We still don't know the complete truth." ■

Next month - The "truth" according to ASIC and the Supreme Court of NSW; talks with community figures; the position of the church; Froggy Music and Linda George.



Johnny Michael, 33

Managing Director of Amacom Technologies - manufacturer of portable data storage devices - www.amacom-tech.com. Chairperson of the Assyrian Aid Society - United Kingdom (AAS-UK).

1. What does Assyria mean to you?

As an Assyrian born and raised in England, it didn't take me too long to understand that I was different from the average English student, partly because I was made to feel different. Assyria to me means security, having a place where we can truly call home - a homeland that safeguards and protects Assyrian interests.

2. What gives you a sense of identity?

The ability to read, write and speak the Assyrian (Syriac) language as well as practice our culture and traditions.

3. What do you think is the most significant event in Assyrian history?

The most significant event in my opinion was the First World War, where the Assyrians lost over 75% of our overall number as well as our ancestral homeland. To recover from such a disaster is a mammoth task but not an impossible one.

4. What part of Assyrian culture attracts you the most?

The fact that Assyrians maintain tightly knit communities throughout the world.

5. What is your favourite Assyrian dish?

Kuba Hamouth

6. What is your favourite non-Assyrian dish?

Chinese Food

7. What is your favourite Assyrian song?

Ninwaya by Janan Sawa

8. What is your favourite non-Assyrian song?

My Way - as sung by Elvis rather than Sinatra

9. What book are you currently reading, or have recently read?

The Bible

10. What is your philosophy on life?

Devote your life in doing what you truly believe in.

ELECTION WRAP-UP



Democracy again proved its worth on Saturday, 10th November. As usual, the federal election had created media frenzy and great hype in the lead up to the big day, but emotions were, as usual to Australia, constrained to cheers and disgruntled groans.

The Liberal party, led by Prime Minister John Howard, went back to office with a swing of 2.1%, and a majority of ten seats. But many were sceptical of Mr. Howard's win (especially those who did not vote for him), putting his victory down to scare mongering tactics. You must admit, it was never expected that Australia would go through something such as the Tampa crisis. A shock to all, it is still being justified by the Immigration Minister, Mr. Phillip Ruddock.

The last election had two subjects in the spotlight, the economy, and the asylum seekers. The economy was slowing down, but the events of September 11 sped up the process and threw the USA into a recession, along side Japan (which had been battling for a while). With the two biggest economies experiencing negative growth, the Australian economy was sure to follow, and history has proven that the Liberals had better handled such times.

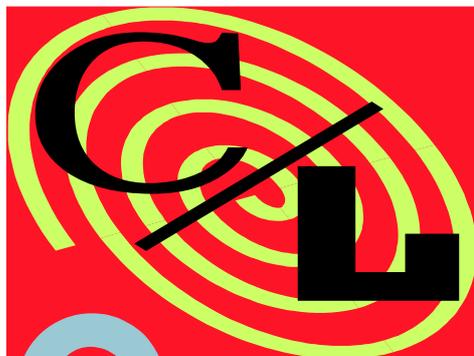
The asylum seekers were the innocent victims of the Liberal Party's marketing campaign. As speculated by many, Mr. Howard's party, in an effort to gain rural voters, created great hype regarding the credibility of the refugee status claimed by the asylum seekers. The events of September 11 played a big part in distilling the fear of the "what if there are terrorists arriving on those boats?" question.

The Labor party made the mistake of not being clear on its stand on the issue, while the Liberal party made it very clear that the asylum seekers will be kept away from our society no matter the cost. They are proving true to their word - the so-called Pacific Solution currently has an estimated price tag of \$500 million.

Tony Walker, the national political editor of *The Australian Financial Review*, argued that Australia did not have much of a choice. He wrote, "Howard and his supporters may be crowing...about a "third-term" victory, but this was by no means an acclamation, more a qualified, even grudging, acceptance by the electorate of what was perceived to be the lesser of two evils."

On election night, Mr. Kim Beazley conceded defeat, and then announced his resignation. This paved the way for new faces in the opposition. Mr. Simon Crean has taken up the leadership, while the very sensitive portfolio of immigration has been passed on to Mrs. Julia Gillard. As for issues closer to home, the seat of Calwell was won by Mrs. Maria Vemvakinou. Being a Labor party representative, she noted that she is at a disadvantage, as members in opposition to the Federal Government don't get as much access to funds, so this limits how much she can contribute to Calwell. But she still aims to do her part. "I will be working with the state government, and the local government...we'll make our services available to help individuals and community groups with government departments." Turning her attention to the Assyrian community, she said, "the Assyrian community needs to be more organised...and learn about their local government." ■

Sennacherib Warda



Q

Which Assyrian holidays do you celebrate? Why or why not?

A

F/21/Chicago

My family and I do celebrate some of the traditional Assyrian holidays like *Kha b'Neesan* and *Baoota D'Ninwaye*. The others like *Noosardel* and *Kalu D'Sulaqa* aren't celebrated in our household probably because they're not as popular as *Kha b'Nissan* has become in the recent times in Chicago; and because they're not connected religiously into the community as *Baoota D'Ninwaye* is. Recent awareness of *Shawa D'Dabukh* brought on active involvement from my family in remembering those who had fallen. It's extremely important to keep these holidays going, as they have been kept alive till today. Holidays and pastimes like these are a significant component to what sustains a culture through wartime, peacetime, and during the times where your nation has an indefinite future. So when you go *kadeh* collecting, feel free to douse H₂O on the unsuspecting person at the door who's been fasting for 3 days. Don't let his yellowish hue frighten you into not singing the New Year anthem Chicago-style: "We are the Assyrians, the mighty mighty Assyrians!"

F/35 but who's counting/ North American Continent.

As an Assyrian I do believe that we have many wonderful as well as colourful celebrations that are not found in other cultures. I try as much as possible along with the few Assyrians who live in the area where i am to celebrate our traditions so that we can keep them alive in our hearts cause they're a part of who we are. We try to gather every year for *Kha B'Nissan* and we have a small party in order to remind the new generation of who they are. As for *Baouta D'Ninwayeh* it's one of the traditions that is beloved to my heart and the story as rendered in the Old Testament carries to me a message that us being Assyrians is so important to have our sense of belonging because we were given so much, and it's so unfortunate that there are some amongst us today who don't even want to be known as Assyrians isn't that pathetic, but it's their loss. As

to *Noosardel* and *Qalou Soulaqa* there are stories that i used to hear from my Grand-mother God rest her soul and that have been told to me also by my mother

about how the kids used to celebrate *Qalou Soulaqa* and these are wonderful stories, I believe that they should be gathered in a small book with the different celebrations in order to have a complete archive about our traditions, which are absolutely beautiful.

I still soak my friends with water when i see them and it's *Noosardel*.

I hope that these traditions will be kept and documented, i have always said that we have the older generation of Assyrians who have a wealth of information and we have to ask them and keep all that info on tapes, videos and so on.

Well, God Bless all.

M/54/Sweden - Linköping

We in this city are used to celebrate these holidays and other Assyrian and Christian holidays every year. This is the least we can do to keep our children aware of their ancestors' history and traditions. Those who don't respect their history and try to be fully assimilated in other societies, will lose everything, namely their identity. Those of us who are not proud of their great civilization which is respected by other people, can never be proud of anything. They can never be respected by others. With my best wishes.

54/ Apopka, USA

Assyrian Day of Remembrance; I am not familiar with any of the others.

M/18/Australia/Sydney

I celebrate April 1 and August 7, because they are national days of celebration and remembrance, respectively and are the most essential in maintaining our national identity. The rest are just treated as novelties. I used to join in the traditions of the Rogation of the Ninevites just for fun, but *Kalu Sulaqa* has always been a strictly female event. Besides, *Noosardel* can't be celebrated in the middle of Australian winters. It's impractical. Then what about burning bonfires at the end of every February and every Christmas eve at "shaharta"? Or jumping into frozen pools to celebrate the Epiphany? Or jumping over fires on Holy Cross Day? Many of our quaintest and most ancient cultural practices are becoming obsolete in the diaspora. That is why a separate Assyrian state or Assyrian autonomy in the Middle East must be the goal of every Assyrian patriot. If not, even the memory of our traditions will fade in a generation or two. Then, who cares what we celebrate, how we celebrate it or when? We will have lost ourselves in the freedom of the west and totally assimilated

M/Phoenix, Arizona, U.S.

Yes, most of the holdidays when ever possible. This helps us keep in touch with our past and our people.

44/Melbourne,Australia

Yes I try to do my best in these celebrations. Why? I believe without tradition we will be as shaky as a dying fish on the shore.

M/ 47/Iraq

Yes, it has been a tradition.

"My family and I do celebrate some of the traditional Assyrian holidays like *Kha b'Neesan* and *Baoota D'Ninwaye*. The others like *Noosardel* and *Kalu D'Sulaqa* aren't celebrated in our household..."



Nosardeel down-under



The Assyrians: At Home in Jerusalem and the Holy Land Since Ancient Times

One visit to the Old City of Jerusalem is not enough to have an idea about the ethnic diversity in the plethora of communities who have made it their home, let alone to be aware of what their lives are like. If it is easier to recognize Armenians, not all of whom master the Arabic accent, it is impossible to distinguish Assyrians (members of the smallest yet oldest Christian community in Jerusalem) unless involved in discussion with them.

The story of the Assyrian presence in the Old City is no different from that of the Armenians. Both claim roots over the centuries for religious reasons connected with the Christian holy places in the city. They both also suffered more than one forced emigration: from Turkey following the genocide committed against the Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, and expulsion from a number of Palestinian towns within the 1948 borders of Israel.

The Assyrian Quarter is situated in Mount Zion, far from the noise of the crowded bazaar of the Old City. In this quiet part of the city among the first things to catch one's attention is the grandly built monastery which is the centre of Jerusalem's Assyrian community and where a bold inscription fixed above the entrance reads "St. Mark's Monastery".

A few metres away there is the Assyrian club, closed at midday and nearby, the old Assyrian Orphanage School building which, after its closure in 1967 (due to a lack of money, space and students), was used to house local Assyrian families and just recently has been bought by a group of Jews from Brooklyn who now live there. This historical school was just one of those built and funded by the Assyrian Orphanage and School Association (AOSA) in New Jersey, of which Assyrian nationalist Naoum Faiq was a key member.

St. Mark's Monastery... St. Mark's House

A curtain opens, revealing three monks and a priest circling an altar. Incense and chants in Syriac fill the dark space. The gilt of the altar and the priest's cape shine in the candlelight of the empty chapel. The Assyrian (Syriac) Orthodox clerics face the altar and kiss the brass chains of the incense shaker and the silver-covered Bible. Toward the end of Mass, a lone member of the congregation enters to offer prayers and take communion with them.

St. Mark's monastery, famous for its library, is situated on the intersection of Ararat Street and Assyrian Convent Road on the northern slope of Mount Zion. It stands on the ancient site of the house of St. Mark the Evangelist (also known as John) and his mother Mary. A 6th century inscription, discovered during restoration work in 1940, carved on the northern pillar inside the entrance of the church states:

"This is the house of Mary, mother of John, called Mark. Proclaimed a church by the holy apostles under the name of the Virgin Mary, mother of God, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. Renewed after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in the year AD 73."

After the Syriac Orthodox Church had lost all its other churches, monasteries and properties in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, St. Mark's became the seat of the Archbishop of Jerusalem. The first known bishop to have lived there is Ignatius III in 1471 and the chain of succession has not yet been broken. This monastery was destroyed again and again, but it was rebuilt and restored each time.

Traditions, Traditions...

There are few places in Jerusalem where so many momentous events are said to have taken place in such a small area. Here is just some of what is said to have happened at St. Mark's Monastery:

1. The Last Supper and Washing of the Feet.
2. The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples on the Day of Pentecost.
3. St. Peter's Imprisonment.
4. The Gathering of the Disciples and sharing of Holy Communion after the Ascension of Christ into Heaven.
5. St. Peter Setting up the First Church.
6. Baptism of the Virgin Mary.

In addition to the above mentioned events, which make pilgrims interested in the church, there is a parchment portrait of the Virgin Mary, which according to local tradition, was painted from life by

St. Luke the Evangelist. Enshrined in glass framework the portrait is placed just above the front in the small baptismal chapel, which is in turn linked with the tradition that the Virgin Mary was baptised here by the Apostles. There are other paintings of the Virgin Mary on the south wall of the church which are also attributed to St. Luke the Evangelist.

One Nation, Many Church Communities

Among the many recognised Assyrian Christian communities residing in Jerusalem are the Syriac Catholics, the Chaldean Catholics and the Syriac Orthodox.

The Syriac Catholic Church has had an exarch in Jerusalem since 1810, although the see is currently vacant. This community numbers 350 in Jerusalem, with another 121 in Bethlehem and a few adherents in Jaffa, Lod and Haifa. They possess a church dedicated to St. Thomas on Chaldeans Street in Jerusalem, as well as another church dedicated to St. Joseph in Bethlehem. Both these churches have pilgrims hostels attached to them. The community also has a youth centre.

The Chaldean Catholic Church has had an exarch in Jerusalem since 1908. The exarchate is located on Chaldeans Street near that of the Syriac Catholic Church. The present exarch is Fr. Paul Collin, who sees to the spiritual needs of the few Chaldean families in Haifa, and those over the border in nearby Jordan.

The Syriac Orthodox Church has had Bishops residing in Jerusalem since the seventh century. Its present archbishop is Mor Severius Malke Mourad, who is assisted by 5 monks. The Syriac Orthodox community in Jerusalem numbers 150 families (compared to about 2,000 before the establishment of Israel in 1948). They not only possess St. Mark's Monastery, but also a chapel dedicated to St. Nicodemus in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which contains Christ's tomb. This chapel contains the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea as well as other ancient tombs, but is in a dilapidated state due to an ownership dispute.

In Bethlehem there are 400 Syriac Orthodox families, served by a priest and with a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary near the city's central bazaar, a mere walk away from the church of the Nativity, built on the location where Christ was born. There is also 1 family each in Jericho, Nazareth and Haifa. A house in Jericho is presently being converted into a church, to be dedicated to St. Gabriel and to serve Syriac Orthodox pilgrims visiting the Jordan River.

The Church of the East has no presence in the Holy Land, other than the occasional pilgrim, even though it had a presence in Jerusalem as early as the 5th century. Those that resided there were gradually absorbed into the Gregorian Armenian, Coptic and

Syriac Orthodox denominations, among others, and were non-existent by the 1700s. This was due to the extreme hatred for the "Nestorian heresy". Through this the Church lost many monasteries and churches and much land and the office of Metropolitan of Jerusalem also became obsolete. The chapel of St. James in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which once belonged to the Church of the East, now belongs to the Greeks.

Israel and Palestine

Naturally, Assyrians in the Holy Land have been suffering throughout the unholy Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the severing of ties between Israel and Arab countries in 1967, it has also been hard for the Assyrian community to maintain contacts with co-nationals in Iraq, Syria or Lebanon. Due to this isolation, many Assyrians have since assimilated into Palestinian society or converted to other religions.

Emigration continues to whittle away at the remaining communities, which don't have enough clergymen to celebrate Mass for them regularly and as the numbers dwindle, fewer and fewer among the younger generation speak Syriac.

About 40 families among Jerusalem's Syriac Orthodox have begun saving money in hopes of buying land and building a housing development in the Beit-Hanina neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Such a project, they say, could draw together church members now scattered around the city and help stem the wave of emigration that has engulfed not only theirs but other local Christian communities. But the future of the housing project is uncertain. The community has found neither the land nor the money to buy it.

One now famous Palestinian-Assyrian is Diana Thomas, who had until recently been imprisoned by the Taliban along with other aid workers in Afghanistan for preaching Christianity.

Conclusion

Assyrians have been living in Israel/Palestine since the most ancient of times, and their presence was solidified by their conversion to Christianity in the 1st century AD soon after Pentecost, the miracle of which was witnessed by many people from Mesopotamia. Assyrian Christians of many denominations, totalling to about 7,500, live in that land today from Bethlehem and Jerusalem to the Mediterranean coast, in many of the country's major towns.

Many Assyrian pilgrims visit the Holy Land without ever knowing of the Assyrian Christian presence and history there, or of the more than 30,000 Assyrian Jews who have made Israel their home since the 1950s. Hopefully in the future, they may think of visiting their Assyrian co-nationals there and sharing in their own unique experience on the land where Jesus walked. ■

Nicholas Aljeloo

S W E E T

S a m s o n B a z i

S C I E N C E

"My name is Samson Bazi," he said firmly shaking my hand. I was in Sydney's Western suburbs and we were warmly welcomed into the home of this proud Assyrian boxer.

Some readers may be troubled that such an activity could be classified as sport. They may also wonder "why of all sports would someone take up *boxing*?"

According to Samson, "It gives me an adrenaline rush." It was inspirational to hear the positive attitude he displayed when speaking about his sport – "It's a challenge. And I like challenges," he said as he held his boxing gloves in front of his face and posed for a photograph.

He continued to verbally counter remarks some critics may make, by explaining the strategic nature of the sport. "It's called a 'sweet science,'" he said, "because you have to be thinking and know when to hit."

Currently aged 18, he explained how he first got into boxing. His love for the sport began early. "I loved Mike Tyson," explained Samson. "For his weight division he's very quick and he's also one of the hardest hitters to put on gloves."

He went on to explain how the aggressive and brutal style displayed by his hero Tyson was the type of style he had adopted. "I like to come at my opponent very aggressively!" he said clenching his teeth. His training began over 2 years ago. "It's always better fighting in the ring than in the street," he said, recalling how the local Police Community Youth Centre in Cabramatta had been the starting platform for his career. "The best thing for youth is sport.... it gives them something to focus on and gets them out of trouble."



His face lit up with pride when he explained how he was part of *Team Fenech*. "Jeff Fenech is responsible for training us." His admiration of the Australian boxing champion was self-evident: "He's a good guy."

His initial training involved a regime of 2 hours for 3 days per week, but since joining *Team Fenech* he has increased his training regime to 1.5 hours, 6 days per week. Some of the exercises include sparring, sit-ups, punching, roof-to-floor ball, skipping and pad-work. He also goes jogging in his own time. Sacrifices have had to be made, and some of the habits he's had to give up include partying, drinking alcohol and smoking.

His professional career began at age 17 when he was runner-up at the 1999 Southern Zone Titles. He also competed in the South Sydney juniors exhibition match. Recently he was seen on Australia's pay television in which he fought and lost, on a technicality, at Sydney's very own Nineveh Club.

When we asked his mother, Alice Bazi, if she'd actually seen her son fight in the ring, she exclaimed, "I can't watch him fight. I have to be told that he's fine and that the fight is over before I can watch it on video."

Unlike many other boxers Samson has already planned his long-term career. "I intend to turn professional and to make an impact as quick as I can and then get out of it [boxing] as quickly as I can," he said. "I'm aiming for the Australian championship."

Sounding part-businessman, part-boxer, Samson elaborated, "I want to become marketable." Once he becomes "marketable" he intends to stop boxing and use the marketing as a tool to make money. His plans are to stop boxing at the age of 30, after boxing for 12 years.

When asked about his Assyrian background and culture, Samson stated that he wanted to "Let the world know who the Assyrians are.... I'd like to put them on the map!"

His final thoughts for youth interested in pursuing a boxing career were as aggressive, direct and to the point as his boxing style – "Don't give up. Turn hard, and discipline yourself!" ■

David Chibo