



Bring them home

Ohad Ben Ami, age 55, kidnapped from Kibbutz Be'eri

Overcoming disaster

Israel's unique reconstruction challenge **Page 10**



Spreading joy

Matisyahu sparks light in Jerusalem **Page 16**



Gantz calls to hold general election in September

Minister's proposal comes in wake of pleas by hostage families and supporters for new ballot

• By ELIAV BREUER



FAMILIES OF Israelis held hostage by Hamas terrorists in Gaza protest at the Knesset yesterday. The yellow paint which was taken into the building against regulations, is a symbol of the hostages. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Israel's political system should agree to hold a national election in September as it approaches a year since the war against Hamas broke out on October 7, National Unity chairman MK Benny Gantz said in a press conference on Wednesday evening.

The statement marks the first time Gantz has mentioned a specific month as a date for an election since joining Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an emergency government days after the Hamas massacre in October.

Gantz said that he had spoken to "political leaders" in recent weeks on the topic, that he had updated the prime minister, and that he would "continue dialogue on the subject."

According to Gantz, an agreement to go to an election will give Israel the time it needs to continue its war efforts while enabling the citizens of Israel to know that "trust will soon be renewed between us."

This will also prevent a schism amongst the people and hopefully allow other "Zionist and responsible" leaders to join the government during the interim period, Gantz said.

He also argued that this would give Israel international backing.

Gantz's statement came a night after a stormy protest in Jerusalem in which a protester threw a torch at a police cavalry officer, and police officers used force against family members of hostages.

"What Israel needs is "quiet in the ballot box, not flames in the streets," Gantz emphasized.

He stopped short of saying that he would leave the government if the prime minister did not accept his demand. "We will do everything for our proposal to be accepted. I will not detail what Netanyahu said in response," he noted.

Gantz did, however, reiterate the position that he would leave the government if it ceased "truly acting" to bring back the hostages.

His call for an election came after United Right chairman, MK Gideon Sa'ar, called earlier



NATIONAL UNITY party chairman Benny Gantz holds a press conference at the Knesset last night. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

on Wednesday for a consensus election in January, joining similar calls by opposition parties Yesh Atid, Yisrael Beytenu, and Labor.

Gantz stands to gain politically from an election. His National Unity party won 12 seats in the previous election, but now numbers only eight seats after Sa'ar's faction broke away from Gantz in March. However, in polls, Gantz has consistently passed 30 seats, while the Likud, led by Netanyahu, which currently has 32 seats, in polls has not even reached 20.

The Likud said in response, "At a fateful moment for the State of Israel and amid a war, Benny Gantz must stop dealing in petty politics just because of the breakup of his party. An election now will necessarily bring paralysis, divisiveness, damage to the fighting in Rafah, and critical damage to the chances for a hostage deal. The government will continue until reaching all of the war's goals."

The call for an election in September came towards the end of Gantz's speech. He began it by making several points regarding the security situation. First, that the wish to bring home the hostages is a source of strength, and the government is doing everything it can to do so. Second, that the most important front was the North, as the security situation must enable evacuated residents to return. Finally, that a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia which would lead to a "regional treaty" against Iran was "within reach" and could

180 DAYS OF WAR

In Gaza, Palestinians risk death in desperate rush for aid, Page 2

also assist in replacing Hamas in Gaza.

Sa'ar criticized Gantz for these comments.

"Gantz is part of the failing and clueless war cabinet that led Israel into a dead end in this war," Sa'ar accused, adding that Gantz had not laid out any plans in detail. "For empty slogans, there is no need to convene a celebratory press conference. We have heard enough of these already," Sa'ar said.

Opposition leader MK Yair Lapid said in response that Israel could not wait another six months for the "worst, most dangerous, and most failing government in the country's history" to "go home."

Rather, the government needs to be toppled "as soon as possible," Lapid said.

Former MK and a candidate to lead the left-wing camp in the next election, Yair Golan claimed that the speech proved that in the "choice between saving the State of Israel and saving the catastrophic Netanyahu government, Gantz chose the latter, and not for the first time."

Ministers condemn stormy protests

Knesset to reconvene week after Independence Day

• By ELIAV BREUER and EVE YOUNG

Israel's parliament (Knesset) on Wednesday held its final plenum session before beginning its annual spring recess, which starts officially on Sunday and is scheduled to continue until May 19.

In recent days, Knesset members from the opposition and family members of Israelis being held captive in Gaza criticized the fact that parliament was recessing despite the ongoing war and amidst a broad uptick in protests against the government and in favor of a hostage deal.

During the plenum session, protesters smeared yellow paint on a window that divides the visitor's balcony from the main hall.

The Knesset could convene during the recess under certain circumstances and is likely to do so, but the governing coalition refused requests by the opposition to completely cancel the break. For a government to fall, the Knesset needs to convene and vote to disperse itself,

See STORMY, Page 7

Are anti-government protests helping Hamas?

COMMENT

• By EVE YOUNG

Since Sunday, masses converged in Jerusalem for four days of protests, calling for the return of hostages and against the government in the lead-up to the Knesset's scheduled spring recess that began on Wednesday.

With the return of the broad anti-government protests, those saying that the demonstrations are helping Hamas and Israel's enemies by making Israel seem weak and divided have also returned. We've heard it from politicians and leaders, from people on the streets, and from our friends, but as the adage goes, these people are fighting the last war.

We are unlikely ever to know the effect of the pre-October 7 protests on the Hamas attack. Regardless of these possible influences, post-October 7, the cracks in Israeli society have already been shown, and no amount of "unity" will convince Israel's enemies that this togetherness extends beyond the superficial.

Israel has an emergency unity government, which is

See HAMAS, Page 7

US: Findings of probe into strike on WCK should be made public

• By HANNAH SARISOHN in New York and Reuters

The White House dodged answering if it agrees with Chef Jose Andres' sentiment that Israel is using food as a weapon on Wednesday fol-

lowing these allegations from the celebrity chef, whose World Central Kitchen aid workers were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza on Monday.

"We know Israelis. Israelis, in their heart of hearts, know

that food is not a weapon of war," Andres wrote in an op-ed published in the *New York Times* on Wednesday. "Israel is better than the way this war is being waged. It is

See US, Page 7

WH assures hostage talks are continuing

Qatar: Point of contention is return of the displaced to northern Gaza Strip

• By HANNAH SARISOHN Jerusalem Post Correspondent

NEW YORK - The White House on Wednesday affirmed that hostage talks are continuing despite the slow timeline.

"I wish I could stand here

today and say there's a deal, but those conversations continue. We have made this a priority," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "This president has made this a priority to get that hostage deal to get those hostages home to their families."

Jean-Pierre also said it's important to get humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani said that the main point of dispute in negotiations on a Gaza ceasefire is over the

return of displaced people to different parts of the Palestinian territory, during a joint press conference with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

Hamas Qatar-based chief

See HOSTAGE, Page 7

Many Iranian options to retaliate, but all carry risks

ANALYSIS

• By IDREES ALI and ARSHAD MOHAMMED

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Iran faces a dilemma following an Israeli attack on its embassy in Syria: how to retaliate without sparking a wider conflict that Middle East analysts said Tehran doesn't appear to want.

Monday's strike, which killed two Iranian generals and five military advisers at

Iran's embassy compound in Damascus, comes as Israel accelerates a long-running campaign against Iran and the armed groups it backs. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed revenge.

Tehran has options. It could unleash its proxies on US forces, use them to strike Israel directly, or ramp up its nuclear program, which the United States and its allies have long sought to rein in.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, US officials said they were watching closely to see if, as in the past, Iran-backed proxies would attack US troops based in Iraq and

Syria after Monday's Israeli strike.

Such Iranian attacks ceased in February after Washington retaliated for the killing of three US troops in Jordan with dozens of air strikes on targets in Syria and Iraq linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and militias it backs.

US officials said they had not yet picked up intelligence suggesting Iran-backed groups were looking to attack US troops following Monday's attack, which Iranian media said killed IRGC members including Mohammad

See OPTIONS, Page 7



HEZBOLLAH LEADER Hassan Nasrallah speaks yesterday in a pre-recorded message shown on a screen during an event in Beirut ahead of al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day this coming Friday. (Mohamed Azakir/Reuters)

A call of gratitude: 'The Jerusalem Post' tribute

• By ZVIKA KLEIN

Judaism values thankfulness and as a country, Israel has so many people, leaders, communities, and celebrities who stepped up on October 7 and afterward, and fought for the world's only Jewish State, to thank.

We, Israelis, and also we, Diaspora Jews, have suffered immensely since that bloody weekend of infamy. Still, there were and are so many members of our tribe across the world, as well as supporters of Israel from all faiths, who have devoted their efforts and resources to support Israel during these most trying of times.

We at *The Jerusalem Post* are planning to say thank you on behalf of Israel and on behalf of the Jewish world. On June 3, in midtown Manhattan, we will salute everyone

See CALL, Page 7