

**IN THE NEWS**
**Court denies Pollard appeal**

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear Jonathan Pollard's petition for access to classified information used to convict him.

A former U.S. Navy analyst, Pollard is serving a life sentence in a U.S. prison for spying for Israel.

On Monday, the high court rejected Pollard's request for a hearing on a petition for his attorneys to receive access to the evidence to bolster Pollard's argument for clemency.

A hearing would not have affected Pollard's conviction, but would have addressed whether federal courts may grant access to classified material for clemency, which is the purview of the executive branch.

**Bush: U.S. will protect Israel**

President Bush said the United States would use "all military might" to protect Israel.

Bush fielded national security questions Monday at Cleveland's City Club.

Asked about Iran's nuclear threat, he said, "The threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally, Israel."

He added: "I've made it clear, and I'll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally, Israel."

**Karni crossing reopens, then closes**

Israel briefly reopened the main commercial crossing into the Gaza Strip following warnings of Palestinian food shortages.

The Karni crossing, which had been closed repeatedly over the past two months because of alerts of impending Palestinian attacks, was temporarily opened Monday to allow convoys of goods into Gaza. The opening was to have lasted three hours but was called off much sooner, with security sources citing renewed terrorism warnings.

# WORLD REPORT

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## As bills advance to cut off P.A., administration weighs aid approach

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — With the prospect looming of a terrorist-ruled enclave on Israel's doorstep, the Bush administration is weighing how to isolate the terrorists — without hurting the Palestinians who voted them into power.

Administration officials are pushing hard against proposed congressional legislation, strongly favored by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, that would profoundly change the way the United States assists the Palestinians.

Aid questions were brought to the fore when Hamas, labeled a terrorist group by Israel and the United States, won a surprise landslide victory in Jan. 25 Palestinian legislative elections. The group has yet to assume power.

The officials say a humanitarian crisis is likely once the aid flow stops. A World Bank report published Wednesday envisions 47 percent unemployment and 74 percent poverty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2008 if aid restrictions described in the legislation are imposed.

Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. secretary of state, said the United States would forestall such a scenario.

"We're committed to the well-being of the Palestinian people," she said March 15 in Indonesia, where she was on a state visit. "We will continue humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, to Palestinian refugees, to food assistance where it's needed, to the health and well-being of Palestinian children and families."

The legislation also could cripple attempts to maintain the current lull in violence, officials said.

In testimony March 15 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, the U.S. security envoy to the Palestinians, pleaded with senators not to tie his hands.

"The less restrictive that the legislature can be on our activities, the more flexibility it will give me as a military man to deal with situations that are inevitably very chaotic and unexpected," Dayton said.

It was highly unusual for a military figure to explicitly oppose legislation.

Like every other Western official who deals with the Palestinians, Dayton was emphatic about the need to cut off Hamas.

Western nations and Israel have said Hamas will remain a pariah until it recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism, which no one expects to happen soon.

Proposed legislation in both houses of Congress would ban assistance not just to Hamas, but to anyone associated with a Palestinian Authority run by Hamas.

Furthermore, it would set unprecedented markers for the P.A.'s return to the United States' good graces, no matter who's in charge in Ramallah.

Some have advocated maintaining aid but channeling it through relative moderates in the Palestinian Authority, such as P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, who is from the Fatah Party.

Speaking on background, backers of the House bill in Congress and in the pro-Israel community are concerned that such an approach would only bolster Hamas by freeing it from the business of government and allowing the terrorists to focus on arming. It also would

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**NEWS ANALYSIS**

## ■ Some warn that aid proposals bypassing Hamas will only radicalize the P.A.

*Continued from page 1*

undercut the intention of the sanctions, which is to show the Palestinians the impact of having a government run by a terrorist group.

Still, some senators worried that abandoning the Palestinian Authority could have dire consequences.

"A diminishment of aid from the West could further radicalize the Palestinian people or expand the influence of Iran and Syria," considered by the United States to be rogue states, Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in prepared remarks.

Proponents of the bills say they provide for humanitarian aid, but aid providers say the exceptions the president would have to seek from Congress would crimp such assistance.

James Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president who is now the envoy for the diplomatic Quartet — the grouping of the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia that is guiding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process — said the legislation would hamper efforts to circumvent Hamas.

"Some of the recommendations would make it difficult for some of the alternatives that we're looking at because they would not meet rigidly the requirements of that legislation," he told the Senate committee.

Additionally, aid officials say the Palestinian Authority cannot be divorced from the delivery of assistance.

"The P.A. delivers the vast bulk of public

services," the World Bank report said. "It would be difficult to ramp up emergency/humanitarian assistance levels quickly if humanitarian flows required new verification procedures."

Wolfensohn said donor nations needed to come up with an alternate structure to the Palestinian Authority. That might not be possible in the short time — as little as days — before Hamas takes power.

"The notion of trying to re-establish a framework that deals with 4 million-plus people overnight, when you're given these constraints, is just something that I think may be beyond human capacity," he said.

The Senate version of the bill, sponsored by the majority whip, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), and Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), allows Bush the narrow loophole of unfettered dealing with Abbas.

The House, traditionally more hawkish on the Palestinians, would ban such a loophole. Yet even there, the bill, sponsored by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), has run into resistance.

Six weeks after its introduction, and 10 days after a lobbying blitz by 5,000 delegates to the AIPAC policy conference, the number of co-sponsors remains stuck at about 150. Once a bill passes the halfway mark of about 220 co-sponsors, its passage becomes inevitable.

In an alert sent to supporters Tuesday, AIPAC sounded a note of alarm.

"After weeks of lobbying and hundreds of meetings at last week's policy conference, the House International Relations Committee is scheduled to meet on Wednesday, March 29 to 'mark up' this bill," the alert said in an underlined passage. "Once this occurs, no new co-sponsors can be added."

A "mark-up" refers a bill to the full House for passage. The implication was clear: Without a majority co-sponsoring the bill, its passage is not guaranteed.

But no mark-up was scheduled for March 29, leaving lawmakers confused: Why was AIPAC telling this to its supporters?

It might be an innocent mistake, AIPAC

insiders said. Others wondered whether the lobby was lighting a fire under its activists in the face of successful counter-lobbying by groups that oppose the legislation, including Americans for Peace Now and the Israel Policy Forum.

"There's a very active counter-lobbying effort going on," said a senior staffer in the office of one congressman who strongly backs the bill.

**The Senate version of the bill allows Bush the narrow loophole of unfettered dealing with Abbas.**

APN blitzed the Hill with a bulletin headlined "questions to ask AIPAC," the first time the dovish group has openly taken on the pro-Israel powerhouse during its policy conference.

"Why should Congress change U.S. law, permanently, in

a way that weakens and embarrasses our best hope for a future Palestinian partner (people like former Minister of Finance Salam Fayyad, who is now an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council), and strengthens extremists?" it asked.

Additionally, the staffer said, two critical players appear detached from the legislation: the Republican leadership, and Israel, where officials have hinted that they may seek a bit of flexibility in dealing with relative moderates.

"I don't think there's been a signal from the Republican leadership that they favor this," said the staffer, who would not comment on the record on pending legislation. "And there hasn't been a clear signal from the Israelis."

## E.U. payout for P.A.

NEW YORK (JTA) — The European Union donated \$78 million for Palestinian relief. The sum, given to the United Nations on Monday for disbursement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, was cast by the E.U. as an ad-hoc gesture that was not meant to undermine calls for Hamas, which won a majority in January P.A. elections, to moderate its stance on Israel.

The E.U. has said its annual aid program of hundreds of millions of dollars for the Palestinians could be cut completely unless Hamas renounces terrorism, recognizes Israel's right to exist and accepts past Israeli-Palestinian accords.



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# Belarus Jews walk tightrope after vote

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MINSK, Belarus (JTA) — Boris voted for the opposition candidate in this week's election in Belarus — even though he knew Alexander Milinkevich wasn't going to win.

"I only want to be given a chance to vote freely and choose freely who I want," said Boris, a 36-year-old Jewish businessman who asked that his last name not be used.

In contrast, an elderly Jewish woman named Mila is a major supporter of Alexander Lukashenko, who has been the authoritarian president in this former Soviet republic for the past 12 years. Lukashenko won his third term in office Sunday amid widespread international condemnation of the vote.

"I wish him long, long years and want him to remain our president forever," Mila said while attending a service last Friday night in Minsk's Simcha Reform congregation.

The opposition, she said, "wants to sell us out to America."

Boris, for his part, joined some 5,000 people at an opposition rally in a Minsk square Sunday night to show disagreement with the official vote count and solidarity with Milinkevich.

According to official results, Lukashenko received nearly 83 percent of the vote while Milinkevich got about 6 percent. Voter turnout was a record 93 percent.

Lukashenko, a former Soviet collective farm boss, has maintained a strict, state-controlled economy, and has capitalized on low unemployment and stable, if meager, living standards.

He may be considered a dictator by the Western world, but for many of his own people — especially for pensioners, rural citizens and workers at state-owned plants — he is a great politician who has ensured his nation a stable and crisis-free development after the turmoil of the initial post-Communist years.

A country of 10 million people, Belarus is home to anywhere from 20,000-70,000 Jews.

Much of the country's official Jewish community took a different approach from Boris. Despite Lukashenko's authoritarian rule, the Jewish community has managed to retain a certain level of independence while avoiding political involvement.

"We don't mix our community in

politics," said Leonid Levin, a renowned architect and president of the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Organizations and Communities, an umbrella group.

Jewish leaders cite both fear of repression and the solid support Lukashenko enjoys among older Jews as reasons for avoiding political activity. Yet community leaders have felt safe enough to criticize authorities for what they believe is a weak response toward anti-Semitic incidents, particularly vandalism.

"Lukashenko is not an anti-Semite himself," said Yakov Basin, a longtime Jewish leader and civil rights activist in Minsk. "But there are some people around him who are."

Eduard Skobelev, a member of the presidential entourage and editor of the official Presidential Bulletin, is a prolific anti-Semitic writer, and authorities ignore community complaints against his writings.

Showing up for the opposition rally was a courageous step for many Belarusians: In recent years, dozens of opposition leaders disappeared and many more were sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

Two days before the vote, Lukashenko threatened to "wring the necks" of opponents preparing to take to the streets, and the KGB — which has retained its Soviet-era name — said police would arrest protesters as terrorists.

"In school, we were told that anyone who goes to the rally and gets detained will be expelled from school," said Veronika, a Jewish high school student in Minsk.

On Sunday night, dozens of trucks with police and special forces filled the streets of central Minsk but no force was used, and the protest ended peacefully.

Milinkevich, who campaigned on a pro-democracy ticket, said the rally was people's "victory over fear."

The opposition called on people to show up in the same square Monday night, but fewer were expected to attend.

Observers from Western countries said the elections did not meet democratic standards, citing repression of the opposition and the fact that Lukashenko's rivals had virtually no access to state-controlled airwaves.

In the months before the elections, state television was fanning hysteria over "some worldwide anti-Belarusian conspiracy," Basin said.

That conspiracy allegedly included not only Western countries but Ukraine and Georgia, two former Soviet republics where popular protests over rigged elections have brought down governments in the past two years.

Before the vote, Belarus imposed strict control over everything coming from Ukraine and Georgia, apparently out of fear of the "export of revolution."

Jewish officials in Belarus experienced the fear firsthand: Nearly five tons of matzah has remained at a customs terminal in Minsk since early March, and the community has been unable to get the shipment.

The matzah was baked in Kiev, and Jewish officials were told they could get the shipment only after the elections because customs suspected that any shipment from Ukraine could contain opposition propaganda material.

Yet observers believe Lukashenko's fear of a repeat of the 2004 democratic upheaval in Ukraine is misguided.

Until the fall of Communism, "Belarus never had a state of its own, and ethnic identity here has always been weak," Basin said.

In addition, years of repression weakened the opposition and spread political apathy.

"Even those who disagree with the official line do not believe they can change anything," Basin said.

Echoing that feeling was a group of Jewish students who gathered at the Minsk Jewish Campus last Friday night to celebrate Shabbat with the local Hillel.

"Everything has been decided and counted," one of the students said of the upcoming vote.

None of the students planned to attend the post-election protests.

"We want to live peacefully," one said.

Despite the regime's oppressive character, Jews as individuals are relatively safe in what the West has labeled "Europe's last dictatorship."

"There is no discrimination against Jews" on the government level, Basin said.

But some wonder if Lukashenko may order a crackdown now that he has received a third five-year term in office.

"The main question is whether there will be mass repression after the election, whether the screws will be tightened even more," Basin said.

BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Report: UAE helped families of terrorists

The United Arab Emirates has given money to families of Palestinian "martyrs" killed or injured in the intifada.

The money to the families of both civilians and militants was provided through the UAE's Red Crescent Society, The New York Times reported. In at least one case, the money went to the family of a member of Islamic Jihad who was killed in clashes with Israel.

The documents were provided to the Times by Gary Osen, an American lawyer who is working on legal cases for American victims of Palestinian terrorism.

The UAE is a federation of states that includes Dubai, where a government-owned company recently said it would sell its port-security operations to an American firm following an outcry about allowing a UAE-owned firm to oversee security at U.S. ports.

#### Hamis sees U.S. pressure

Hamis accused the United States of trying to isolate it among Palestinians. Khaled Meshaal, a leader of the Islamic terrorist group that won recent elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, on Monday blamed delays in forming a new Palestinian Authority government on Washington.

"The United States placed pressure on Palestinian factions to not participate in the government so that the government will be purely Hamas and Israel can justify carrying out its plan to attack the Palestinian people," Meshaal said during a trip to Yemen.

The long-dominant Fatah faction has refused to join a Hamas-led government unless the group recognizes past Israeli-Palestinian accords.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Iraq war names intoned

Approximately two dozen students, alumni and staff gathered at the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary in New York to honor those killed in the Iraq war. At Monday's memorial ceremony at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, names were read of 5,708 Iraqi and coalition troops who have perished in the fighting, marked the third anniversary of the beginning of the war.

"We hope that this day of remembrance will remind both supporters and opponents of the war that the obligation to honor the dead transcends ideology and political affiliation," Rabbi Shirley Idelson, associate dean of the college, said during the service. "It is a solemn task that falls upon all the living."

#### Chabad group to endorse military chaplains

A Chabad-affiliated group became the second Jewish agency empowered to endorse U.S. military chaplains.

The Aleph Institute, a Miami-based non-profit that serves Jewish prisoners and members of the military, was designated this month by the Department of Defense as an endorsing agency empowered to recruit and approve Jewish military chaplains.

The first endorsing agency is the Jewish Welfare Board's Jewish Chaplains Council, an agency of the Jewish Community Centers Association, which has been approving military chaplains since 1917.

Unlike the JWB, which endorses rabbis from all streams, the Aleph Institute will recruit and endorse Orthodox rabbis only.

We will not be involved in endorsing Reform rabbis," said Rabbi Sanford Dresin, a retired Army colonel and longtime military chaplain who is now Aleph's director of military programs.

There are currently 28 rabbis serving as active duty military chaplains — 15 Orthodox, nine Conservative and four Reform.

#### Bishop: Occupation a factor in persecution

A leading U.S. Catholic bishop said Israel's occupation is a factor in the persecution of Christians in Muslim lands.

"The failure to secure a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its resulting occupation of Palestinian lands, sometimes spills over into prejudices and distrusts of indigenous Christians in Muslim nations," said Bishop Thomas Wenski of Miami.

Testifying last week in Congress, Wenski, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committee on international policy, also cited globalization, the Iraq war and perceptions of anti-Muslim sentiment in the West as factors in the persecution of Christians.

#### Divestment letter submitted at Michigan

More than 40 professors and staff members at the University of Michigan presented a letter supporting divestment from Israel.

Submitted online and to university regents last Friday, the letter argued that the school's financial involvements in Israel posed "serious moral or ethical questions."

Pro-divestment activists noted that during apartheid, university regents voted to divest stock of companies doing business with South Africa, and some Jewish observers worry they will do the same now with Israel-related stocks. Backers of divestment say the move will pressure Israel not to violate Palestinian human rights, but opponents say it ignores the reality that Israel is responding to Palestinian terrorist attacks.

#### Torahs buried in Louisiana

Seven Torahs destroyed in Hurricane Katrina were buried in Louisiana. More than 200 people attended Sunday's ceremony near New Orleans.

The Torahs belonged to Beth Israel, a 102-year-old congregation that was flooded during the August 2005 storm, the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported.

According to Jewish law, Torahs that are damaged or destroyed must be buried.

### WORLD

#### Jail sentence demanded in Moscow stabbing

Russian prosecutors urged a 16-year sentence for the man accused of stabbing several worshipers at a synagogue in Moscow. Alexander Koptsev is on trial for the January attack on Moscow's Bolshaya Bronnaya Street Synagogue.

He is charged with attempted murder and activities intended to humiliate a religious or ethnic group.

#### Rabbi pushes for world religious body

One of Israel's chief rabbis called for an international organization of religions. Yona Metzger, Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, called Sunday for a "United Nations of religious groups" as the second World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace opened in Seville, Spain, the BBC reported.

Also speaking at the three-day meeting, Rabbi Israel Singer of the World Jewish Congress' Policy Council rejected the idea that Jewish-Muslim tensions lie at the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

He added that "religious crusaders" like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad "must be exposed for what they are: impostors." Some 150 rabbis and imams are taking part in the conference.