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THE JERUSALEM POST

Volume XCII, Number 27893 FOUNDED IN 1932 NIS 13.00 (EILAT NIS 11.00)

MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2024 ▪ 22 ADAR 2, 5784

Bring them home

Shiri Bibas, age 32, kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz

Unexpected partners

Israel can find partners in the Muslim world

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'Buckle up, Shabbat Shalom!'

Daniel-Ryan Spaulding brings his act to Israel

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MOURNING MOTHER

The mother of Sgt.-Maj. Alon Kudriashov, who was killed in Gaza, mourns at his funeral in Modi'in yesterday, as the IDF pressed onward in Gaza. Additionally, the military announced on Sunday the passing of Sgt.-Maj. Sivan Wail from injuries he sustained in Gaza fighting on Friday, in the same incident as Kudriashov. **See story, Page 2.**

(Nir Elias/Reuters)

PM on talks: Israel flexible, Hamas stance has hardened

No indication of renewed negotiations – Al Jazeera

• By ELIAV BREUER and EVE YOUNG

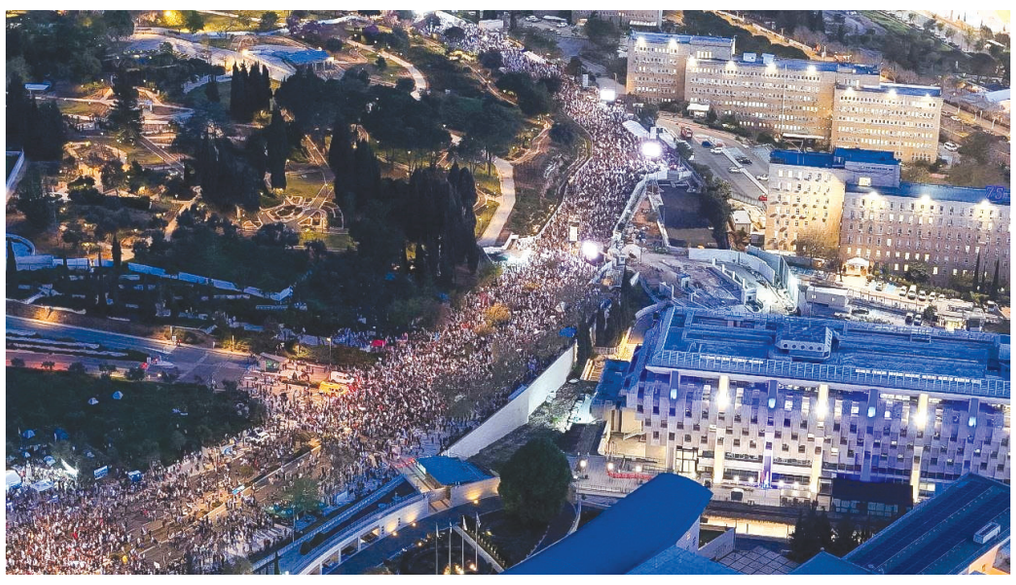
While Israel was willing to compromise in the negotiations for a hostage deal, Hamas has only hardened its stance, and its demands have repercussions that "I cannot expand on," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday.

Netanyahu's evening press conference coincided with a mass protest just outside the Prime Minister's Office; the noise could be heard from the conference room.

The prime minister said the pain of the hostage families "broke his heart," and that whenever the security forces presented an opportunity to save a hostage, he approved it. But instead of giving in to Hamas demands to free the rest of the hostages, the main effort was a mix of "military pressure" and "determined negotiations."

Netanyahu said that one of the Hamas demands was to "cancel" the humanitarian corridor that split the Strip in two and enable "unchecked" return of hostages to the northern part of the Strip. This Israel could not accept, he said.

Countering protesters who have claimed that he is not doing enough to free the hostages being held by Hamas, the prime minister said that "whoever says that I am not doing everything to free our hostages – is wrong and misleading," Netanyahu said.



PROTESTERS DEMONSTRATE last night in Jerusalem calling for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to resign. (Ilan Rosenberg/Reuters)

Countering calls for an election, Netanyahu argued that an election now would "paralyze the country, bring an end to the war, [and] freeze the [hostage] negotiations, and the first to celebrate this will be Hamas," he said.

Opposition leader MK Yair Lapid, who spoke at the protest at the same time that Netanyahu was speaking, wrote on X in response, "Mr. Netanyahu, elections won't paralyze the country, it is already paralyzed. The war against Hamas is paralyzed, a hostage deal is paralyzed, the North is paralyzed, and mainly, your government is paralyzed and failing."

PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the media last night. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

Hamas political bureau member Osama Hamdan said there is no talk about a new round of negotiations, Qatar state-owned media Al Jazeera reported Sunday.

"We appreciate the efforts of the mediators, but the

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Could Arab forces in WB help resolve Gaza?

ANALYSIS

• By YONAH JEREMY BOB

A mix of top Israeli and US officials have poured cold water on reports claiming that a multinational Arab force is feasible to manage internal security in Gaza – and potentially the West Bank.

Some officials also appeared to dismiss reports that Israel and the US were close to agreeing on a very tamped-down invasion of Rafah, which Washington would support, instead of criticizing.

These dual reports, taken together as one full picture, could have potentially solved a variety of Israel's remaining largest problems in a grand series of bargains.

Israel wants to dismantle the remaining six Hamas battalions out of the original 24, four of which are in Rafah. But the problem was that everyone else – most importantly the US – not only opposed such an invasion for humanitarian reasons, but some countries preemptively froze arms purchases, to convey to Jerusalem the seriousness of their opposition.

Does this mean Israel needs to forgo Rafah, leaving one-quarter of Hamas's military intact?

An even larger long-term strategic problem is: Who will take over internal security to keep Hamas down in Gaza

***Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance under threat,* Page 3**

***Inner divisions in Jordan resurface following weeks of pro-Hamas,* Page 5**

once the IDF withdraws?

No one in the war cabinet, in the top echelons of the IDF, or from any political parties besides the Religious Zionist Party and Otzma Yehudit – which combined only have 13 seats – is willing to get stuck in a permanent occupation.

But, who can Israel reliably hand Gaza off to?

One of Jerusalem's preferred options from the start has been a multinational Arab force from allied states like Egypt, the UAE, and Jordan, and perhaps Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

One problem has been that these countries have made it clear from day one that they are not interested in stepping into the Gaza quagmire, unless the Palestinian Authority is also involved and unless there is a process in place to eventually move toward a two-state solution.

Although war cabinet ministers Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot have been ready to accept these terms from the start, and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has more recently swallowed the idea of the PA being involved in controlling humanitarian aid in Gaza, Gallant still opposes the two-state solution, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opposes any involvement by the PA.

Although there were hopes by Gallant and the IDF to build up a local Gazan force, connected to neither Hamas nor the PA, all have concluded these attempts failed following Hamas's assassination of the top potential prospects for cooperation.

This realization had shifted Gallant and the IDF into Gantz's and Eisenkot's camp on the idea of the PA controlling Gaza aid instead of Hamas, pitting them against Netanyahu.

But Netanyahu, who still holds the vast majority of the levers of power, has not budged, making it seem increasingly likely that Israel would get stuck occupying Gaza for a very extended period, despite its clear lack of interest in doing so. The apparent alternative would

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Thousands in J'lem rally for elections

• Jerusalem Post Staff

Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered outside the Knesset on Sunday, calling for the dissolution of the Knesset and setting an immediate date for elections, claiming it is a direct consequence of its failure to secure a hostage deal. Parallel protests took place in Tel Aviv.

Nearby, in the Knesset, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a press conference with reporters where he mostly addressed hostage talks and plans for the IDF's invasion of Gaza but also said that "whoever says that I am not doing everything to free our hostages – is wrong and misleading."

In Jerusalem, Begin Road was blocked in both directions. Speakers included parents of hostages or victims of October 7, Yesh Atid chairman and head of the opposition Yair Lapid, as well as Moshe Redman, one of the leaders of the judicial overhaul protest movement.

A tent city was reportedly set up outside of the Knesset

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Mixing messages in protest misses mark

ANALYSIS

• By HERB KEINON

Six months after October 7, Israel's streets are once again filling up with angry protests.

Up until now, the protests, which never reached the dimensions of the protests against the judicial overhaul plan last year because the country is still waging a war, could be divided into two categories.

One category, the far bigger group, was the relatives of hostages demonstrating to make sure that the release of the hostages remained at the top of the nation's agenda.

The nation was scarred by the capture of Air Force navigator Ron Arad in 1986 after his plane exploded while on a mission to attack a PLO target near Sidon. He was captured by the Shi'a Amal organization, which later handed him over to Hezbollah.

The Arad family was asked by the defense establishment to take a low profile, told that the government was

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Hundreds of French doctors attend first medical aliyah expo in Europe

• By MICHAEL STARR
Jerusalem Post Correspondent

PARIS, France – Hundreds of French doctors attended the first European medical aliyah exposition in Paris on Sunday, where they laid the groundwork for their immigration to Israel.

The Medex program, a joint project of the Immigration Ministry, Health Ministry, Nefesh B'Nefesh, and the Jewish Agency, guides Jewish doctors in the immigration process and aids them with documents, registration, and accreditation.

At the conference building next to the iconic Eiffel Tower, Nefesh B'Nefesh cofounders Tony Gelbart and Rabbi Yehoshua Fass said that the program was designed to streamline the process for Jewish doctors having trouble navigating Israeli bureaucracy.

Jewish Agency France director Emmanuel Sion told *The*

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FRENCH DOCTORS visit the booths at the Paris Medex conference. (Yonit Schiller)

War has hurt economy 'on many levels' – BoI report

• By EVE YOUNG

"The war's adverse impact on the economy was seen on many levels," said Bank of Israel Governor Amir Yaron in a letter to the Government and Knesset Finance committees.

The central bank chief presented on Sunday the yearly report of the Bank of Israel for 2023 in which he also detailed the impacts of the war on the last quarter of the year.

"GDP contracted, private consumption and particularly investment declined sharply, and exports declined by a more moderate pace," said Yaron, also touching on the adverse impact on employment, which he also said began to recover by the end of 2023.

There was a particularly acute impact in the construction and agriculture industries where there was a severe shortage of foreign workers, impacted by a prohibition to employ Palestinian laborers, said the report.

Lawmakers approved an amended 2024 state budget in March that added tens of billions of shekels to fund the war, as the conflict nears six months.

Yaron called for a committee to be formed to establish the size of the defense budget "in an informed manner."

"It should delineate Israel's defense needs in the coming years and formulate an appropriate multi-year budget program that will take into account all the ramifications on the economy."

Yaron also said that if there are additional increases in the defense budget, they must be accompanied by fiscal adjustments, to "at least prevent an

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