

IN THE NEWS

The hunt is on

Israeli helicopters fired missiles at arms factories in Gaza on Monday as Israel vowed to resume targeted killings of terrorists.

Two metal foundries that Hamas used to produce weapons were destroyed in the predawn strikes Monday, hours after a double suicide bombing killed 10 Israelis at the Mediterranean port city of Ashdod.

Israeli security officials called the Ashdod attack "strategic terrorism," saying it might have caused a major cataclysm had toxic fuels at the port ignited. They also said Israel would step up its hunt for terrorist leaders.

Hamas and the Al-Aksa Brigade, the terrorist wing of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction, jointly claimed responsibility for the bombings.

Palestinians ordered freed

Four Palestinian suspects detained in connection with last year's killing of three U.S. security guards in Gaza were ordered freed by a Palestinian court.

The court found Sunday that there was insufficient evidence to hold the men, but they won't be released until Yasser Arafat gives his approval.

Unitarian same-sex arrests are blasted

Reform Jewish leaders criticized New York state for arresting Unitarian ministers who performed same-sex weddings.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington blasted the arrests Monday of two Unitarian Universalist ministers from New Paltz, N.Y.

The town's mayor began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples last month and was arrested on similar charges.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform group, said the separation of church and state "should permit clergy to officiate at religious ceremonies without state interference."

WORLD REPORT

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After Iran scraps inspections, Israel urges pressure from West

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — When Iran declared late last year that it was suspending development of programs that could produce nuclear weapons, many Israeli officials eyed the move suspiciously.

Now, they say, Tehran's mid-March postponement of international inspection of its nuclear plants confirms the suspicions that the Iranians simply are playing for time.

For Israel, the Iranian enigma is not academic: Israel's cities are within range of Iran's Shihab 3 missile, which is believed to be capable of delivering a nuclear payload.

The latest Iranian move, therefore, poses key questions for the Jewish state: What does Israel do if Iran continues developing nuclear weapons under a stop-start facade of cooperation with the international community? How does it go about independently verifying Iranian programs? How does it keep up international pressure on Iran without seeming to be pushing toward confrontation?

Some of those calls will be made by the Mossad intelligence agency, which has made coverage of Iran a top priority.

Still, Israeli officials believe that — in the near future at least — the battle with Iran will be diplomatic, and they are heartened by the fact that the United States and Europe are keeping up pressure on the Islamic republic to disarm.

Iran's suspension of International Atomic Energy Agency inspections was seen as a warning to the IAEA board to tone down language censuring Iran for hiding evidence of materials that could be used to make nuclear

weapons — or risk losing Tehran's future cooperation.

If so, the warning seems to have worked.

U.S. officials wanted wording that could have paved the way for U.N. sanctions on Iran. But the final resolution included amendments that effectively defer any threat of U.N. Security Council action against Iran until the next IAEA board meeting in June.

Much of the current standoff revolves around advanced centrifuges that can be used for enriching uranium to the level used in nuclear weapons. Iran first failed to declare that it had such machines. It then argued that its agreement with the IAEA permitted the country to continue assembling centrifuges at a plant in Natanz as long as they weren't used for uranium enrich-

ment.

The Americans and Europeans, on the other hand, say the agreement proscribes any activity related to potential nuclear weapons development.

The most disturbing development was the recent discovery of traces of weapons-grade uranium on centrifuge components at the Natanz plant.

Israeli experts believe the Iranians might have bought the uranium in Russia or on the Pakistani-based nuclear black market and used the centrifuges to enrich it themselves. Others have a more innocent explanation: that the centrifuges were bought second-hand from Pakistan and came with traces of previously produced uranium.

For the Americans, though, the evidence was damning.

"We think it's clear that Iran has not made

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ANALYSIS

■ *After Iran inspections are scrapped, Israel urges West to keep up pressure*

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any decision, any strategic decision, to abandon a nuclear weapons effort," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

That view is shared by the Israeli establishment, which makes a clear distinction between the commitments from Iran and from Libya — which recently pledged to end its own weapons of mass destruction programs.

"Libya and Iran are totally different cases," said Ephraim Sneh, chairman of a key Knesset subcommittee on defense planning and policy. "Behind Libya's announcement there is a genuine strategic decision by" Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi "to bring his country into the new world. The Iranians, as far as we know, are simply playing for time."

Sneh believes that by pretending to stop their nuclear weapon projects, the Iranians hope to dupe the Europeans into providing previously withheld "dual-use" items — products designed for civilian use that can be modified and used in the manufacture of weapons.

Regardless of whether or not Iran reopens its facilities to international inspection, Israel's plan is to monitor as closely as possible what the Iranians are doing.

Mossad chief Meir Dagan, who recently called the Iranian nuclear program the "gravest existential threat to Israel since the founding of the state," has restructured the agency to focus exclusively on just two issues: global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction. Coverage of Iran has been strengthened significantly.

But that doesn't mean the Mossad is succeeding.

Neither the Mossad nor any other Western intelligence service detected the existence of the Pakistani nuclear black market in real time — even though its activities were only semisecret. The technology peddlers had to come into the open to look for potential clients, even providing printed brochures.

This major intelligence failure illustrates how difficult it is to monitor nuclear developments in a closed country as large as Iran — even more so if Iran makes permanent its temporary suspension of cooperation with IAEA inspectors.

But would Iran dare to go that far with the Americans on their doorstep in Iraq? Israeli analysts think not. They believe Iran soon will invite the inspectors back and try to string them along while clandestinely proceeding with nuclear programs.

The Israelis see their role here as quietly sounding the alarm to induce the Americans to carry out what is essentially U.S.

policy: doing all they can to prevent "rogue states" like Iran from going nuclear.

Israeli officials are encouraged by the tough line the Americans and Europeans are taking with Iran. The Europeans, for example, are not yet providing Iran with the "easier access to Western technological aid" they promised if and when Iran fulfills its weapons of mass destruction commitments.

The Europeans first want to make sure the Iranian weapons program has been irretrievably scrapped. Until then, Israel will back fully the American policy to pressure rogue states rather than rely on international nonproliferation treaties that can easily be signed and then ignored.

Israeli officials believe the consistently tough American line could eventually lead to U.N. sanctions on Iran until a possible regime change in Tehran.

But judging by recent elections — in which the conservative hardliners made sweeping gains after disqualifying most opposition candidates — regime change in Tehran could be a long time coming. ■

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

**Regime change
in Tehran could
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Hillel TV in Uruguay is advocacy tool

By NICOLE SHER

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay (JTA) — Hillel TV, a new television show geared toward Israel Advocacy, is being developed in Montevideo by Hillel Uruguay.

The show, which will air weekly late at night is intended for an audience of young people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The message will be comprised equally of Israel advocacy and local material relating to Hillel Uruguay and Montevideo.

Currently in development, the show is expected to begin airing in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil next month.

Hillel TV is part of a growing campaign of Israel advocacy in South America.

The show's creator, Odelia Barkin, 26, director of Israel programs at Hillel Uruguay, says she hopes the show will "give information about Israeli culture and make Israel more vivid, more relevant."

Hillel TV will strive to "show that

Israel is a multifaceted place that has something beyond the terrorist attacks and conflicts," she said.

Aimed at college-aged viewers, the show is designed in part to empower "young Jewish students with information to fight back against the ignorant anti-Semitism that they encounter on their campuses," Barkin said.

"With so much emotion on both sides of the conflict, it's more important than ever to try to present a balanced perspective," Barkin said.

The local Jewish community is excited about the show.

"I think it's great," said Marcelo Mirkin, 19. "I think young, college-aged people need a space like this to get informed."

"We can get a different perspective from the one we see every night on the news," he continued.

"Plus, it's fun to watch, with lots of cute girls." ■

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After Putin win, some Jews seek new Kremlin ties

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — After he easily won re-election to another four-year term, Russian President Vladimir Putin made sure to address widespread concern about democracy in Russia — a concern Russian Jews share.

“All democratic achievements of our state will be absolutely maintained and guaranteed,” Putin said in a victory speech after Sunday’s election.

Putin won about 71 percent of the vote.

The president apparently made his comments to respond to critics in Russia and abroad who called the election campaign undemocratic and expressed concern about the future of democracy in Russia.

Indeed, Putin won without having put forth a comprehensive campaign platform, without really campaigning very much and without taking part in any televised debates.

Though there were six other candidates in the race, Putin dominated the airwaves on state-controlled TV channels, giving him what many said was an unfair competitive edge.

There is no hard data yet on Jewish voter preferences, but experts agree that Russian Jews generally show greater support for liberal candidates than do other Russian voters.

In this vote, where Putin’s re-election seemed inevitable, many Jews said they would vote for the only liberal challenger, Irina Khakamada.

According to the final tally, Khakamada received less than 4 percent of the national vote but won about 8 percent in the largest cities in Russia, where most Jews live.

Elena Gitlina, 49, a manager at a Moscow tourist company, was among those who voted for Khakamada — though she didn’t have the slightest hope that she would win.

“I’ve done so to show that there is an alternative to Putin, that there is a voice of discontent in this chorus singing praise to our president who is so much obsessed with keeping his power,” Gitlina said after casting her ballot.

The strongest runners-up were candidates few Jewish voters backed. Communist Nikolai Kharitonov and left-wing economist Sergey Glazyev, from a Commu-

nist splinter group — both from parties with records of xenophobic and anti-Semitic remarks — together received about 18 percent of the vote.

Gitlina said she was the only adult out of six in her family to cast a vote.

The others were unwilling to participate in an election that left the public with little real choice, she said.

Similarly, most of the Jewish leaders contacted Sunday by JTA said they didn’t vote.

Many said it was the first time in their lives since the fall of communism that they declined to vote.

“I just see no point for myself in participating in this farcical ballot,” one official said privately.

In Israel, only 6,150 Russians out of nearly 100,000 eligible Russian voters participated in the election.

They cast their ballots at 11 polling stations that the Russian Embassy set up across the Jewish state.

Israeli Russians voted overwhelmingly for Putin, giving him 67 percent of their votes, even though they weren’t exposed to the lopsided campaigning that other Russians experienced.

Khakamada received nearly 25 percent of the vote from Israel, the Russian Embassy in Tel Aviv said.

Before the election, the organized Jewish community in Russia tried to remain apolitical.

However, one of Russia’s two chief rabbis, Berel Lazar, did say three days before the election that Jewish voters had a religious duty to go to the polls.

“Taking part in a democratic election is not only a human right, but in the first place is the fulfillment of God’s commandment,” Lazar said in a statement last week.

On Sunday, Lazar, who is known for his good personal relations with Putin, invited members of the media to the polling station where he was registered.

“The result of the election is important to Jews of Russia,” he said after casting his ballot, noting that voting “would show that Jews that live here today feel they are comfortable.”

Another influential Jewish leader said though the result of the vote will not please all Russian Jews, they don’t have to

be especially concerned about Putin’s second term as long as the general political winds do not shift drastically.

“Jews in Russia are more sympathetic to Western-style liberalism that the average Russian,” said Mikhail Chlenov, secretary general of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress. “Yet Jews are ready to live within the system of power Putin

‘Jews are ready to live within the system of power Putin has built.’

Mikhail Chlenov

Euro-Asian Jewish Congress

has built.”

“What Jews are most afraid of is Russian nationalism as an element of state policy,” he said. “As long as Putin’s system maintains its democratic and pro-Western rhetoric in his second term, Jews here have no particular reason to be worried.”

Many of Russia’s estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews are pleased with the way Putin has handled anti-Semitism.

But they are uncomfortable with his apparent disregard for democracy, as evidenced by his use of state-run media to fuel his election campaign and his refusal to take part in any televised debates.

Russians — Jews included — seem to be accepting Putin’s limits on democratic reforms because he has brought stability to the country.

Some Jewish figures abroad said they hope to develop a broader partnership with Putin during his second term.

The World Jewish Congress is preparing a meeting with Putin on the issue of anti-Semitism. Isi Leibler, the group’s senior vice president, said the meeting could take place in the next month.

Leibler said the goal is “to try to get the Russian government to support the resolution in the United Nations condemning anti-Semitism.”

Leibler, who was in Moscow on the day of the election, said Putin’s Russia potentially could take a more positive stance than many European nations on Israel-related issues and anti-Semitism.

“We can prove that by being better on Israel and the issue of anti-Semitism, Russia can benefit its own interests,” he told a small group of Moscow Jewish leaders. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Boy bomber

A 10-year-old Palestinian boy was caught trying to smuggle a bomb through a West Bank checkpoint.

The Israeli army said a policewoman at the checkpoint outside Nablus searched the boy, who worked as a porter, after noticing wires jutting out of his bag. According to Channel Two television, Palestinians who dispatched the boy tried to set off the bomb as soldiers gathered around him by calling in to a cell phone rigged to the detonator, but a short-circuit prevented a disaster.

Fence clash

A dozen Palestinians protesting Israel's West Bank security fence were wounded Monday in clashes with Israeli police.

The clash at Deir Qadis, just inside the West Bank near the Israeli city of Modi'in, followed similar disturbances the day before.

Abbas burial not in my backyard

Syria agreed to bury terrorist mastermind Mohammed Abu Abbas after Israel refused to allow his body to be given to the Palestinians.

The Haifa-born Abbas, who masterminded the 1985 hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship, died last week in U.S. custody in Iraq.

Abbas' family had wanted him buried in the West Bank city of Ramallah, but Israel refused. "We will not be party to a terrorist getting a hero's funeral," an Israeli security source said.

Schwarzenegger to Israel

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is going to Israel.

The former Hollywood star and bodybuilding champion said he will visit Jerusalem in May for the groundbreaking of Israel's Museum of Tolerance, Ha'aretz reported. Schwarzenegger also will use his two-day visit to promote trade ties between Israel and California.

Knesset alert

Knesset members were warned of a terrorist plot to target them with mail bombs. A letter distributed Monday to Israel's 120 lawmakers instructed them not to open packages delivered to their homes, and to summon Knesset security instead.

Security sources would not comment on which Palestinian group was believed to be behind the new threat.

Words, not war

The son of Libya's leader said Libya had sought weapons of mass destruction for a war with Israel, but decided diplomacy was better. "The main reason for us developing arms was to battle the enemy," Saif al-Islam Gadhafi told the London-based newspaper Al-Hayyat in an interview published Monday. "We saw that the Palestinian armed struggle, which had lasted 50 years, did not produce results comparable to those of five years' negotiations."

NORTH AMERICA

Arab group urges dictionary revision

An Arab-American group is urging Merriam-Webster to revise its dictionary definition of anti-Semitism.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee called on the publishers to repudiate its "false and damaging" explanation of anti-Semitism, including one definition as "opposition to Zionism: sympathy with opponents of the State of Israel," the Washington Post reported.

A Merriam-Webster spokesman said the company likely would revise or drop that definition in its next edition in seven to 10 years.

Lawmaker: Link Libya policy to property

A U.S. lawmaker wants U.S. relations with Libya to be contingent on the settlement of compensation for Libyan Jews.

Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.) wants the Bush administration to halt normalization of relations with Libya until Jews are compensated for property confiscated by Muammar Gadhafi's regime after they were forced to flee the country because of political persecution.

Justice petitioned on 'Passion'

The Justice Department is being urged to rule whether Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" constitutes a hate crime.

An Internet petition by the Messiah Truth Project urges Attorney General John Ashcroft to determine whether the controversial movie about Jesus' death violates hate-crime statutes because its portrayal of Jews amounts to an "anti-Semitic diatribe."

Bartholomew meets the Jews

Leaders of the World Jewish Congress held their first meeting Monday with the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of some 250 million people in the Greek, Russian and Serbian Orthodox churches, met in New York with the WJC officials.

Officials said Bartholomew, whose seat is in Istanbul, condemned religious fanaticism, terrorism and anti-Semitism.

WORLD

Alone on the A-bomb

A former South African president said the country developed atomic arms alone, dispelling reports of Israeli cooperation.

"We developed our own uranium-enriching process which is unique in the world," F.W. de Klerk, the last white president of South Africa, told reporters in Johannesburg on Monday.

Based on reports of the exchange of military expertise between Israel and the South Africa's former apartheid regime, independent analysts had assumed that Israeli know-how fueled South Africa's atomic program.

Experts gather in Brussels

European terrorism experts will gather for an emergency workshop on "the lessons of Madrid" at the American Jewish Committee's new Transatlantic Institute.

Following last week's suicide bombings in the Spanish capital, experts from Spain, Germany, France and Belgium are to hold a two-hour workshop at the Brussels institute on "how what happened in Madrid could engender closer cooperation on issues of terrorism," said Deidre Berger, head of the AJCommittee's Berlin office.

Pope invited to synagogue gala

Rome Jewish leaders have invited Pope John Paul II to a 100th anniversary celebration for Rome's main synagogue. Italy's president, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, already said he'll attend the May 23 ceremony.

A reply from the Vatican is expected by the end of March.

Jewish author: Publish 'Mein Kampf'

Hitler's "Mein Kampf" should be released in Germany, a prominent Jewish author says.

Novelist Rafael Seligmann said it would be an "exercise in truth" to release the book so German readers could see for themselves the seeds of Hitler's plans for exterminating the Jews and for expanding German dominion eastward. The State of Bavaria, which owns the rights to the book, has banned publication in Germany and prevented publication in Sweden, Croatia and Turkey.