

DANIELLE DEMETRIOU
in Tokyo

HE RECEIVES regular death threats, websites are devoted to his demise, the Vatican has sent letters of complaint and the Queen of Spain has sued him.

The man in question is not a criminal, a terrorist or a dictator. Instead, he is the businessman behind the world's biggest website for extramarital affairs.

Noel Biderman is the Canadian founder of Ashley Madison, a controversial but globally popular adultery website that connects married men and women and discreetly enables them to have affairs.

Notorious for its catchy slogan, "Life is short. Have an affair", the dating service is free for women, but men must pay.

Its array of features include virtual "winks", instant messaging and "travelling" services for members seeking an affair during business trips. Its mobile app uses GPS technology to track down the nearest available potential lover.

The website is currently in the throes of a rapid global expansion: since launching in Canada on Valentine's Day in 2002, it has attracted more than 24million members in 37 countries, with South Korea launched last week.

Mr Biderman, 42, is a man clearly used to defending his business. In an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph* last week during a visit to Japan – the fastest growing country in terms of membership – he reeled out a string of polished reasons as to why infidelity is the way of the modern world.

"Infidelity exists in every culture in the world," said Mr Biderman, who refers to himself as the "Emperor of Infidelity".

"There's no place you can point to on the planet where there is no unfaithfulness.

"In the lifetime of a relationship, on the male side, close to 70 or 80 per cent of men are going to be unfaithful at some point or another in their marriages. And the female side is incredibly on the rise – it's well past 40 per cent."

This appears to be the case in Britain in particular. Since the UK launch of Ashley Madison four years ago, more than 825,000 members have joined, in particular, married women aged between 38 and 42.

"Our brand resonates really well with a married woman, 15-plus years into her marriage who doesn't feel that celibacy should slip into the marriage at this time," he said.



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King of cheats heads East

Adultery website enjoys a surge in membership in Asia, thanks to culture that 'separates sex from marriage'

Japan is another success story, with one million members joining within nine months of its launch last summer.

"It seems to me that culturally, this region does the best at separating sex and marriage," added Mr Biderman. "You can do sex outside marriage much more liberally here. That's not to say that they don't present a traditional face, as most societies do. But I think that if we had to measure the infidelity economy in Japan, it's incredibly sizeable."

The reasons for soaring infidelity around the world are multiple, according to Mr Biderman.

The site is particularly pop-

ular in recession-hit nations such as Spain, while affluent communities with large disposable incomes are also major players in the "infidelity economy".

But Mr Biderman ultimately believes that the human race is simply not biologically programmed to remain faithful – and that this can be good for a marriage.

"People have affairs because we're not engineered for monogamy," he said.

"Monogamy didn't come about from some great scientific research. If anything, the current social science tells us the opposite, that the longer the couple is together, invariably, after six months, their



Noel Biderman, top, the Canadian founder of Ashley Madison, said the 'infidelity economy' in Japan was especially sizeable

sexual encounters decrease, two years, they decrease even further. Twenty years into a relationship, we're no longer sexually attracted."

Needless to say, the company is rarely far from controversy. Mr Biderman has incurred the wrath of the Pope, with the Vatican sending a disapproving letter to Ashley Madison in opposition to its sponsorship of Rome's basketball club Virtus Roma.

More recently, Singapore's government banned the site, following a public outcry against its "flagrant disregard" for public morality.

Mr Biderman plans to challenge the ban in court. In response to claims of amorality,

he believes that precise act of having an affair – without getting caught – can actually help save a marriage, the only other option normally being divorce.

"There was tons of infidelity before I got here," he said. "The only encouragement I give is to say to people, there is a way to have the perfect affair."

"So the perfect affair is not only meeting someone like-minded, it's also not being discovered."

"That's what I've built: a platform where everybody here has put up their hand and said I'm interested in an affair, and the technology to keep it discreet." Perhaps

CASE STUDY

When a friend confessed to Akiko, a 38-year-old nurse in a Japanese city, that she was using the adultery website Ashley Madison, she was instantly intrigued.

Depressed and unhappy after eight years of marriage, Akiko, who has a six-year-old daughter, decided that it was time to explore the world of adultery.

"When I saw how good my friend was feeling, I wanted to feel like that again too – the excitement, the butterflies," she said. "I'd fantasised about it many times but I was too afraid in case I got caught."

So she signed up. "I've already seen three different men on Ashley Madison. I'm a bit ashamed to admit it, but it is so easy and so much fun. Two of the men are Japanese, one is a foreigner."

Explaining the appeal of the site for married women, she said: "I like that I can choose between so many men and that I can take my time to get to know them. I also like that I can meet men in the same situation as me, who do not want anything more than an affair or ask me to leave my husband."

Guilt, it seems, does not enter the equation. "The website is super discreet. I don't have to be scared my husband will find out from my email or phone. I don't feel guilty because I am sure that my husband has other women all the time."

She added: "Before this site, there was nothing online you could use as a woman. If you wanted an affair, it would have had to be with someone at work or a neighbour or a friend and I always found that to be too risky and uncomfortable."

most surprising are Mr Biderman's disclosures about his own private life: monogamously married for 10 years with two children, he describes his wife as unwaveringly supportive.

However, he candidly admits she does not share his views on infidelity: "If in the next decade, my sex life evaporates, I have no interest in being celibate."

"Because I have these wonderful children, an extended family I cherish, great economic success and homes – I have not worked for all of that just for sex."

"I wouldn't get a divorce, therefore, if that happened, I'd try to have an affair."

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PHILIP SHERWELL
in New York
and EDWARD MALNICK

A FORMER computer student from Croydon is expected to be named as a key lieutenant of Abu Hamza, the hook-handed Islamic preacher who goes on trial in New York tomorrow.

Feroz Ali Abbasi, 34, was among nine British Guantanamo detainees whose detention became a cause célèbre among those campaigning for the closure of the US military camp. His supporters have protested his innocence and insisted that the Americans could have no evidence against him.

But as the trial of Mr Hamza gets under way – he is accused of being a "terrorist leader of global reach" – testimony prepared for the court is expected to paint Mr Abbasi in a very different light.

Prosecutors have lined up a star witness, Saajid Badat, a British terrorist "supergrass", to testify against Hamza by live video link from London, if the judge grants their request for him to do so.

In the court papers, the prosecutors said that Mr Badat would testify that Mr Hamza had sent both him and Mr Abbasi to al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan for jihad training in 2001.

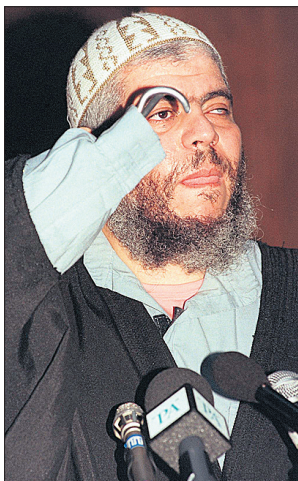
The testimony is crucial to prove the US case that Mr Hamza, who preached at the Finsbury Park mosque in London, dispatched his followers for military training and worked to assist al-Qaeda, prosecutors argued in submissions to the judge.

Mr Abbasi, who was reportedly detained in northern Afghanistan in December 2001, is seen by many to symbolise of the unjustness of Guantanamo's system of incarceration without trial or charges.

Since his release in 2005, he has worked with Cage Prisoners, now simply Cage, a campaign group for Muslim detainees "held as part of the war on terror".

He insists that he moved to

'Abbasi went to Afghanistan to train for jihad missions'



Abu Hamza allegedly sent resources to al-Qaeda and set up terrorist training camps

Afghanistan simply to pursue his Islamic studies, and that when he was captured, he was merely trying to escape the fighting after the overthrow of the Taliban regime.

But if Mr Badat testifies, a rather different story is expected to appear, saying that Mr Abbasi was sent there by Mr Hamza, his mentor at the Finsbury Park mosque.

Mr Badat is expected to portray Mr Abbasi as an enthusiastic "terrorist lieutenant" dispatched to Afghanistan to be trained for jihad missions, and who agreed to engage in attacks on American and Jewish targets, according to the pre-trial filings.

Mr Badat's testimony would chime with American claims about Mr Abbasi's actions in Afghanistan. The US government had alleged that he was taught urban warfare, assassination techniques and surveillance, and fought with al-Qaeda and Taliban forces against US and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Such was his reputation

among US soldiers that he became known by some as "the SAS guy" because he was believed to be a former member of the British Special Forces.

At a military tribunal at Guantanamo in August 2004, Mr Abbasi accused his interrogators and guards of abuse, but he also asked to be treated as a "prisoner of war".

He said that he was "humbled" that Allah would "honour" him as an "enemy combatant", admitting that he went to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban and expressed his loathing for America.

But he later told a fellow British detainee that he wrote a confession saying he was a member of al-Qaeda only under the influence of drugs "administered by US military medics" and that he had never engaged in fighting against US or coalition forces.

Following his release from Guantanamo, he returned to Croydon, where he had grown up. He enrolled at a London university and

married, later becoming a father.

At his family home last week, his mother, Zumrati Juma, a nurse, directed queries to his solicitor, who said: "He won't be saying anything".

Any testimony from Mr Badat is expected to be given by video link, because he will not travel to America, where he still faces arrest for his role in the failed transatlantic "shoe bomb" plot of December 2001.

He has testified in two previous cases by video, although the judge in this case has yet to rule on whether his evidence will be heard, saying she would prefer him to appear in person.

Hamza has pleaded not guilty to channelling resources to al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, conspiring in a 1998 kidnapping in Yemen in which three Britons and an Australian were killed, and trying to set up a terrorist training camp in Oregon.

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