

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024 ■ 23 ADAR 2, 5784



## Bring them home

Yarden Bibas, 34, kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz

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## Knesset passes law aimed at silencing Al Jazeera

• By ELIAV BREUER

The Knesset passed into law on Monday a bill aimed at shutting down the operations of the Qatari state-funded news outlet Al Jazeera in Israel.

The Likud stated on Monday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had spoken with Coalition Whip Ofir Katz to ensure that the bill passes and that the prime minister will act immediately to close Al Jazeera according to the procedure laid out in the law.

According to the law, if the prime minister becomes convinced that content broadcast by foreign media "harms in a real way" the nation's security, the communications minister can bring a resolution to the government to block that media's television broadcast in Israel, shut down its offices, seize equipment used for its broadcasts, and block its website under certain conditions.

Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi led the government's effort to pass the law after reports emerged that the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) and IDF had warned that Al Jazeera broadcasts were revealing the location

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US REP. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) inspects a ransacked family home in Kibbutz Nir Oz yesterday. Torres toured southern Israel, including the site of the Nova music festival, where hundreds were massacred by Hamas terrorists on Oct. 7. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

## Rep. Ritchie Torres tells 'Post': 'Israel is not alone'

• By EVE YOUNG

Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) thinks that the US's recent abstention in the UN Security Council that led to the passage of a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza war was wrong but he wants Israel to know that "the Israel-US relationship remains fundamentally intact."

"What we are witnessing is not a change in American policy, but a clash of personalities," the New York Democratic congressman explained to *The Jerusalem Post*, adding that this "is natural in every relationship." The crisis between the US and Israel is "more perception than reality," according to Torres.

Torres thought that the US abstention was a mistake because it did not tie the

demands for a ceasefire to the release of the hostages. "The de-linking of those two demands gives enhanced leverage to Hamas in the war and the hostage negotiations. I thought it was a colossal misjudgment on the part of the US," he explained.

Torres brought a delegation made up of local leadership and clergy from his district to Israel on Sunday with UJA-Federation New York, to send the message that Israel is not alone. This may seem like a surprising stance from the progressive congressman, but Torres says the connection is natural.

"There is no greater expression of progressive values in the Middle East than the state of Israel," he said, adding that no country is more protective of the rights of minorities.

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## Airstrike kills top IRGC commander in Damascus

Iran blames Israel • Tehran's envoy to Syria vows: Our response will be 'harsh'

• By Jerusalem Post Staff,  
YONAH JEREMY BOB,  
and Reuters

Mohammed Reza Zahedi, the top commander in the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for Lebanon and Syria was assassinated in an airstrike on Monday.

Zahedi is the highest-ranking Iranian killed since the current war started, even higher than Sayyed Reza Mousavi, killed in December, *The Jerusalem Post* has learned.

Reuters reporters at the site in the Mezzeh district of Damascus saw emergency workers clambering atop the rubble of a destroyed building inside the diplomatic compound, adjacent to the main embassy building. Emergency vehicles were parked outside. An Iranian flag hung from a pole in front of the debris.

The Syrian foreign minister and interior minister were both spotted at the scene. Initial reports indicated that at least six people were killed in the strike, which targeted the building adjacent to the Ira-



SMOKE RISES after what the Iranian media said was an Israeli airstrike on a building close to the Iranian embassy in Damascus yesterday. (Firas Makdesi/Reuters)

nian consulate, reported to be used as a military command center for the IRGC. Syrian state media said at least six people were killed and several more were injured. These reports could not be verified by press time.

Besides his wide-ranging responsibilities for terror on Israel's borders, Zahedi was the highest-level interlocutor for Tehran with Hezbollah.

This means that although Israel has not taken credit, Iran and Hezbollah are

already accusing Jerusalem of escalating Israel's war against Iran's regional proxies, since removing Zahedi could be seen as a blow to the management of the Lebanese terror groups' rocket attacks on Israel.

Iranian press reported that Zahedi was meeting with leaders of Palestinian Islamic Jihad at the time of the strike, but these reports could not be independently verified.

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## 'Rafah op will harm your security, isolate you,' US tells Israeli officials

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF  
and HANNAH SARISOHN  
in New York

Israel's security will be harmed by a military operation in Rafah that would further isolate it on the international stage, the Biden administration told its counterparts in Jerusalem during a virtual conversation on Monday.

"The case that we are making about Rafah: It's not just about the interests of the Palestinian people, it's also about Israel's long-term security interest," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters in Washington.

He spoke as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held virtual talks

with Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi about the pending Rafah operation.

At issue for the US and the international community has been the over 1.3 million civilians in Rafah, many of whom fled there to escape bombing in the north at the start of the war.

Israel has insisted that it must conduct a major military operation in the area of that southern city by the Egyptian border to fully defeat Hamas. The US has insisted that the IDF could achieve the same results through targeted strikes.

Miller discussed the messaging that was presented to Israel with reporters, explaining that the Gaza war has taken a toll on "Israel's

standing in the world and its ability to influence countries around the world.



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"We think that a full-scale invasion of Rafah would only further that impact on Israel's standing.

"We're going to make that case to them. Ultimately,

they're a sovereign country and they'll make their own decisions. But we will lay out to them the way we see it," he stated.

It's not enough for Israel to clear out certain neighborhoods or hospitals of Hamas without a long-term, sustainable security and political strategy, the State Department said on Monday, referencing Israel's weeks-long operation at the Shifa Hospital.

The US has not seen such a plan from Israel, spokesman Miller said.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters in Washington that the virtual talks followed those held with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in Washington last week.

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## Palestinians want vote on full UN membership this month

• By MICHELLE NICHOLS

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) – The Palestinian Authority wants the UN Security Council to vote this month to make it a full member of the world body, the Palestinian UN envoy told Reuters on Monday, a move that can be blocked by Israel's ally the United States.

Riyad Mansour, who has permanent observer status in the UN, made the Palestinian plans public as the war between Israel and Hamas nears a six-month milestone, and Israel is expanding settlements.

Mansour told Reuters that the aim was for the Security Council to decide at an April 18 ministerial meeting on the Middle East, but that a vote had yet to be scheduled. He

said a 2011 Palestinian application for full membership was still pending because the 15-member council never took a formal decision.

"The intention is to put the application to a vote in the Security Council this month," he added.

Alongside a push to end the war, global pressure has grown for a resumption of efforts to broker a two-state solution – with an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

An application to become a full UN member needs to be approved by the Security Council – where the United States can cast a veto – and then at least two-thirds of the

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## Can gov't survive High Court ruling on haredi IDF service?

ANALYSIS

• By ELIAV BREUER

The political ramifications of the High Court of Justice's ruling on Thursday – that beginning on April 1 the state can no longer refrain from drafting haredi men into the IDF, and that state funding to yeshivot will cease beginning on April 1 as well – could go in several directions depending on developments in the

coming weeks.

The previous situation was that yeshivot would provide quarterly reports on the number of students, and each student aged 18 and over would receive a yearly deferral until age 26, after which they received a permanent exemption. While different sources include different numbers, the total number of yeshiva students is somewhere in the range of 150,000, and the number of students between the ages of 18-26 is in the range of 60,000.

The haredi yeshivot have different sources of funding. In general, the small-

er a yeshiva is, the more it depends on state funding, a source from one of the haredi parties explained. The funding is provided every month. While its cessation for April is unlikely to cause yeshivot to shut down, a few months of blocked funding could cause many to collapse. However, the larger yeshivot that have name recognition and donors will survive financially, the source explained.

State funding for yeshivot is based on a per-student basis, and in many cases, yeshivot have students registered who

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## Naval commandos lead pullout from Shifa

St.-Sgt. Nadav Cohen killed in southern Gaza

• By YONAH JEREMY BOB

The IDF on Monday withdrew from Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza, after a successful intense two-week battle. The operation to take control of it from over a thousand terrorists was successful partly due to the direct participation of the naval commandos (Shayetet 13) special forces unit.

Although Shayetet 13 has special additional training for combat at sea, it has also been used for decades for special or precision operations on land.

The war is the first time that "Israel's Navy SEALs" became an additional long-arm of a



ST.-SGT. NADAV COHEN (IDF)

regular infantry division, Division 162, commanded by Brig.-Gen. Itzik Cohen.

After nearly six months of

fighting together, Cohen said he has a fantastic operational relationship now with Col. "A", the commander of Shayetet 13.

One of its early missions in the war – taking over the Qatar hospital building – is now viewed as having emerged as a paradigm shift that became a model for the takeovers of many other Gaza hospitals that terrorists were using as command centers, in violation of the laws of war.

This violation was so pronounced during the recent two-week re-invasion of Shifa – after the IDF took it over in mid-November – that now, top officers do not even refer

to Shifa as a "hospital," but as a "compound," reflecting the belief that it was not so much an abused hospital, as it was a command center with some hospital camouflage built around it.

Military sources described how field intelligence from the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), Division 162, and Shayetet 13 worked together to track the growing number of terrorists building a new large command center at Shifa.

The three centers of gravity for the terrorists were: the Qatar facility, the emergency

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