

## Israel halts Gaza aid after Hamas rejects U.S. cease-fire extension plan

Jonathan Lis,  
Yaniv Kubovich  
and Jack Khoury

Israel is willing to extend the cease-fire in Gaza for a few days, under pressure from the Trump administration and the mediator countries to make the most of the negotiations with Hamas, senior Israeli officials said Sunday. Nonetheless, Israel will agree to conduct these negotiations only on the basis of the framework proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, which includes the release of half the hostages held by Hamas in a single phase on the first day of the new agreement and the release of the remaining hostages only after reaching an agreement later on the second stage, said the officials.

Hamas knows the details of the American initiative and Israel's position, and the moment Hamas agrees to negotiate based on this plan it will be possible to begin negotiations and make progress, said one of the officials.

Israel expects Witkoff to arrive here only at the end of the week and he could well save the stalled negotiations. It may be possible to achieve a breakthrough in the talks in the next few days, an Israeli source involved in the negotiations said. At the same time, Israeli defense officials are also preparing for the renewal of military operations in the Gaza Strip if the negotiations fail.

Israel's willingness to extend the pause in IDF operations on the ground contradicts previous state-



Mourners paying their respects to murdered hostage Shlomo Mantzur as his body was brought for burial on Sunday. See story, Page 2.

Ilan Assayag

ments by the political leadership, according to which Israel would demand the release of hostages as a condition to the continuation of any cease-fire out of a fear Hamas would exploit the additional days of quiet without providing anything in return.

Instead of demanding the immediate release of more hostages, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the closure of all the border crossings on Sunday to prevent the entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Israel signaled that this step could push Hamas to make

progress in the talks because of the group's desire to entrench its control over the Gaza Strip by providing aid. Israel's move to halt humanitarian aid, which seemingly violates the agreement it signed with Hamas, is not expected to harm Gazans immediately because Israel

estimates that Hamas has amassed supplies for five to six months, so for now halting aid is mostly a symbolic show of force and an attempt by the Israeli government to signal to its own base of right-wing voters.

The Prime Minister's Office said in a statement that

Netanyahu made the decision at the end of the first stage of the deal, "in light of Hamas' rejection of the Witkoff framework" for continuing the talks, to which Israel has agreed."

Speaking at the start of

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## PM is looking to justify war

The backing U.S. President Donald Trump is giving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at least for now, has enabled the Israeli government to take far-reaching steps. In some cases, these are dangerous gambles that could reignite the war or even start new conflicts.

Netanyahu, according to someone who knows him well, had until recently exercised restraint due to three different fears – fear of complicating his ongoing criminal trial, the army's objections to his moves and American criticism. But all these restraining factors have weakened in recent months, and now, they are almost nonexistent.

The most salient and important example relates to the negotiations over the hostage deal. The headlines about the state of the negotiations on Sunday quoted Netanyahu's office: U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff presented a plan for extending the cease-fire that Israel accepted and Hamas rejected.

A more accurate headline would have been that Israel is violating the hostage deal. It isn't withdrawing from the Philadelphia corridor along the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, it rescinded its commitment to end the fighting and it isn't willing to begin the deal's second phase.

Shortly after the Prime Minister's Office issued that press statement, Israel also announced that it was halting humanitarian aid shipments to Gaza. Granted, Hamas has amassed sizable reserves recently, so this decision is unlikely to immediately affect the situation of Gaza's civilian population.

But the Israeli move will spark widespread international criticism, especially coming as it does at the start of Ramadan. Israel will be accused of deliberately starving civilians (the world doesn't buy the argument that "there are no innocents in Gaza"), and during the holiday season yet.

The question is whether the freeze on humanitarian aid can really be leveraged to speed up completion of the hostage deal, as Netanyahu claims, or whether the entire goal is to reignite the war. And meanwhile, the Arab mediators are increasingly unhappy with Israel's moves.

Egypt is furious over the violation of Israel's commitment to leave the Philadelphia corridor, since it views an Israeli withdrawal from that area as important to its own interests. And the Qataris are evidently getting fed up with the entire mediation game.

Witkoff backed Netanyahu's moves through his new proposal, which is more convenient for Israel. Under it, the cease-fire would be extended through the Ramadan and Passover holidays, until April 19.

The remaining Israeli hostages, both living and dead, would be released in two groups – one as soon as implementation of the new deal begins and the other at its end. In exchange, Israel would free Palestinian prisoners, though the ratio of how many for each hostage hasn't yet been determined.

This is the proposal Hamas rejected. If it continues to do so, and the Americans continue backing Netanyahu, this could

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Sharabi at the hospital following his release.

Haim Zach / GPO

## Freed hostage Eli Sharabi to meet Trump in D.C.

Haaretz

Sharon Sharabi, the brother of released hostage Eli Sharabi, said Sunday that Eli and other freed hostages will meet U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on Tuesday. "They will directly explain the urgency of returning all hostages – living and dead," Sharabi told

Channel 12 News.

Last week, Sharabi, freed last month from Gaza, told Israeli TV show "Uvda" that he endured severe torture and starvation under Hamas captivity.

"Extensive excerpts from 'Uvda' were shown to Trump, with English subtitles, and he was shocked once again, but also expressed great sympathy for

those who survived captivity, including my brother," Sharon said.

According to Sharon, his brother will fly to the United States Monday on the private plane of the Israeli-born Republican megadonor Miriam Adelson. The meeting with Trump is scheduled for Tuesday, when Trump is to address a joint session of Congress. Sharon said his

brother is likely to be seated in the gallery overlooking the House chamber during the speech.

"Tomorrow morning, we're boarding the plane with Mrs. Adelson's kind help. We'll arrive to see Trump and explain to him up close the urgency of continuing the first stage or beginning the second stage – it doesn't really

matter," he added.

Regarding Adelson's reported efforts on behalf of the hostages, he said, "She deserves to light a torch on [Israel's] Independence Day for her work on behalf of Israel in general: She deserves our salute."

In the interview with "Uvda" broadcast Thursday night, Eli Sharabi said that Hamas' captors' behavior

toward the hostages was influenced by decisions made by the Israeli leadership, specifically regarding Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Sharabi added that the captors would watch Israeli media.

"They came and told us, '[Palestinian] prisoners are not receiving food, so you

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## Almost as significant for Israel as Ukraine

## Why Netanyahu should fear the Trump-Zelenskyy showdown

Amir Tibon

The shocking scene in the Oval Office on Friday, during which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was lambasted in front of the entire world by U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance, carried important significance for Israel, perhaps more than any other country apart from Ukraine itself.

It's hard to think of another country that relies so heavily on American support as much as Israel. For Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu, the showdown between Trump and Zelenskyy must have been petrifying to watch. Right now, Netanyahu is in Trump's good graces, but he knows very well that every word that the U.S. president told Ukraine's leader in front of the cameras could have been said to him regarding Israel's war against Hamas and Hezbollah, not to mention its decades-long fight against Iran.

Even more than that, Netanyahu should be concerned by the reaction of

several prominent Republican senators, who until the Trump-Zelenskyy brawl were fierce defenders of Ukraine, but in its aftermath, chose to delete posts about meeting the Ukrainian president from their social media accounts, or to call for Zelenskyy's resignation. No one should have any doubt that these politicians, who fear Trump's wrath more than anything else, would shift their positions on Israel in a second in case the president did.

For now, there are no signs that Trump is about to do this. He applied pressure on Netanyahu before entering the White House to accept the Gaza cease-fire deal that has allowed for the release of 33 hostages so far, but is now looking the other way while Netanyahu violates the terms of the deal and threatens to resume the war. Instead of insisting that the deal be implemented in full, Trump has given Netanyahu free rein to break and bend it.

But there is no guarantee that this will remain his policy in the long run, and Netanyahu knows it. Trump

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## HAARETZ

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## The Australian Jews who are choosing to leave Down Under

Nomi Kaltmann

MELBOURNE – When Velvel Lederman steps off the plane in Tel Aviv in June, it will mark the realization of his lifelong dream of immigrating to Israel.

The retired schoolteacher and Orthodox father of eight children – three of whom live in Israel – will be leaving behind the comforts of life in laid-back Sydney to spend his retirement years in a new country still shaken by the worst disaster in its history. A son of Holocaust survivors, Lederman, 71, says he always planned on making aliyah. But it was the recent and unprecedented rise in antisemitism in Australia that convinced him this was the time.

"When we saw everything that was happening and all of the trouble here in Australia, and Sydney especially, we knew that Israel is the real home for Jewish people," he says.

Like many young Australians, Elisheva – who asked that her last name not be published – has been shocked at the recent calls for violence against Jewish people on Australian campuses and the slow response from law enforcement officials.

She first opened a request to immigrate back in 2022, but says that since the Oc-



A police officer looks at an anti-Israel slogan sprayed on a wall in Sydney, in Dec.

Mick Tsikas/AP

"The fact that people in Australia can say 'resistance by any means necessary' and mean it – there needs to be action taken against that," she says. "To watch a whole generation turn into Hamas, Hezbollah and jihad supporters, all because they don't like Jewish people – that has to stop for me to stay."

She first opened a request to immigrate back in 2022, but says that since the Oc-

tober 7 Hamas attack, her desire to leave Australia has taken on greater urgency. Referring to her Gen Z peers, Elisheva says: "For Australia to be safe, they need to change their behavior, as they are the generation who will lead us. If this is how they think, it will only get worse from here."

Over the past 16-plus months, Australian Jews have been shocked by an unprecedented and trou-

bling rise in antisemitism. This has included arson attacks against synagogues; the doxxing of hundreds of Jewish creatives; attacks on Jewish businesses and schools and attempted arson at the former home of the co-chair of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the country's top Jewish body.

This tight-knit community of some 120,000 Jews

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Netanyahu with Trump in the White House.

Andrew Caballero-Reynolds / AFP

# Shlomo Mantzur buried at kibbutz where he was murdered and taken to Gaza

Eden Solomon  
and Bar Peleg

Shlomo Mantzur, who was killed in the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023 and his body abducted to Gaza, has been laid to rest in Kibbutz Kissufim, his home near the Gaza border. Mantzur's funeral procession left the southern Tel Aviv suburb of Rishon Letzion Sunday morning en route to the kibbutz.

Mantzur's body was returned to Israel last week, along with the bodies of hostages Tsachi Idan, Itzhak Elgarat and Ohad Yahalomi.

Hundreds participated in the funeral convoy for Mantzur, who was 85 and is survived by his wife, five children and 12 grandchildren. At the funeral, President Isaac Herzog eulogized Mantzur, asking for his forgiveness on behalf of the entire state of Israel.

"In these agonizing moments, speaking as a public servant of the entire state of Israel, I apologize and ask for your forgiveness, Shlomo."

"Forgiveness for our failure to protect you in the very place that was meant to be your fortress. Forgiveness from you, from your family, from the members of Kissufim, and from all the residents of the western Negev – for not saving you on that bitter, terrible day." Herzog said.

Herzog said that the IDF's probe of the events of October 7, 2023, should spur a state-wide investigation of Israel's failed response to Hamas' attack.

"These are difficult days, filled with deeply painful revelations. But we know: there is no way to repair and rectify without investigating in depth all that led to this horrific massacre. There is no way forward without taking full respon-



Shlomo Mantzur's funeral procession, on Sunday.

Tomer Appelbaum

sibility – bearing its full weight – to ensure that we never again experience such a catastrophe," he said.

"I emphasize that this thorough investigation must be conducted comprehensively – at all levels and across all branches of the state. There is no bypassing it if we seek justice and life. The only way to rebuild trust and ensure that we learn the vital lessons is through a state commission of inquiry by law, and I once again call for its immediate establishment."

Following the identification of Mantzur's body last week, his sister Hadassah Lazar told Israel's Channel 12 News that her brother had had confidence in the Israeli army.

"He loved the army so much. I can say that until his

last day, he volunteered for the army once a week, and if he had to cancel a day, he would tell me disappointedly that he wasn't at the base," she said. "I was so proud that even at his advanced age, he would volunteer, and also as a girl – he was a Nahal Brigade paratrooper – I would proudly go around having a brother who was a paratrooper."

Lazar said that while her brother was being held in Gaza, and before it was known that he had actually been killed on October 7 and his body taken to the Strip, she refrained from publicly stating that he had been a paratrooper, afraid that Mantzur would be punished by captors in Gaza for his military service. "Shomo loved the country. It's a pity that this was his end," she said.

Lazar made it clear that she didn't see the return of her brother's body as an act of closure. "Until the last of the hostages returns home, we will continue to fight. I very much hope that it will be short and doesn't go on for months or years," she said. "We'll be with them the whole way. I hope we have the strength to face this. I am asking the prime minister to make courageous decisions and to release all of the hostages. Time is already critical."

"We've reached an absurd situation in which we're consoled over receiving a body and that he has a grave. I am finding this difficult. I see the pictures [of the remaining hostages] and it breaks my heart."

Last month, Lazar spoke with Haaretz upon discover-

ing the news that her brother had been murdered on October 7. "My heart is broken and torn apart," Lazar told Haaretz. "After so many months, we got this news" that was reminiscent of the Book of Job. "Everything has turned upside down."

She said the family was told that he was kidnapped and murdered on the same day. "And that's it – they didn't provide any further details," she recalled. "It was a huge blow to the stomach."

The family based its faith on the idea that Mantzur was alive on hope, on cautious calculations and an attempt to grasp for information in the dark. "We were optimistic. We thought that if he was the only one kidnapped from the kibbutz, that that was a sign that he was alive," the bereaved sis-

ter said.

"We also believe that the fact that he spoke Arabic would be an advantage for him in captivity, and that his being a senior citizen would make them respect him. When time passed and they told us there was no information on him, we thought perhaps he was alone in an apartment. Our optimism stemmed from that."

Born in Iraq, as a child Mantzur survived the Farhud, the June 1941 violent riots against the Jews of Baghdad that were spurred on by antisemitic Nazi propaganda disseminated in Iraq by emissaries of Nazi Germany from Berlin.

"He saw the Muslims break into the house and shoot his dog that tried to protect them. Then he fled to the roof, where he witnessed terrible scenes – a baby being horribly abused while his mother pleaded for her son's life, and violent abuse of more people. Everything that happened in the Farhud was an exact copy-paste of what happened in the kibbutzim on October 7. They murdered and raped and abused," Lazar said.

Like many Iraqi Jews, he made aliyah with his family in 1951. The family initially lived in transit camps in Atlit and then in Talpilot. "People from the youth movements came to encourage the young people to join the kibbutzim, and Shlomo chose Kissufim – in order to make things easier for his parents and for himself, as they were living in very cramped conditions," Lazar said. At 16, he joined the founding group of the kibbutz.

Mantzur worked in all of the different kibbutz industries. He created, built and repaired wooden objects and taught woodworking to the children.

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the weekly cabinet meeting Sunday, Netanyahu said: "If Hamas thinks that it will be possible to continue the cease-fire or benefit from the terms of the first stage, without us receiving hostages, it is sorely mistaken. ... If Hamas continues to stick to its position and does not release our hostages, there will be additional consequences, which I will not detail here."

In a post on X, Netanyahu spokesperson Omer Dostri, wrote, "No trucks entered Gaza this morning, and none more will enter at this time."

The head of Hamas' media office in Gaza said in an interview with Qatari Al-Araby news outlet, "Israel is disregarding international law and blocking the entry of medicine and food. Halting the aid means the occupation has decided to starve the people of the Gaza Strip."

He added, "There is a need for a strong international stance to pressure Israel to stop starving the people of Gaza."

In the past, Netanyahu has spoken out publicly against implementing the second stage of the deal with Hamas. On Sunday he said that Witkoff also thinks it isn't possible at this point to bridge the dif-

ferences between Israel and Hamas regarding stage two of the deal and more time is needed for negotiation to reach an agreement.

Nonetheless, Netanyahu has not publicly ruled out holding negotiations over the second stage at the request of the Trump administration, and said Israel is ready to negotiate.

At the start of the cabinet meeting, Netanyahu presented the official numbers: "Hamas is currently holding 59 hostages: Up to 24 are alive and at least 35 are deceased." He added that while Israel agreed to Witkoff's initiative, Hamas has so far stuck to its refusal to the plan.

If Hamas changes its position, Israel will immediately begin negotiations to implement the plan, said Netanyahu.

The first stage of the hostage release and cease-fire deal ended on Saturday night, the 42nd day of its implementation. According to the nonclassified sections of the cease-fire, Israel will allow the daily entrance of substantial humanitarian aid into the Strip starting from day one of the cease-fire.

The cease-fire stated that 600 trucks would enter Gaza per day, 50 of them containing fuel. Half of the aid was destined for the northern part of the strip. Israel said that the aid that entered up to this point should last Gaza for five months.

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lead to a resumption of the war. And that would come at the hostages' expense. Some would be sentenced to a further lengthy stay in Hamas' tunnels; others would be sacrificed to die. And that's without even mentioning the Israeli soldiers who would be killed in a new offensive, since Hamas has clearly used the cease-fire to reorganize its defenses.

On the other side, the battle waged by the hostages' families is exerting influence in favor of an immediate deal, with no delays. On Sunday, we learned that Trump watched freed hostage Eli Sharabi's interview with the Israeli television program "Uvda," was moved by what he saw and invited Sharabi to a White House meeting on Tuesday. Since a fair amount of American policy stems from the president's emotions, from his gut, this may open additional possibilities.

How Netanyahu interprets the Witkoff proposal is clear, and it's mainly political. Netanyahu wants to pass the state budget on time and get through the Knesset's winter session without his government falling or his finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, breathing down his neck.

According to all the polls, Smotrich's Religious Zionism party will have trouble getting enough votes to enter the

Knesset again. Yet it is once against extorting Netanyahu, dictating the conduct of the war and endangering the hostages' lives. That won't stop its leader from once again posting a congratulatory message online, in fake joy, next time any hostages are released – if that ever happens again.

### Power's addiction

Netanyahu's government is being rather adventurous on every front, because the prime minister feels he can afford to do so. He is telling his right-wing base that this is a promising new era in Israel's history. Finally, Israel isn't afraid of being attacked, and it is even seizing more territory (for an undefined length of time, as of now) when necessary to defend its security interests.

All of the government's moves are being presented as direct lessons from Hamas' massacre in southern Israel on October 7: We will no longer fold.

Nevertheless, a question arises: How will this serial violation of commitments affect the faith that other countries in the region place in Israeli promises? This is true for Israel's policy in Gaza as well as in Lebanon, where the Israel Defense Forces has so far remained in five outposts in the country's south with American authorization, in defiance of the timetable set in the cease-fire agreement.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah is currently weak and therefore

hasn't allowed itself to respond with its own violations. Hamas is the murderous terrorist organization that launched the October 7 attack, but it has actually complied with most of the provisions of the hostage deal.

Amid this flood of events, it's worth paying attention to developments in Syria that could pose a threat. In early December, Israel took over a buffer zone on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights and Mount Hermon in response to the swift downfall of the Assad regime, which fled before the Sunni rebels.

The immediate reason was security – fear that extremists connected to the new Syrian government, which has ideological links to Al-Qaida, would exploit the chaos for a swift terror attack on the Golan. But meanwhile, it turns out that Trump, in conversations with Netanyahu, voiced surprise that Israel didn't exploit the situation to take more territory in the Golan.

Since then, new ideas have emerged in the government, from sending troops to help the Kurds in Syria (an idea that was fortunately shelved) to promising to defend the Syrian Druze. Over the weekend, Israel even warned the new government not to attack a Druze town near Damascus and threatened to intervene forcibly if it did.

The government's considerations here aren't solely diplomatic and military. This is a gesture to Israel's Druze community, whose support Netanyahu lost after passing the

nation-state law, because his Likud party will need Druze votes in the next election.

The threats and Israel's preparations for the possibility of an attack against Iran's nuclear facilities are lurking in the background – along with the complex relations of the Israel-United States-Russia triangle. Trump will certainly prefer a deal containing the Iranian nuclear project over a war, but will not object to using a real threat from Israel as a means of pressure against the regime in Tehran.

The imperial aspirations Trump ignited for Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials do match up well with a different issue – the IDF is simply too small for the heavy burden of missions and fronts now being considered. It may be appropriate for those entertained by the thoughts of taking over more territory and the renewal of the fighting on more fronts to think about the limitations of the IDF's available forces, too. After all of those killed, wounded and psychologically distressed over the 16 months of the war, the IDF is now missing the amount of personnel equivalent to two full brigades. All this comes even before talking about the enormous crisis in the reserves, where soldiers have had to deal with an unprecedented burden of service during this period. It would be best for anyone who wants to go out and fight new battles to first check whether the army and the public stand behind him.

## Ramadan in Gaza, amid rubble and devastation

Jack Khoury

Nearly every religion seems to have a holiday in which light is a central element. For many Muslims, the Ramadan lantern, or *fanoos*, is an important part of the holy month of Ramadan.

Despite or maybe because of the extensive destruction across the Gaza Strip, expressed in the lack of power and total darkness, many families tried to obtain a fanous before the start of Ramadan. For Gaza's children, who have not known moments of joy for 16 months, the fanous symbolizes some hope and illusion of a return to normal life.

In some parts of Gaza, people have hung colorful flags and the Palestinian national flag. Some hold *suhor* and *iftar*, the pre-dawn and sunset meals that begin and end the daily fast, respectively, in communal settings.

Collective efforts at recovery are underway in the few places that have not been heavily damaged, says Imad, who lives in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza. He says candy shops and food stalls have opened, and those with means can buy all sorts of sweets. That is a distant dream for most Gazans, who for now rely on food vouchers and rations, mainly canned goods.

The war was in full swing during Ramadan last year, with Israeli airstrikes that caused immense damage and high casualties.

"I doubt there is a family that convenes for iftar with everyone present. The father, mother, children or others, and relatives are absent. There are families that have been completely wiped out," Imad says.

Palestinians returning to northern Gaza after a year or more in designated as humanitarian zones in southwestern Gaza face a special challenge. Housing is extremely limited and rent prices have skyrocketed to \$400-500 a month for a small apartment and \$300 for a single room or storeroom – out of reach for most Gazans. Many people are waiting to receive a tent and meanwhile seek shelter beneath clothes and plastic sheeting.

"Ramadan is known for its food, especially sweets. But it's now hard to even find knafeh in Gaza – there are no ingredients or cooking gas," a resident of Gaza City told Haaretz, referring to the dessert made with cheese and phyllo pastry threads. "Once, cafes in [the upscale Rimal neighborhood] were open for most of the day, especially at night. Now only a few places are open until 9 or 10 P.M.," he says.

"Look what we've come to because Israel decided to punish everyone, combatants and noncombatants. Even if someone isn't affiliated with Hamas, he's a target for punishment," he laments, adding, "Despite the stench of death, the destruction and darkness, people still greet each other with '*Ramadan kareem*'."

In addition to the dire economic, housing and food situation straits, Gazans continue to face movement restrictions around the Netzarim checkpoint. Anyone visiting family far from home within the Strip may wait hours on their return.

In the West Bank, meanwhile, the hundreds of checkpoints on roads from Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south are an acute problem. Traveling between areas, even just a short distance, is arduous if not impossible. People feel as if they are living in pens, a merchant from Nablus told

Haaretz.

"You don't know when they open or close, and going from Ramallah to Nablus can take hours," he says, adding that the checkpoints are particularly felt during Ramadan, with its culture of socializing. "How can you celebrate Ramadan in a normal way? Ramadan is visiting, domestic tourism, going from area to area, visiting friends and family and Israeli Palestinians visiting the West Bank. Now everything is locked."

He believes Israeli policy constitutes collective punishment. "It's enough that a junior officer decides to close and half the West Bank will close. That is Ramadan this year, unfortunately."

As in Gaza, Palestinians in the West Bank are suffering from war-related economic hardship, but for different reasons. Ammar Abu Bakr, the head of the Jenin Chamber of Commerce, told Haaretz that the inability of tens of thousands of Palestinian workers to work in Israel for over a year has cost the Palestinian economy tens of millions of shekels.

"Add to that the Palestinian Authority officials who receive only a partial salary, you will understand the scale of the distress," he says, adding that, as a result of the economic situation, dozens of stores and workshops have closed in Jenin alone in the past two years, even before October 7, 2023.

Like many other merchants in the Jenin area, Abu Bakr is convinced that the measures taken by Israel in the past few months have no security objective. "Why can't Arab citizens from Israel pass through the Jalameh checkpoint to go to Jenin?" he wonders.

"During Ramadan in past years, we were used to thousands of vehicles a day, and now – nothing. Even those who are able to enter the city can expect to deal with many checkpoints when they leave, and avoid coming to us," he says. "It's a recipe for collapse," he concludes.

A hundred kilometers to the south, in Hebron, the impending collapse is being felt. Akram, from Hebron, told Haaretz that many people are avoiding decorating their homes.

"Everything used to be lit up, and there was even a covert competition to see who had the biggest lights during Ramadan," he says. According to him, "Now, you feel the atmosphere less. It's also a large expense, and it reflects everyone's mood. Last year, it was solidarity and pain with Gaza, and now we feel that the situation in the West Bank is also worsening."

But it's not just internal checkpoints, the prevention of workers from going to Israel, and the closure of entry into West Bank cities throughout the month that harm the local economy.

The police's decision regarding the arrival of Palestinians to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque for prayer will also have significant consequences. According to the decision, only 10,000 worshippers from the West Bank will be allowed to attend every Friday, a very small number compared to previous years.

In a conversation with Haaretz, bus and taxi drivers nostalgically recall the days when a quarter of a million people would arrive in Jerusalem every Friday during Ramadan. "We always wish '*Ramadan kareem*' and pray for things to improve, and this year we will say it too, hoping that something will change for the better," concludes Abu Ans, a shuttle driver from Nablus.



People in Rafah gather for iftar, Saturday.

Haatem Khaled/Reuters

## SHARABI

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won't eat. Our prisoners are being beaten, so we'll beat you.' That was the constant threat.

"You dream every day of opening a refrigerator and taking out fruit, vegetables or a slice of bread. You don't care about the beatings you receive. They break my ribs, and I don't care: Just give me another pita," he said.

According to Sharabi, the hostages he was held with employed various measures to receive extra food. He estimated that each of them survived on 250 to 300 calo-

ries a day for months. "I cut my eyebrow with a razor blade to create a visual effect of blood. I pretended to fall on my way to the bathroom, and for a week, we got more food," he explained.

"When you ask for more, and suddenly they throw a dry date at you, it feels like the best meal in the world."

Sharabi also mentioned that until his release, he was shackled by his legs with heavy chains – "with locks that cut into the flesh with every step." He said the hostages "sleep, wake up, pray, and exercise" while being tied up.

He also added in his opinion, there is no chance that Israeli forces could successfully rescue hostages from

Hamas' tunnels. "You would get a bullet to the head before Israeli troops stepped into the tunnel," he said.

Sharabi, a 52-year-old resident of Kibbutz Be'eri near the Gaza border, was married to Lianne, who immigrated to Israel from Britain. They had two daughters: Noiya, 16, and Yahel, 13. On October 7, 2023, the three were killed at their kibbutz, and Sharabi was taken captive to the Gaza Strip. His brother Yossi was also captured.

Later, it was determined that Yossi was not alive, and the IDF confirmed he was most likely killed in an airstrike on a building near where he was held.

Sharabi was released on February 8, along with hos-

tages Ohad Ben Ami and Or Levy, appearing gaunt and malnourished, sparking outrage both in Israel and overseas.

Trump also commented on their appearance: "I watched the hostages come back, and they looked like Holocaust survivors," he said, a day after their release.

"When I see that scene I saw today," he continued, "They look like they haven't had a meal in a month. No reason for that. I don't know how much longer we can take it. When I watch people who were healthy just a short time ago, you look at them today, and they look like they've aged 25 years. They look like Holocaust survivors. The same thing," he added.

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still hopes to achieve a grand peace agreement in the Middle East, and sooner or later, he may realize that Netanyahu's constant surrender to his fanatic coalition partners is pushing that dream farther away.

It's also important to remember that unlike Zelen-sky, who emerged from the Trump shakedown stronger domestically for standing up to the president, Netanyahu simply can't afford a fight with Trump, who is much more popular than him among Israelis.

Not only that, but Zelen-sky flew from Washington directly to London, where he was greeted as a hero by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. A long list of European leaders have also expressed their support in the aftermath of the disastrous White House meeting. But if Trump turns on Netanyahu, no world leader will stand by the Israeli premier – in fact, most important heads of state will rejoice. Netanyahu is loathed even by Israel's strongest and most loyal allies.

The real question is whether or not Trump understands the amount of leverage he has over Netanyahu – and for what purpose he is planning to use it.

# Kurdish cease-fire could challenge Israel in Syria

Syrian airspace, open to Israel after Assad’s fall, may soon be closed if Ankara replaces Moscow as its protector

Analysis **Zvi Bar’el**

The historic announcement by Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan's Workers' Party, or PKK, in which he called on the organization to lay down its arms and disband, may be the impetus of a dramatic change in the balance of power in Syria and impact Turkey's regional status, as well as promoting the withdrawal of American forces from Syrian territory, challenging the continued Israeli presence in areas of southern Syria.

**Israel will be the only foreign occupying force in Syria, and will face Turkish and Syrian pressure as well as Washington, which could ‘give’ Damascus to Ankara.**

This isn't the first time Ocalan has responded to a Turkish initiative for opening negotiations and moving forward a process of historic reconciliation with the separatist movement, which is designated in Turkey as a terrorist organization. However, in 2013, after four years of negotiations – some of which were conducted in secret – Ocalan proposed a cease-fire and called on his men to withdraw from Turkey and relocate to Iraq. This time, the move was considerably more radical. The organization is called upon to lay down its weapons and cease to exist. Saturday's decision by the group's lead-

ership, which is based in the Qandil mountains in Iraq, to embrace (partially for now) Ocalan's announcement and declare an immediate cease-fire still does not attest to a willingness to dismantle the organizational framework which has been operating for over four decades, or to disarm, but it is a necessary first step ahead of entering political negotiations replete with volatile obstacles. It is still too early to determine if the talks will succeed.

It's in the vital interest of both sides, the Kurds and Turkey, headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to end the protracted conflict, which has caused the deaths of more than 40,000 people since the 1980s.

It seems that regional developments since October 7, 2023, most notably the toppling of the Assad regime in favor of one headed by Ahmad al-Sharaa, brought a new sense of urgency to seek an arrangement between Turkey and the Kurds, with greater chances of success.

For Turkey, which quickly positioned itself as Syria's patron state after the fall of Assad, it's not only about being the leading partner in the vast project of rebuilding a country that was destroyed over four decades of civil war. Erdogan sees its neighbor to the south as an inseparable part of the span of his regional strategic influence, after the withdrawal of Iran from Syria.

From a weakened position, Russia is trying to at least retain its two military bases there, in Hmeimim and Tartus. However, reaping the fruits of diplomatic and military gains in Syria will require Turkey to help Sharaa establish a united country, with a national army replacing the dozens



Kurds in northeastern Syria wave the flag of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan, last week.

Delil Souleiman/AFP

of militias that still operate in Syria.

Of the plethora of militias, two major military forces threaten the process of political and military fusion. In the north, these are the Kurdish forces united under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a military body consisting mainly of Syrian Kurds but also some Arab, Syriac, and Armenian elements. The United States set up this organization to help fight the Islamic State organization. There are also the Kurdish People's Defense Units.

In the south, there are mainly Druze forces, which have managed to retain some degree of autonomy while blocking Assad's army from taking control of the Suwayda province and surrounding areas. These two ethnic groups have political demands that will be

hard to bridge. Since each one demands autonomous cultural and political rights that would turn Syria into a country of cantons – even if the country develops into a federal state – it would detract from the total control Sharaa aims for.

In both these regions, there are also foreign forces. In the north, Turkey has captured areas in the Kurdish provinces along its border with Syria, while in the south, Israel has taken over several areas; it is already perceived as a patron state of the Druze. Turkey, which places itself alongside Syria, together with other Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, is calling for freeing Syria from Israel's occupation.

However, it too is required to withdraw its forces from Syria so that it can conclude its strategic alliance with the new Syrian regime

without being considered an occupying country. At the same time, it has to thwart any possibility of the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous state which could continue its armed struggle against Turkey.

Implementing this master plan will require Syria's president to integrate Kurdish forces into Syria's army while granting Kurdish regions some measure of cultural autonomy and preventing these areas from becoming a separate canton.

Kurdish forces have said that they are willing to integrate into the Syrian army, not as individuals but as organic units. Sharaa opposes this, worried about the formation of a Kurdish army within the national one. Thus, as long as no solution is found for the Kurdish forces, Turkey does not intend to pull back its forces.

Herein lies the great importance of a conciliation between Turkey and the PKK. If this succeeds, it will unravel the complex web of relations between the Syrian regime and Syria's Kurds. The main claim upon which Turkey bases its right to control northern Syria and its war against Syrian Kurds is that the Kurdish forces in Syria are an inseparable part of the PKK, and thereby terrorists who threaten Turkey's national security.

The question now is how the cease-fire announced by the PKK and the conciliation, if it proceeds, will affect the fighting between Turkey and Kurdish forces in Syria. The commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Abdi, was quick to declare that there is no connection between Ocalan's announcement and the

PKK's decision and the conduct of his forces, and that the PKK's decision does not bind him.

However, Kurdish forces in Syria depend militarily and financially on American support and the presence of 2,000 American troops and instructors in northern Syria. To the dismay of the Kurdish forces, the current president of the United States wished to withdraw American troops from Syria already back in 2019. The move was prevented under pressure from the U.S. Congress and the international community.

Now that the Congress is on Trump's side and relations with the "international community," namely the European states, look like an arm-wrestling competition accompanied by spitting, Syrian and American commitment to the Kurds will not be at the top of the White House's priorities.

Trump may now be persuaded that his friend Erdogan can replace the Kurds in the war against the Islamic State group, thereby ending American involvement in Syria. As a result, the Kurds could find themselves in a military confrontation with Turkey and Syria, without the backing of the Americans, while Turkey is in tandem undergoing a conciliation process with the PKK, which may disarm later.

According to such a scenario, promoted by Turkey, the Syrian Kurds will no longer have military or diplomatic room for maneuvering and will have to accept Sharaa's dictates, which in fact will be Erdogan's, and agree to Syrian rule over all Kurdish districts, thereby enabling Turkey's withdrawal from Syria.

Israel will face a new situation: it will be the only foreign occupying force in Syria, and will have to contend not only with Turkish

and Syrian pressure but also with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, which could easily give Erdogan the gift of being the "owner" of Syria, on behalf of the United States.

Over the weekend, Reuters reported that Israel is trying to persuade the American administration to take action to retain the Russian bases in Syria, to weaken the Syrian regime and mitigate Turkey's influence in Syria, which Israel views as a threat to its security.

Trump has leverage over the new regime in Syria, since he has to decide whether to remove altogether sanctions on Syria, which were frozen for six months in December. Still, the decision regarding the closing of the Russian bases depends first of all on Syria's government, which demands that in exchange for their operation, Moscow hands over Bashar Assad, the ousted Syrian leader, who fled to the Russian capital with his family and has been given asylum.

But even if Russia continues operating its bases, it will be in a much more limited fashion. It's hard to see how this would restrict Turkey's operations and sphere of influence, or that of any other player. Estimates are that Syrian airspace, which was open to Israel based on coordination with Russia, will close up if Turkey replaces Russia as the air defense force protecting the new regime in Syria.

These steps largely depend on Erdogan's direction and his leverage in Washington. He could gain an extra advantage if Turkey reconciles with the Kurds, which would also give it credit to the European Union. This is a new playing field in which Israel strives for tactical advantages, while Turkey aims for long-term strategic ones.

## PM, Katz tell IDF to prepare to defend Syrian Druze city

Yaniv Kubovich and Jack Khoury

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz instructed the Israeli military on Saturday to prepare to defend the Druze-majority city of Jaramana in southern Syria. Katz said in a statement that the city, located on the outskirts of Damascus is "currently under attack by Syrian regime forces."

"We will not allow Syria's extremist Islamist terror regime to harm the Druze. If the regime harms the Druze—it will be harmed by us," Katz added.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least one person has been killed and nine others wounded in recent days in Jaramana during clashes between residents of the city and those of the neighboring town of Al-Maliha, which has a Sunni Muslim major-



Militants loyal to the new regime in Damascus. Saleh Salem/Reuters

ity, along with security forces made up of rebel militias.

Following the clashes, Syrian security forces sought to enter the city, but local residents opened fire on them, killing one security officer and wounding two others. In recent hours, efforts have been underway among Druze spiritual leaders in Syria and senior

figures in the country's new regime to calm tensions.

Jaramana is located about five miles southeast of Damascus. In addition to the city's Druze population, it is also home to a UNRWA refugee camp, which the agency says houses approximately 13,000 Palestinians originally from northern Israel.

In early December, Syrian

rebels entered Damascus, toppling the Assad family's rule after nearly five decades. The leader of the main rebel militia, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Ahmad al-Sharaa, now serves as the country's interim president. Last week, a national dialogue conference was convened in Damascus, attended by about 600 people from various regions of Syria.

Following the rebel takeover of Damascus, the Israeli military entered the demilitarized zone along the Syrian border, which, under the 1974 disengagement agreement, is supposed to remain demilitarized.

Satellite images taken this month indicate that Israel has established at least seven new outposts in the area, stretching from the Syrian side of Mount Hermon in the north to Tel Kodna in the south, near the Israel-Syria-Jordan border triangle.

## Israeli charged with spying for Iran after impersonating nuclear reactor staff

Josh Breiner

A resident of Be'er Sheva was indicted on Sunday on charges of having contact with a foreign agent and passing information to the enemy after allegedly carrying out security-related tasks for Iran and offering to sell information about the Negev Nuclear Research Center.

According to the police and the Shin Bet security service, the suspect, named as Doron Bokobza, initiated contact with intelligence officials from the Iranian regime and carried out tasks at their direction for a fee. The investigation found that he was in touch with the Iranians for several months, and took pictures of facilities for them and provided them with information.

In his contacts with his handlers, he allegedly

claimed to have access to Israel's nuclear reactor in Dimona and provided openly available information about the facility.

The investigation also found that in December, Bokobza contacted a Telegram messaging account called International Secret Agency of Iran and presented himself as an Israeli who wanted to work with the officials behind the account. He explained his desire as resulting in part from his opposition to the Israeli government and his own economic difficulties.

Iranian officials allegedly began sending him money in exchange for photographs that he provided. At a certain stage, Bokobza allegedly represented himself as having a background in electronics and sent a screenshot related to the Dimona nuclear reactor.

According to the indict-

ment, the Iranians then told him that he would receive a large sum of money if he proved that he worked where he claimed, although he in fact worked at a chemical plant in the south. He allegedly had initially sent them a map of the reactor from Google Maps and then deleted it and then sent a photo of a communications cabinet from his actual place of employment and claimed that he was involved with the handling of heavy water at the Dimona reactor, for which he received 250 shekels (\$70).

Israeli authorities allege that at the end of January, upon hearing that two soldiers had been arrested on suspicion of working for the Iranians, Buchobza blocked the Iranian agent. He later reinstated contact and wrote to the agent that he was deleting the corre-

spondence between them. The agent is said to have responded that Bokobza was brave and that the agent would protect him and continued to ask for more information about the reactor.

Bokobza allegedly then lied to the agent, saying that representatives from the Mossad had visited him at work on February 5, prompting him to cut off contact with the Iranian. According to the indictment, three days later, Bokobza again wrote to the Iranian claiming that over the coming day, Iran's nuclear facilities would be attacked and advised the Iranian to steer clear of the facilities.

The defendant is said to have received a total of 3,250 shekels (\$900) from the Iranians for his actions. He was arrested on February 13.

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# Female soldiers refusing spotter roles after Oct. 7

Bar Peleg

Since the October 7 Hamas massacre, many draft-age Israeli women have asked not to serve as spotters and many who have been assigned to the position have refused to serve in that capacity, according to an annual report by the army's ombudsman.

The report, released Wednesday, doesn't say how many complaints were received on this issue. However, the ombudsman, Brig. Gen. (res.) Rachel Tevet-Wiesel, said the multiple complaints indicate a "worrying trend."

Tevet-Wiesel said she also received complaints from parents of spotters, who were worried that the war rooms where their daughters served were too close to border fences, which comes as outposts in other areas have been moved further away from borders.

"Following the aforementioned, the divisional commander held a meeting with the spotters' families" so he could discuss their concerns, the report said. At this meeting, he "stressed the importance of their presence close to the sector they are observing and to the officers and soldiers with whom they work in cooperation." The divisional commander, however, also detailed the increased security that has been provided to the spotters.

Tevet-Wiesel also addressed in the report the rise in the number of spotters' complaints regarding treatment by their commanders. "More and more soldiers, especially in compulsory service, complained about harsh, crude language and rigid, unpleasant attitudes," the report said. "But these complaints, as serious as they are, pale in comparison to complaints of blatant violence and threats."

Soldiers complained of being threatened with knives and being kicked or choked, including one case where an officer slapped a subordinate.

The report said some of these complaints were sent to the Military Police for investigation. Others were dealt with by the ombudsman's office, primarily by informing senior officers about the issues so they could take action "to restore soldiers' trust in the military."

The report cited one case where a female spotter serv-

ing on the Egyptian border complained that the deputy battalion commander entered the war room where she served and screamed, "Who's the spotter who spoke with me, who's living in a fantasy?" He then turned to the spotter's immediate superior and told her that if he were in her place, he would have "slapped her twice."

In another case, a female soldier doing her compulsory service said her former commander had told her, "You ought to dye your hair blond, because you're stupid." Tevet-Wiesel said she considers such behavior very serious, and therefore reprimanded the officer so he could "learn the lessons and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future."

The report also addressed the army's mental health service, and said that even though it had been reinforced over the last year, "many complaints continued to accumulate about delays" in providing services.

Tevet-Wiesel added, "At times, the aforementioned delay is due to the significant increase in the demand for mental health services during this complex period." The report also said that "at times, the delay in response is caused by a lack of availability in appointments and therapists, or by poor management on the part of commanders."

In one incident, the report described a mental health officer who met with a soldier who witnessed the atrocities of October 7, and advised him to seek talk therapy from a civilian organization.

In another case, a soldier doing his compulsory service who asked to meet with a mental health officer was left to wait three months because of his commanders' behavior, even though the chief medical officer's orders say an appointment must be scheduled within four weeks.

In another case, a combat soldier who witnessed difficult scenes during his service in the Gaza Strip ended up scheduling a meeting with a mental health officer on his own, because his commanders failed to do so despite his repeated requests.

Another section of the report dealt with political messages soldiers were exposed to during their service. For instance, one combat reservist complained that a senior officer in the reserves who met with the soldier's bat-

talion expressed his views on controversial political issues, which created divisions within the battalion. The army said the meeting hadn't been prepared in advance and during it, "the guest spoke as a civilian and not as a former officer."

In another case, a reservist complained that an Israeli flag bearing the slogan "Hofshi B'Artzenu" ("free in our land") was hung in his unit. The phrase, which comes from the national anthem, is also the name of an anti-government protest group.

Another reservist complained about his company commander's decision to kick him out of the unit. Ostensibly this was for a minor disciplinary infraction, but in reality, the soldier claimed, it was due to his political opinions and the fact that he belonged to an anti-government protest organization. The commander also made inappropriate comments about his political opinions, the reservist said.

After investigating the incident, Tevet-Wiesel concluded that the complainant was kicked out due to "a severe disciplinary incident," not a minor one. However, she did note that the company commander linked the complainant's actions in the event to his involvement in political protests, which she deemed inappropriate.

Although the commander told Tevet-Wiesel that his problem was with the complainant's refusal to obey an order, not the political motives behind it, "there is no room for IDF soldiers, much less officers, to express political opinions, or for actions within the army, while they are doing their job, that stem from political opinions," she added.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit responded to the report saying that following the October 7 attacks, staff worked on changes to the spotters' service, "including examining the placement of war rooms. Some of the lessons have already been implemented in the field, and several war rooms have already been moved away from the border—in places where this was possible based on operational needs—for the security of the female soldiers."

It also said the army "views any violent statement or behavior by officers toward their subordinates gravely and deals with them harshly."

# Ad against Trump's Gaza plan, signed by 200 Italian Jews, shows community's rifts



Pro-Palestinian supporters in Milan earlier this year after the announcement of the cease-fire.

Stefano Porta/AP

Anna Momiagliano

MILAN – A newspaper ad placed by several hundred Italian Jews last week calling out Israeli and U.S. actions in Gaza has provoked strong reactions from within the community.

Two Italian newspapers printed the petition last Wednesday signed by some 200 Italian Jews – including prominent media and literary figures – condemning U.S. President Donald Trump's recent plan to evacuate Palestinians from Gaza and turn the coastal enclave into a Riviera: "Trump wants to expel the Palestinians from Gaza. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, the violence of the Israeli government and settlers continues. Italian Jews say: NO TO ETHNIC CLEANSING."

The petition, which echoes similar appeals circulated in the United States and Australia, was published as a paid ad in the wide-circulation daily La Repubblica and free of charge by smaller daily Il Manifesto. It was organized by two left-leaning Jewish groups: Jewish Anti-Racist Laboratory, mostly composed of young activists; and Mai Indifferenti, consisting of older Jews. However, it included many unaffiliated signatories.

The move caused strong reactions from both within and outside the Jewish world in Italy. It sparked vitriolic reactions from pro-Israel activists and right-leaning Jewish public figures. European Jewish Association Vice President Riccardo Pacifici went as far as to describe it as toilet paper (he actually used a more colorful expression).

However, it is also facing criticism from progressive Jews who oppose the policies of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Jewish Anti-Racist Laboratory spokesperson Daniel Levi said the purpose of the petition "wasn't to distinguish between good Jews and bad Jews. We wanted to give a message that there is diversity within Jewish thinking. This is important to point out, especially when some Jewish institution are giving the impression that Italian Jewry is united behind certain positions, which is not true," he said.

Sabeta Fresko, a member of the other group organizing the ad, Mai Indifferenti, said their main motivations were to raise awareness about the "increasingly dangerous situation, both in the Middle East and in other parts of the world, where the far-right positions are get-

ting stronger" and to counter "the silence of official Jewish institutions."

He believed that the petition was contributing to countering antisemitism in Italy: "Part of the antisemitic discourse is conflating Diaspora Jews with Israel's actions, and here we are clearly demonstrating that the Jewish world isn't a monolith supporting Israel," he said.

## Unintended consequences

Some critics argue, though, that such actions promote the idea that Diaspora Jews bear moral responsibility for Israel's actions and are to be considered complicit until they openly denounce them. Jewish public figures who did not sign the petition, for instance, have faced criticism in some quarters.

Luciano Belli Paci, a lawyer and progressive pro-Israel activist in Milan, said he was appalled by the petition even if he shares its message against Trump's plans for Gaza and settler violence in the West Bank.

"The problem lies in speaking 'as Jews,' because it's an implicit statement that Jewish people bear some collective responsibility for Israel's actions in Gaza and therefore are morally com-

pelled to distance themselves from them," he said.

Belli Paci also noted that the petition had the unintended consequence of unleashing a wave of antisemitic attacks on Jewish public figures who hadn't signed it – including his own mother, the prominent senator and Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre. "Suddenly social media was full of people attacking my mom, going like 'Why didn't she sign it? Isn't she ashamed?' While I understand the signatories didn't mean to cause all this, I am shocked that they didn't see it coming."

David Parenzo, a popular TV host, said he was outraged by the petition, which he fears is fueling antisemitism. "Antisemitism has been on the rise in the past year, and one of its chief weapons is to conflate Diaspora Jews with the actions of the State of Israel," he said. "This petition gives the false impression that the signatories are the good Jews, while other Jews are the bad ones. It's putting others in the position where they have to justify why they didn't sign."

Angelica Calò, an Italian Israeli peace activist from Kibbutz Sasa near the Lebanon border, was particularly critical of the petition. "It's unacceptable that people living abroad, sitting comfort-

ably on their couches, come up with a petition like that without mentioning Hamas and October 7 even once," she said.

"I oppose the Trump plan and support a hostage deal, but that petition just comes across as anti-Israel and devoid of empathy for its people – and even more so because it was published on the day of the Bibas funeral," she added, referring to Shiri Bibas and her young sons Ariel and Kfir, who were abducted on October 7 and killed in Gaza.

## 'Fighting dehumanization'

Some of the signatories, however, say that far from dictating policies to Israel, the ad was about advocating for basic human decency.

Federico Fubini, a prominent columnist at one of Italy's biggest newspapers, Il Corriere della Sera, said he felt compelled to sign the petition due to Trump's statements on Gaza and Ukraine.

"We've reached a point where the leader of the most powerful country in the world is saying that people can be moved like objects, that countries can be invaded. Dehumanization has become a norm internationally. In this climate, we must raise our voices to say we cannot accept it."

He said he didn't see the petition as political. "Fighting dehumanization is not political, it's something that reflects both human and universal values. It's not about telling Israelis what to do, which none of us is in the position of doing."

Sara Buda, a Jewish woman in her 30s who is not a public figure, said she "had doubts until the very last moment," but in the end decided to sign the petition.

"I was skeptical about signing something 'as Jews,' especially since it's an identity under attack," she said. "But then I thought that there are public figures who are endorsing Israel's actions speaking 'as Jews,' and I thought countering these voices was the priority."

"I wanted to say that they don't speak for me," she added. "I am appalled that some people are now using it to attack other Jews. But antisemitism is always finding new excuses – they're good at twisting facts – and this should not force us to keep quiet."

# In annual viral Ramadan ad, Arab media giant attacks Trump plan



The ad opens with a girl walking across rubble.

Screenshots

Naghm Zbeedat

A Kuwaiti telecommunications giant known for its annual Ramadan commercials has delivered a strong rebuke to U.S. President Donald Trump and his plan to evacuate Gaza in its latest seasonal ad.

Zain's 2025 Ramadan ad also highlights the Gazan determination to rebuild the Strip following the devastating 16-month war between Israel and Hamas.

Muslim and Arab communities eagerly anticipate the commercial, which always touches on timely social issues. Last year, for example, it dedicated its Ramadan ad to the plight of children in Gaza.

This year's video opens with the statement: "My pulse awakens, good as new. Into my arms, my land, let my love shape you." The video then shows a young girl walking

across shattered glass and rubble, raising a blue flag that reads "Let us sing a spiritual peace that embraces a national peace." Alongside the girl, an Iraqi performer sings, addressing the Palestinian homeland: "We won't die for it [land] to live, we give it life and it returns the grace."

Another message is delivered by Maria Hanoun, a curly-haired girl from Gaza City. Last month, a separate video of the 4-year-old went viral. In it, the war survivor directly challenged Trump regarding his takeover and displacement plan: "If I asked you to leave your home and live in Egypt or China, would you accept that?"

Maria now appears in the Zain commercial, delivering another message: "I won't leave my land just to please. Mark my presence, its shores and its seas."

The chorus of the video, reiterating that Palestinians remained rooted in their land, is repeated as lines of schoolchildren rush to class in the narrow, ruined halls of an abandoned school. Other youngsters gather around a pot of maqluba – a Palestinian layered dish of meat, rice and fried vegetables. The commercial's concluding segment says: "This land is not for sale, not measured in feet but by cubits." The cubit, an ancient measurement for the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, is used to reference Gazans' determination to hold on to every inch of the land.

The final message of the ad is aimed directly at Trump: "Our roots still stand. Your 'deal of the century,' dust in sand. And in the Riviera, drown by your own hand."

The commercial features several Palestinian visual cues, including drummers wearing watermelon-patterned scarves. On social media, fans praised the video and the telecommunications company. Another saw the ad as more inclusive of multiple conflicts: "The commercial is heartbreaking; It speaks of destruction. At first, Gaza came to mind, then Lebanon, then Yemen, and perhaps even Sudan and Syria. That's when I realized the immense pain and devastation across our Arab world."

## LEAVE

Continued from page 1

had never experienced significant antisemitism before. But since the Hamas attack and ensuing war in Gaza, incidents of Jew-hatred have skyrocketed across the country, spreading even to isolated communities in Queensland and Adelaide. Most of Australia's Jewish community is centered around Melbourne and Sydney, with smaller communities in Perth and Queensland.

## Hearts set on aliyah

Retired schoolteacher Lederman holds little optimism for the future of Jewish life in Australia. "I believe antisemitism here is being fueled by overseas influences, with people being paid to spread fear and intimidation," he says.

Although he is fully aware that Israel, with the ongoing war, is still potentially far less safe a place for Jews today, he says: "I do not think you will see 'F\*\*\* the Jews' graffitied on houses while walking down a street in Tel Aviv."

Australian Jews have always felt welcome and appreciated in their country, home to one of the largest concentrations of Holocaust survivors in the world. Over the past 17 months, however, many have felt the ground shift beneath their feet.

Indeed, a quick scroll through Jewish Australian Facebook groups reveals a noticeable rise in posts about leaving Australia since October 7.

And they are not just toying with the idea.



Hasidic men standing outside Adass Israel Synagogue after a firebombing in December.

Con Chronis/AP

According to Jewish Agency figures, 193 Australians immigrated to Israel in 2024: up 45 percent from the previous year. However, Zionist Federation of Australia CEO Alon Cassuto cautions against seeing this trend as a direct result of antisemitism.

"We do not want to fuel a false narrative that Australian Jews are making aliyah to flee antisemitism, as this is not the motivation for the vast majority," he says. "Anecdotal, the vast majority would object strongly to their aliyah being characterized as being driven by antisemitism."

It is quite likely, in fact, that most of these Australian Jews who are making aliyah – like Lederman and Elisheva – had their hearts set on aliyah before the explosion of antisemitism that followed the October 7 attack.

Paul Baram, 65, a lawyer from Sydney, was born in Australia to grandparents who fled the Russian pogroms more than a century ago. While he says he is not yet ready to move to Israel, rising antisemitism in Australia has prompted him to reconsider his family's future in the country.

"My wife and I discussed for the first time in our lives the possibility of having to leave Australia because of the extent of antisemitism, which in my view is now entrenched," he says. Among other options, he is considering a move to Britain – where his daughter lives – although he notes that "the antisemitism is just as bad there."

Liana Levin finds herself in a similar position. "I have been worried, and I am abundantly aware of history repeating itself," says the 62-year-old, Canberra-based public policy adviser who was born in Israel to parents who fled Europe.

She says she is watching the situation closely, noting that at her age, relocation can be challenging.

"It's not something I want to do," says Levin. "I have a very comfortable life in Canberra: a beautiful home, career opportunities and the advantage of language. My Hebrew is at a child's level – the age I left."

Still, if she were to pick up and leave, Levin says she knows where she would go. "Although I'm not in any way, shape or form religious, I have a profound and very

real connection to Israel – as a Zionist and as someone who deeply, profoundly believes in Israel as the savior of the Jewish world."

## 'Plan B for a lot of people'

Eva Hussain is the founder of Polaron, a company that helps citizens with roots in Europe – like many Australian Jews – obtain citizenship there. "The interest in having a second passport has stayed steadily high as it gives people freedom to access 27 European Union member states with no restrictions," say Hussain, who is Jewish and serves as Austria's honorary consul general in Victoria.

Demand for European passports among her clients, many of them Jewish, has increased more than 50 percent in the past six months, she says.

"Many of them left Europe, or their ancestors left Europe, because of antisemitism, so it's really quite tragic that they are seeking citizenship outside of America and Australia," she says.

Hussain says her relatives, some of whom are Holocaust survivors, never imagined that a time would come when Australian Jews would be considering returning to the

countries where they suffered terrible persecution.

"It's a plan B for a lot of people, but it's also a safety net," she says. "You never know what's going to happen in this world, so better to have it."

She adds: "Poland and Germany are making a big effort to make Jews feel safer."

Patrick works as a community service manager and lives in Melbourne. (He also asked that his full name not be published.) He moved to Australia from Poland in the 1980s, after the fall of communism in that country. Through Polaron, this 37-year-old Jewish man reclaimed his Polish citizenship about 18 months ago.

"With the way that things are unfolding in Australia, I found it critical not just to safeguard a future for myself but, more importantly, for my children who are very young," he says.

"I'm not packing up and leaving tomorrow, but it certainly gives me a greater level of comfort."

Since the initial Hamas attack, Patrick says he has felt strengthened by his decision to keep his options open. "When I think back on it now, when I think about the environment and what has transpired since October 7, I feel even more comfortable that I have done my bit."

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HAARETZ

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# On to the second stage

On orders from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the army closed all the crossings to the Gaza Strip on Sunday and prevented the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. The official reason for this was Hamas' refusal to accept the "Witkoff proposal," which Israel accepted but Hamas opposed.

The proposal submitted by U.S. presidential envoy Steve Witkoff calls for a temporary cease-fire lasting through the Ramadan and Passover holidays. Half the hostages would be freed on the first day of its implementation, and all the rest would be freed later – if an agreement on a permanent cease-fire is reached. But this proposal was born due to Netanyahu's refusal to proceed to the second stage of the original deal for the hostages' return.

According to that agreement, which Israel signed, the return of the remaining hostages depends on ending the war and a full withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from Gaza. But Netanyahu isn't willing to declare the war over or announce a pullout from Gaza, for a reason that has nothing to do with the hostages or even the needs of the war. Nor is it related to Hamas' contemptible behavior during implementation of the deal's first stage – returning a Palestinian woman's body instead of that of Shiri Bibas and staging release ceremonies that involved humiliating the hostages and dangerously exposing them to mobs.

The reason for Netanyahu's refusal is his concern for keeping his government alive, which depends on the far right. Consequently, he welcomed this new half-a-plan, which will obscure his previous commitments and reshuffle the negotiations' deck, in order to buy more time – time that will extend his government's life but shorten the hostages' lives. This is also why he halted humanitarian aid to Gaza, which is a violation of the original agreement.

The hostages' families are justly furious. They understand that Netanyahu is preoccupied with domestic politics and that his top priority is Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, not the hostages and their families. The families also understand that halting humanitarian aid to Gaza is meant to appease the far right, in the hope that the Trump administration will swallow the spin that the reason for this move is Hamas' rejection of the Witkoff proposal.

"Netanyahu carried out a targeted assassination of the agreement," Einav Zangauker screamed this weekend. "The crisis that now exists in the negotiations is a deliberate crisis that Netanyahu created and engineered. It's possible to bring them all back. There's a plan that could be carried out tomorrow morning – ending the war and bringing them all home in one go." She is right. Netanyahu simply decided not to start negotiations over a permanent cease-fire.

The negotiations over the second stage, which were supposed to start on day 16 of the first stage, haven't taken place at all. With the first stage now over, 59 hostages remain in Gaza, of whom 24 are still alive. The way to bring them home isn't to extend the first stage, but to move on to the second stage – that is, to end the war and withdraw from Gaza, as the agreement states, instead of starving everyone in Gaza, including the hostages.



Amos Biderman | amosb@haaretz.co.il

Iris Leal

# How Yair Golan could take Bibi's base

For some time now I've been wondering about the grand vision of Yair Golan's party, the Democrats. It's clear that it's been making gains in the polls. Golan, who personally saved many lives on October 7, as well as MKs Naama Lazimi and Gilad Kariy, who do battle diligently in Knesset committees, support protesters who have been arrested, accompany them to court and fight in the streets for the release of the hostages. What's not to like?

They are the most anti-Bibi people there are. How anti-Bibi? Uri Misgav wrote an encomium to Lazimi on these pages (Haaretz, Thursday). After describing her angrily in the past as "just a symptom of a deeper phenomenon" (Haaretz.com, August 8, 2022) – the phenomenon being the Labor Party's candidates' list for the November 2022 election having become "the ultimate poster for identity politics" – Misgav now admires Lazimi because she is "a woman, Mizrahi, from Migdal Ha'emek; raised by Moroccan parents who support the Labor Party. Leftist, socialist, liberal, moderate and traditional. She's married to a Shas [party] activist. In short, there couldn't be more identity politics at play.

On the day Misgav's panegyric explaining why Lazimi is driving supporters of Benjamin Netanyahu crazy was published in Hebrew, I was touring the Gaza border area with Tom Mehager, the former executive director of Amram, a nonprofit association that acts to get justice and recognition for the victims of the Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Children affair, surrounding allegations that thousands of children were abducted in the vote for, after Netanyahu's policy of repeated rounds of clashes with Hamas exposed them to constant anxiety, damage and casualties before October 7. On that day, white pickup trucks unloaded Nukhba fighters in the town's streets. It took two days to clear the city of Hamas terrorists, after 52 Israelis were murdered there – police officers and civilians, including retirees.

Demonstrations calling for the return of the hostages are essential, but they can't comprise the only element of the Democrats' visiting card. Lazimi promotes social-democratic policies, but is anyone explaining to the residents of Sderot, Ofakim and Netivot vote for next time?

There is also Ofakim, which is not getting any government assistance because of its distance from Gaza. Almost 50 of the town's residents were murdered, but the state has simply abandoned them. Residents of the Mishor Hagefen neighborhood, which was badly hit that Saturday, were already contending with problems before that, but the government's neglect has only made things worse. Mehager and I wondered about people who used to be Netanyahu's strong base and who could lead to his rout, as they did in 2021. Who is talking to these people? A few of them will vote for Itamar Ben-Gvir, but the rest won't vote for Netanyahu. Is Lazimi meet-

ing the old and disappointed Bibi-ist base? Is Golan – who was there that Saturday, trying to save as many people as he could, now marching in the first row of demonstrators, arm-in-arm with Einav Zangauker, whose son is a hostage – initiating meetings with residents there, asking them what is important to them and what they need?

There is now a rare opportunity. The identity politics that so perturbed Misgav can contribute to the toppling of Netanyahu and to changes in voting patterns. Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid are on a downward trend, and the Democrats can again become the ruling party, if only they understand that the old Netanyahu base, which was a direct victim of the massacre, is suffering from its results. People who formed this base have lost trust in Netanyahu, and wish to know who sees them and their distress. It is time to get to work.

Ravit Hecht

# Like Yocheved Lifshitz said

Yocheved Lifshitz's eulogy over the grave of her husband, Oded Lifshitz, reverberated and stood out in the sea of words and misery of these sad few weeks.

This is not only because it contained the simplest and most beautiful words of love that a wife could say to her husband before his burial, after 67 years of life together. The eulogy was also etched into our minds because, without realizing it, Lifshitz articulated with typical directness the few points that lie at the heart of the Israeli consensus, despite the camps, polarization, hatred, and incitement. "Our abduction and your death have shaken me. We fought for social justice and peace all these years, and unfortunately, we were struck a heavy blow by the very people we helped on the other side."

In her opening she chose to mark the anger and disappointment with the Gazans and Palestinians, particularly in the peace camp, in the face of the October 7 attack and the support for it. Even those who opposed the occupation and the infringement of Palestinians' personal and national rights do not, rightly, accept the October 7 massacre as a legitimate action that could be understood or forgiven in any context.

But before government supporters jump up in excitement at her words, they should listen to what Lifshitz said next, spoken in the same precise and pointed tone. "I'm stunned by the number of graves and the terrible destruction of our community, which was totally abandoned on October 7. Our hostages have been held in chains, starved, and tortured underground in Gaza for more than 500 days."

With that, she marked the existential and moral necessary of investigating the October 7 catastrophe and its unbelievable failures, and to bring to justice everyone responsible for them, and even before that, of course, to return the hostages who remain behind, and to end their ongoing abandonment.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thinks that through point A – hostility to Palestinians, he'll be able to escape from point B – a state commission of inquiry, and to postpone point C – the return of the hostages, according to his needs. He also thinks that tribal hatred will once again be able to save him. Inciting against the Supreme Court, whose president is supposed to appoint the members of state commission of inquiry, and the trendy use of hating elites as means to prevent establishing such a committee.

It's challenging to be optimistic in light of Netanyahu's current success in surviving this long after the massacre. Given the fact that the government is still standing, continues legislating and behaving so dangerously is cause for concern that it may try to play with the election date, in an effort to postpone their end. A fear that is not entirely within the realm of paranoia.

Processing the trauma of the 1973 Yom Kippur War only led to the ousting of Mapai from government only a few years after. The growing distress of countless affected families, the cry of entire communities that were destroyed, the hostages and their stories, and the investigations that are now being released will collectively block Netanyahu's escape route from responsibility. The combination of distorted policy and serious military failures led to the unforgivable desecration of Israel's primary purpose, and everyone responsible must pay a price. Including, and most of all, the only officeholder who has not taken responsibility for the October 7 debacle, the man who bears the responsibility and blame for the death, abduction, and rape of so many people. It may not happen during this government's term, but it will happen.

In order to achieve this fundamental justice, the necessity of which is unrelated to party or tribal affiliation, to stop the anomaly that disgraces the memory of the many victims and their grieving families, every person with minimal integrity must fight with all their remaining strength for the return of all the hostages, for the establishment of a state commission of inquiry, and for the elimination of Hamas and its ilk. Just as Yocheved Lifshitz said.

Odeh Bisharat

# The last iftar supper in Gaza

The Hebrew month of Adar, which began on Saturday, arrived in all its splendor with breathtaking spring weather, and for the sake of the sun and clear blue skies we must hear the ancient Hebrew phrase and song: "When Adar arrives we increase [our] joy."

At the same time, the intense cold wave that nested in our homes over the last week in February refuses to retreat – even in the face of the sun's embrace. Hot and cold all at once. How does the wonderful poem of the Egyptian poet Bayram al-Tunisi put it: "Why, sweet violet, are you happy, even though you're a sad flower?" This contrast between smiling faces and saddened hearts is the fate of many: Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and many other people in so many disaster-stricken places around the world. Spring warmth outside, and bone-chilling cold inside.

But one type of joy exists that only evil people, even if they are made of flesh and blood, can create. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich gives a different character to the celebration, and specifically at the beginning of Adar. He describes the cabinet's decision to halt the cease-fire agreement with Hamas as "the threshold to Hell." That is why, according to the tidings of the man who

has adopted the racial laws legislated in Nuremberg, it's possible to alter the optimistic saying of the ancient Jewish sages, and say instead: "When Adar arrives, the gates of Hell open." By the way, these tidings are meant not just for Gazans but also for the Israeli hostages and their suffering families.

On Saturday, the iftar meal for the first day of the Ramadan fast was conducted, and as everyone en, young and old. They eat to their heart's content under the open skies, with mountains of ruins surrounding them.

When you watch this unnatural performance it's possible to think about many things, everyone and their own inclinations. I felt both sadness and joy. Sadness – because of the situation the Gazans have fallen into; joy – because in spite of everything people

cided to immediately halt the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The Hell of Adar has returned.

Hamas took over Gaza because of two things: The first is the result of the closed political horizon set by Israeli governments vis-à-vis the Palestinians. When there is no hope, extremism and hatred settle in hearts. The second cause: Israel not only closed the faucet for the Palestinians in Gaza, but also opened them for the benefit of Hamas. The Palestinians in the Gaza Strip lived between the hammer and the nail – suffocation in all areas of life and a brutal and dictatorial regime that imposed a blockade, in other words Israel nurtured and spoiled. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not only knew about these steps – he even planned them himself, and the Israeli public shut its eyes.

The Israeli public is still captive to the chains of the catastrophic concept: No to Hamas, says Netanyahu, but in the same breath he continues, with even greater force: No to the Palestinian Authority. In other words, no to the Palestinians at all. If this is the way things are, then who is the "yes" meant for? The answer is Smotrich – the man who holds the keys to Hell in his pocket. I suggest you start worrying.

have gotten back on their feet and are continuing with their lives. This is the greatness of humankind, regardless of religion, race or gender. It turns to glance back for a brief moment and then continues on. "Bury your dead and arise," said the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Ziad. The sight in Gaza on Saturday is a source of pride for every human being.

One can imagine that there are some people who are bothered by this human beauty. For the Israeli government, this must be the last supper. On Sunday, the Smotrich government de-

**The sight in Gaza on Saturday is a source of pride for every human being. This is the greatness of humankind, regardless of religion, race or gender.**

knows the month is one of goodness and blessings in Muslim tradition. After watching the iftar videos, which quickly went viral, you could wonder whether it was real or maybe just a surreal spectacle. It's hard to believe that such a thing is really happening, with people who just a few weeks ago emerged from the cauldron of fire, death and destruction. It's similar to an imaginary performance than a living reality.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people dining, sitting around a table dozens, perhaps hundreds of meters long – children, men, wom-

Ofer Bronchtein

# A prosperous, independent Lebanon is a paramount Israeli interest

These days, as our eyes are fixed on the multiple fronts of the current war, a dramatic move has taken place that could change the face of the entire region. The new Lebanese government took a courageous decision: to remove from its policy guidelines references to armed resistance to Israel, to adopt United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 and to come out publicly against Hezbollah.

When I was appointed French President Emmanuel Macron's special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Lebanon was a country slowly dying, with a collapsing economy, a paralyzed political system and under the effective control of a terrorist organization. When I look at the map of Lebanon hanging on the wall, I see a glimmer of hope.

Anyone who understands the Lebanese reality knows that what has happened is a political earthquake. For the first time in decades, Lebanon has a government that has expressed willingness to break free from viewing Israel as an eternal enemy.

Lebanon was always a beautiful country, with educated people, a rich culture and enormous economic potential. But years of civil

war, foreign intervention and control by terrorist organizations made it a symbol of tragic missed opportunities. France, with its deep-rooted, long-standing ties to Lebanon, recognizes the immense inherent potential of the government's decision. The challenges Lebanon faces remain enormous, of course. There is still ap-

Israel now faces a test: Will it recognize the historic opportunity unfolding before it or will it remain bound by old perceptions? Can its leaders appreciate that a prosperous and independent Lebanon is a paramount Israeli interest, the best guarantee of quiet on Israel's northern border?

This is an opportunity

vance toward a future of mutual respect and cooperation, we must strengthen the Lebanese government and armed forces. This will only be possible by respecting all international agreements.

Faced with this opportunity, the test for the international community is to provide Lebanon with the needed economic and political support. To that end, France intends to lead a combined international effort to restore the Lebanese economy and strengthen its democratic institutions.

A prosperous, independent Lebanon is a critical Israeli and European interest. It would stabilize the entire region and provide a positive alternative to the model of religious extremism and violence. It could also serve as a bridge between the Arab world and the West.

This moment obliges all of us – Israelis, Lebanese, French, Americans and citizens of other Arab countries – to imagine a different Middle East, in which Lebanon can be what it once was: a free, thriving, pluralistic country in a region in which good neighborliness replaces eternal enmity.

Ofer Bronchtein is French President Emmanuel Macron's special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

**A free, thriving, pluralistic Lebanon would stabilize the entire region and provide a positive alternative to the model of religious extremism and violence.**

prehension regarding the response of Hezbollah and its Iranian patron. It is a tightrope, but for the first time, Lebanon's leaders are willing to walk it.

We have a positive precedent for relations based on shared interests, namely the maritime boundary agreement signed between Israel and Lebanon. The accord proved that when the two countries focus on economic benefits and mutual security, they can reach important understandings. It is an excellent example of what can be done when the two sides focus on a better future for their citizens.

that cannot be missed. A stable and independent Lebanon that recognizes international borders and is committed to UN Security Council Resolution 1701 will remove a major strategic threat to Israel's northern border. Furthermore, would pave the way for future cooperation for the benefit of both countries.

France, under Macron's leadership, has offered to mediate a new arrangement. We believe that the time has come to leave behind the old conflicts and build a Middle East based on mutual interest and thriving economies. To ad-

# Survey: U.S. Jews are group least likely to believe in God

## Latest Pew Research Center poll finds Jews are more likely to be intermarried and to support abortion, LGBTQ rights

Judy Maltz

Jews are less likely than members of other religious groups in the United States to believe in God, to be married to members of their own religion and to pray regularly, according to an in-depth study published on Wednesday by the Pew Research Center.

The study also found that Jews were more likely than most Americans to believe in evolution, to consider immigration to the United States a positive phenomenon and to support gay, transgender and women's reproductive rights.

The Religious Landscape Study was conducted between July 2023 and March 2024 among a nationally representative sample of nearly 37,000 respondents. It was last conducted in 2014 and, before that, in 2007.

It found that 62 percent (the figures have been rounded off) of Americans identify as Christian, 29 percent as religiously unaffiliated and 7 percent belong to

religions other than Christianity. Jews account for 2 percent of the U.S. population, while Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists each account for 1 percent.

The percentage of Jews has remained virtually unchanged from the previous two surveys. After declining over a period of many years, the study found that the share of Christians in America has levelled off.

Although Jews were less likely to be "believers" than members of other religious groups, the study found that they were more likely than most Americans to belong to a house of worship. It also found that Jews tend to be far better educated than most Americans, bigger earners and more likely to identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Here are some of the key takeaways from the study:

- Jews are less likely to believe in God than members of other religious groups in the United States. Among the Jewish respondents, 18 percent said they did not believe in God, compared to 8 percent of Americans overall, 3 percent of Protestants, 6 percent of Catholics and 2 percent of Buddhists.

lieve in God. That compares with 8 percent of Americans overall, 3 percent of Protestants, 6 percent of Catholics and 2 percent of Buddhists. The survey shows that Americans overall are becoming less convinced of a divine existence. In 2007, more than 70 percent of the respondents said they were certain God exists. By 2014, only 63 percent did, and in the latest survey, their share had dropped to 54 percent. Among Jewish respondents, 41 percent said they were certain God existed in 2007. Seven years later, only 37 percent were, and in the latest survey, their share was down to 29 percent. Jews are also less likely than Americans overall, the survey found, to believe in the concepts of heaven and hell.

- Jews are more likely than members of other religious groups to say that religion is not too important or not at all important in their lives. Among Jewish respondents, 43 percent said that was the case for them, compared with 11 percent

of Protestants, 17 percent of Catholics and 13 percent of Muslims.

- Only one in three Jews reported that religion was very important to their family when they were growing up. That compares with 45 percent of Americans overall, about half of all Protestants and Catholics and two out of every three Muslims. Six out of 10 Jews said that the Bible is not too important or not at all important to them.

- Among married Jews, 35 percent reported having non-Jewish spouses. Among Protestants, only 19 percent were married to non-Protestants and among Catholics, only 25 percent were married to non-Catholics. Seven percent of U.S. Jews have Protestant spouses and 11 percent have Catholic spouses.

- Jews tend to be geographically concentrated in the Northeast, where they account for 4 percent of the population – as opposed to 1 percent in the Midwest and the South and 2 percent in the West.

- Jews are more likely than most Americans to attend private religious educational institutions for most of their schooling. Among the Jewish respondents, 18 percent said they had attended private Jewish day schools for at least seven years. That compares with 11 percent of Americans overall and 5 percent of Protestants. Only Catholics attended private religious schools at a higher rate (25 percent).

- About three-quarters of American adults who were raised Jewish still identify



Students from a Jewish school at the Park East Synagogue in New York City.

Drew Angerer / AFP

as Jewish. That is similar to the share raised Muslim, somewhat lower than the share raised Hindu, but somewhat higher than the share raised Protestant and Catholic.

- Jews are far less likely than members of other religious groups to have grown more religious over the course of their lifetime. Only 18 percent of the Jewish respondents said this was the case for them, as compared with 28 percent of Americans overall, 43 percent of Protestants, 30 percent of Catholics and 38 percent of Muslims. Of the Jewish respondents, 29 percent reported becoming less religious over the course of their lifetime.

- Fewer than half of Jewish Americans attend religious services at least once a month. That compares with more than two-thirds of Americans overall, 80 percent of Protestants, 75 percent of Catholics and 55

percent of Muslims. Buddhists (24 percent) were the only group less inclined to pray than Jews. Jews were also least likely (tied with Buddhists) to pray on a daily basis. Only 22 percent said they prayed at least once daily, half the percentage of overall Americans. Still, 42 percent of the Jewish respondents said they belonged to a house of worship – somewhat higher than Americans overall (37 percent).

- Among Jewish respondents, 87 percent believe in evolution. That compares with 80 percent of Americans overall, 76 percent of Protestants, 80 percent of Catholics and 82 percent of Muslims.

- Among Jewish respondents, 82 percent say homosexuality should be accepted by society. That compares with two-thirds of Americans overall, 50 percent of Protestants, 74 percent of Catholics and 41 percent of Muslims.

- Jews are more likely than members of any other religious group to say that greater acceptance of transgender people is a "change for the better." Among Jewish respondents, 59 percent supported greater inclusivity for transgender people, as compared with 39 percent of Americans overall, 26 percent of Protestants, 36 percent of Catholics and 33 percent of Muslims.

- Jews are more likely than members of other religious groups to support women's reproductive rights. Among Jewish respondents, 83 percent said abortion should be legal in most or all cases. That compares with 64 percent of Americans overall, 49 percent of Protestants, 59 percent of Catholics and 57 percent of Muslims.

- Among Jewish respondents, 4 percent identify as gay or lesbian and 7 percent as bisexual. Among Americans overall, 3 percent identify

as gay or lesbian and 5 percent as bisexual. Among Catholics, 2 percent identify as gay or lesbian and 2 percent as bisexual, and among Protestants, only 1 percent identify as gay or lesbian and 2 percent as bisexual.

- Jews are far more likely to be college graduates than members of other religious groups. Among Jewish respondents, two-thirds had at least a bachelor's degree. That compares with only 35 percent of U.S. citizens overall, 31 percent of Protestants, 35 percent of Catholics and 44 percent of Muslims.

- After Hindus, Jews have the highest household incomes of any religious group in the United States. Among the Jewish respondents, 54 percent earn more than \$100,000 a year (compared with 57 percent of Hindus). Only 30 percent of Americans overall reach this income level.



Hasidic Jews in New York City's Brooklyn.

Joe Kohlen / AP

## MONDAY 3.3

CHANNEL KAN 11

(Y11/H11)

**06.00** This Morning - with Arieh Golan **08.00** Kalmann-Lieberman - Live Reshet Betradishow **10.00** Today's Agenda - with Keren Neubach **12.00** Eating Plants: The biggest culinary food trend in the world (s.2) **12.30** Why Is That? - with Prof. Dan Arieli **13.15** Nature's Ultimate Survivors **14.00** News Flash **14.05** Nature's Ultimate Survivors (cont.) **14.15** Come Dine With Me - A group of strangers compete for the title of the ultimate dinner party host **14.45** The Chase - Game Show (s.8) **15.00** News Flash **15.05** The Chase (cont.) **15.45** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **16.00** Pocket Games - Economic magazine **16.55** The World Today - World News **18.00** Six O'Clock - with Maya Rachlin **18.55** Seven O'Clock - with Ayala Hasson **19.50** The Evening News **21.30** The Russian Compound - Israeli drama series **22.20** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **22.30** News **23.00** Sofa Stories - Celebrity share experiences from their personal lives (s.3) **23.35** Bosch - Drama series (s.2) **00.25** The Unimportant - One-vent that at first glance seem unimportant, but from a distance over the years, tell a bigger story about all of us

KESHET

(Y12/H12)

**06.00** News Flash **06.10** Today's Headlines **07.00** News Flash **07.05** The Morning Show - with Nir Raskin **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Special news broadcast - with Nesli Barda & Yoav Limor **12.00** Special news broadcast - with Almaz Mangisto **15.00** Today's Edition - with Ofer Hadad & Amalya Duek **16.55** Five O'Clock - with Rafi Reshef **17.55** Six O'Clock - with Oded Ben-Ami **19.00** The Early Edition - with Keren Marciano **19.55** The News **21.30** Fact - with Ilana Dayan **22.55** Guy Pines **23.25** Tonight - with Yair Sherki & Avri Gilad **00.20** Sports Results **00.35** Auto Road Test

RESHET

(Y13/H13)

**06.00** The Morning Show - with Omer Yardeni **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Starting the Day - with Elad Yarden **10.00** News Flash **10.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **11.00** News Flash **11.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **12.00** News Flash **12.05** The Legal Parade - Law magazine **12.40** New Love - Dating reality **13.00** News Flash **13.05** New Love (cont.) **14.00** News Flash **14.05** The Daily Report - with Kobi Mahat **15.40** Today's News **16.55** Talk of the Day - with Lucy Aharish **17.55** Six O'Clock News **18.55** Israel at War - with Raviv Drucker **19.50** The News **21.30** New Love - Dating reality **22.55** The Tube - with Guy Lerer **23.25** Sports Corner **23.30** The Day That Was - with Tal Berman **00.00** Behind the Money - Financial magazine **00.35** Sports Corner

HOT 3

(H3)

**08.30** Matlock **09.10** A Million Little Things (s.3) **09.55** Shababnikim (s.2) **10.35** Offspring (s.3) **13.40** A Million Little Things (s.3) **14.25** Shababnikim (s.2) **15.00** Days of Our Lives **15.40** The Young and the Restless **16.15** The Bold and the Beautiful (2 eps) **17.00** Days of Our Lives **17.40** The Young and the Restless **18.20** Suits (s.4) **19.00** Matlock **19.45** Offspring (s.3) **20.30** The Other Two (s.3, 2 eps) **21.40** Suits (s.4) **22.25** Zaguri **23.05** The Bay of Fires **00.15** The Other Two (s.3, 2 eps) **01.25** A Million Little Things (s.3) **02.10** Zaguri (s.2)

HOT HBO

(H4)

**10.05** Far North **11.00** Blinded **11.45** Tulsa King (s.2) **12.30** Ludwig **13.30** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **14.15** Far North **15.05** Blinded **15.50** Tulsa King (s.2) **16.35** Ludwig **17.35** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **18.15** Tulsa King (s.2) **18.55** Fallen **19.40** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **20.30** Fleishman Is in Trouble **21.15** Blinded **22.00** The White Lotus (s.3) **23.00** In Memoriam **23.45** Winning Time **00.45** Insecure **01.15** Mrs. Fletcher **01.45** The White Lotus (s.3)

HOT ZONE

(H5)

**06.05** Law & Order (s.24) **06.50** FBI: International (s.4) **07.30** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **08.10** FBI (s.5) **08.40** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **09.30** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **10.15** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **10.55** FBI: International (s.4) **11.40** FBI (s.5) **12.15** NCIS (s.21) **13.00** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **13.40** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **14.25** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **15.05** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.25) **15.45** FBI (s.5) **16.25** NCIS (s.21) **17.10** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **17.50** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **18.30** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **19.15** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.25) **19.55** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **20.35** FBI: International (s.4) **21.20** FBI (s.5) **22.00** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **22.40** NCIS (s.22) **23.25** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **00.05** Law & Order (s.24) **00.45** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.25) **01.30** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **02.10** NCIS (s.22)

HOT CHANNEL 8

(H8)

**06.00** Better Days: Ze'ev Revach **07.20** TMZ Investigations: Matthew Perry & the Secret Celebrity Drug **08.05** Hagashash **09.00** House of Kardashians **09.55** Year on Planet Earth **10.45** No Child Spread **12.00** Hagashash **13.00** House of Kardashians **13.50** Year on Planet Earth **14.40** No Child Spread **15.55** Better Days: Ze'ev Revach **17.10** Year on Planet Earth **18.05** House of Kardashians **19.00** No Child Spread **20.15** Hagashash **21.15** Queen Camilla **22.05** My So-Called Selfish Life **23.25** The Syringe Killer **00.15** Queen Camilla **01.10** My So-Called Selfish Life **02.30** The Syringe Killer

YES DOCU

(Y8)

**07.30** Last Flight Home **09.15** Small Town News: KPVM Pahump **09.45** How Do You Measure a Year? **10.15** The Truth About Killer Robots **11.35** One Nation Under Stress **12.45** Cocaine Bear: The True Story **13.40** Mama's Boy **15.20** Last Flight Home **17.05** Small Town News: KPVM Pahump **17.35** Kareem: Minority of One **19.00** The Telemarketers **20.00** Clinicade Migrants **20.40** Open Your Eyes **21.15** The Americas **22.00** Dangerous Dynasty: House of Assad **22.50** Monster of Jerusalem **23.45** How To with John Wilson (s.3, 2 eps) **00.45** A Dangerous Dynasty: House of Assad **01.35** Monster of Jerusalem **02.30** How To with John Wilson (s.3, 2 eps)

HISTORY

(Y44/H43)

**05.20** American Pickers **06.05** Palmach Training Units **06.35** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.5, 2 eps) **08.00** Lost U-Boats of WWII **08.40** Pawn Stars Do America (s.3) **09.20** American Pickers **10.05** The Icons That Built America **10.50** Ancient Aliens **11.30** Dark Marvels **12.10** The Proof is Out There (s.5) **12.55** The Unbelievable with Dan Aykroyd (s.2) **13.35** Mysteries Unearthed with Danny Trejo **14.20** Pawn Stars **15.00** American Pickers **15.45** The Toys That Built the World (s.3) **16.25** Born to Fly: Danny Shapiro **17.35** The Unbelievable with Dan Aykroyd (s.2) **18.15** Mysteries Unearthed with Danny Trejo **19.00** Lost U-Boats of WWII **19.40** Ancient Aliens **20.20** The Proof is Out There (s.5) **21.05** Pawn Stars **21.45** American Pickers **22.30** Pawn Stars **23.10** The Curse of Oak Island (s.12) **23.50** Lost U-Boats of WWII **10.35** The Proof is Out There (s.5) **01.15** Dark Marvels **01.55** The Unbelievable with Dan Aykroyd (s.2)

YES TV DRAMA

(Y5)

**06.00** Accused **06.50** Suits (s.3) **07.40** Berlin Blues **08.15** Maxima **09.10** Accused **10.00** The Bold and the Beautiful **10.25** The Young and the Restless **11.10** Elsbeth (s.2) **11.55** Matlock **12.35** Suits (s.3) **13.20** Berlin Blues **14.00** Maxima **14.50** Accused **15.35** Suits (s.3) **16.20** The Bold and the Beautiful **16.45** The Young and the Restless **17.30** Maxima **18.20** Elsbeth (s.2) **19.05** Matlock **19.55** The Bold and the Beautiful **20.20** The Young and the Restless **21.00** Miss Fallaci **21.55** Chicken Sisters **22.45** Mixx (s.2) **23.10** Billions (s.4) **00.10** Outlander (s.7) **01.10** Mixx (s.2) **01.35** Billions (s.4) **02.35** Outlander (s.7)

YES TV ACTION

(Y6)

**06.00** 9-1-1 (s.6, 2 eps) **07.30** Trigger Point **08.20** Law & Order: Toronto: Criminal Intent **09.05** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.24) **09.50** NCIS (s.22) **10.35** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **11.20** 9-1-1 (s.6, 2 eps) **12.50** FBI: International (s.2) **13.35** Law & Order: Toronto: Criminal Intent **14.20** Law & Order: Special Victims

Unit (s.24) **15.05** Trigger Point **16.00** 9-1-1 (s.6, 2 eps) **17.30** NCIS (s.22) **18.15** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **19.00** FBI: International (s.2) **19.45** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.24, 2 eps) **21.15** FBI (s.7) **22.00** FBI: International (s.4) **22.45** FBI: Most Wanted (s.4) **23.30** The Responder (s.2) **00.20** True Blood Season (2 eps) **02.05** House of the Dragon

YES TV COMEDY

(Y7)

**06.10** The Neighborhood (s.6, 2 eps) **07.00** Hot in Cleveland (s.6, 2 eps) **07.55** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **09.05** Kid Sister (2 eps) **10.00** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **10.50** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **11.45** Married with Children (s.7, 2 eps) **12.40** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **13.50** The Neighborhood (s.6, 2 eps) **14.40** Hot in Cleveland (s.6, 2 eps) **15.30** Kid Sister (2 eps) **16.25** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **17.15** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **18.10** Married with Children (s.7, 2 eps) **19.00** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **20.10** Kid Sister **20.35** Kid Sister (s.2) **21.00** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **21.50** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **22.40** Married with Children (s.7, 2 eps) **23.30** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.6, 2 eps) **00.30** Entourage (s.7, 2 eps) **01.30** Grow'n-ish (s.6, 2 eps) **02.20** Hot in Cleveland (s.6, 2 eps)

EUROSPORT

(Y61/H59)

**07.00** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Round 1 **11.00** Marathon - 2025 Seville Marathon **12.30** Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Crans-Montana, Switzerland **13.30** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Round 1 **16.30** Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Sestriere, Italy **17.30** Cycling - Volta ao Algarve in Portugal **18.15** Cycling - Vuelta a Andalusia in Spain **19.00** Sailing - Vendée Globe Magazine **20.00** Biathlon - World Championship in Switzerland **21.00** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Round 1 **23.00** Cycling - Volta ao Algarve in Portugal **00.00** Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Crans-Montana, Switzerland **01.00** Biathlon - World Championship in Switzerland **01.30** Ski Jumping - World Cup in Hinzenbach, Austria **02.30** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Round 1

## MOVIE CHANNELS

HOT CINEMA 1

(H16)

**08.00** Pelé: Birth of a Legend (USA, 2016). Biographical Dir: Jethro Zimbalist, Michael Zimbalist. With Kevin Paula, Leonardo Lima, Carvalho, Sergi Jorge. **09.45** Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (USA, 2003). Action. Dir: James Waite. With Alicia Silverstone, Simon West. With Angelina Jolie, Jon Voight. **11.25** Unknown (UK/Germany/France/Canada/Japan/USA, 2011). Thriller. Dir: Jaume Collet-Serra. With Liam Neeson, Diane Kruger. **13.20** Any Given Sunday (USA, 1999). Sports drama. Dir: Oliver Stone. With Al Pacino, Cameron Diaz, Dennis Quaid, James Woods, Jamie Foxx, LL Cool J. **16.00** RED 2 (USA/France/Canada, 2013). Action. Dir: Dean Parisot. With Bruce Willis, Helen Mirren, John Malkovich. **17.55** Duplicity (USA, 2009). Romance. Dir: Tony Gilroy. With Julia Roberts, Clive Owen. **20.00** Dead Man Down (USA, 2013). Action. Dir: Niels Arden Oplev. With Colin Farrell, Noomi Rapace, Dominic Cooper. **22.00** Rambo: First Blood (USA, 1982). Action. Dir: Ted Kotcheff. With Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna, Brian Dennehy. **23.30** Hunter Killer (UK/China/USA, 2018). Action. Dir: Donovan Marsh. With Gerard Butler, Gary Oldman, Common. **01.35** The Black Dahlia (Germany/USA, 2006). Mystery. Dir: Brian De Palma. With Josh Hartnett, Scarlett Johansson.

HOT CINEMA 2

(H17)

**06.25** 13 Minutes (USA/Canada, 2021). Action. Dir: Lindsay Gosling. With Anne Heche, Thor Birch, Amy Smart. **08.15** The Forger (USA, 2014). Crime thriller. Dir: Philip Martin. With John Travolta, Christopher Plummer, Tye Sheridan. **09.50** The 33 (Chile/USA, 2015). Biography. Dir: Patricia Riggen. With Antonio Banderas, Rodrigo Santoro, Juliette Binoche.



Robert Viglasky / Yes

"Silent Night," Yes Movies Comedy, 23.10.

**11.55** Patriot Games (USA, 1992). Thriller based on Tom Clancy's best-seller. Dir: Phillip Noyce. With Harrison Ford, Ann Archer, Sean Bean. **13.50** The Numbers Station (USA, 2013). Action. Dir: Kasper Barfoed. With John Cusack, Malin Akerman. **15.20** T.I. (Ireland/France/UK, 2016). Crime mystery. Dir: John Moore. With Pierce Brosnan, Karen Moskow, Jason Barry. **16.55** The Survivalist (USA, 2021). Action. Dir: Jon Keeyes. With Jonathan Rhys Meyers, John Malkovich, Ruby Modine. **18.30** Lethal Weapon (USA, 1987). Action. Dir: Richard Donner. With Mel Gibson, Danny Glover. **20.20** Dangerous (USA, 2021). Action thriller. Dir: David Hackl. With Scott Eastwood, Kevin Durand, Famke Janssen. **22.00** Mad Max: Fury Road (Australia/USA, 2015). Action. Dir: George Miller. With Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, Nicholas Hoult. **23.55** Wire Room (USA, 2022). Action thriller. Dir: Matt Eskandari. With Kevin Dillon, Bruce Willis, Oliver Trevino. **01.35** Safe House (USA/South Africa, 2012). Action. Dir: Daniel Espinosa. With Denzel Washington, Ryan Reynolds.

HOT CINEMA 3

(H18)

**07.25** Maggie Moore (USA, 2023). Comedy. Dir: John Slattery. With John Hamm, Tina Fey, Christopher Denham. **09.05** Le Week-End (UK/France, 2013). Comedy. Dir: Roger Michell. With Lindsay Duncan, Jim Broadbent, Jeff Goldblum. **10.40** The Love Letter (France, 2021). Romantic comedy. Dir: Jerome Bonnell. With Gregory Montel, Anais Demoustier. **12.10** The Wedding Year (USA, 2019). Comedy. Dir: Robert Luketic. With Sarah Hyland, Tyler James Williams, Jenna Dewan. **13.45** Moving On (USA, 2022). Comedy. Dir: Paul Weitz. With Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Malcolm McDowell. **15.15** Gringo (Australia/USA, 2018). Action comedy. Dir: Nash Edgerton. With Joel Edgerton, Charlize Theron, David Oyelowo. **17.05** Serendipity (USA, 2001). Romance. Dir: Peter Chelsom. With John Cusack, Kate Beckinsale. **18.35** My Old Lady (USA/UK/France, 2014). Comedy romance. Dir: Israel Horovitz. With Kevin Kline, Kristin Scott Thomas, Maggie Smith. **20.20** Can You Keep a Secret? (USA, 2019). Romantic comedy. Dir: Elise Duran. With Alexandra Daddario, Suniata Mani, Tyler Hoechlin. **22.00** Something's Gotta Give (USA, 2003). Comedy. Dir: Nancy Meyers. With Jack Nicholson, Diane Keaton, Amanda Peet. **00.05** Notting Hill (USA, 1999). Romantic comedy. Dir: Roger Michell. With Julia Roberts, Hugh Grant, Rhys Ifans. **02.10** The Players (Les Indes France, 2012). Comedy. Dir: Emmanuelle Bercot. With Fred Cavayé, With Jean Dujardin, Gilles Lellouche.

HOT CINEMA 4

(H19)

**06.05** Contagion (USA/United Arab Emirates, 2011). Sci-fi thriller. Dir: Steven Soderbergh. With Matt Damon, Kate Winslet, Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Marion Cotillard, Laurence Fishburne. **07.50** Downton Abbey (UK/USA, 2018). Drama. Dir: Michael Engler. With Stephen Campbell Moore, Michael Fox, Lesley Nicol. **09.30** A Man in a Hurry (France, 2018). Comedy. Dir: Hervé Mimran, Julie Gali. With Fabrice Luchini, Léila Bekhti. **11.30** Priscilla

Shira Kadari-Ovadia

The school day will begin with the shaharit morning prayer, but wearing a skullcap is considered mandatory or even recommended. Throughout the day, the children will often explore religious themes but without linking them to politics. The classroom will serve as a beit midrash, a place of religious study, but class discussions will also include works by modern Hebrew poets such as Haim Nahman Bialik and Ehud Manor.

First grade at Nevia, which is scheduled to open next year in Jerusalem, will be a sort of religious-secular educational initiative. A contradiction? Not necessarily, say the institution's founders, who aim to establish a school providing what they describe as a "Jewish-communal-state education – an approach that seeks to "liberate Jewish education from tribal identity politics and restore it to the community and the traditional continuum where the majority of Israelis are," as they describe it.

So how does such a vision take shape in practice? Officially, the first-grade class (which may eventually expand into a full-fledged elementary school) is part of the state education system, which at least according to customary designations, is what secular students attend.

But Nevia's founders say their initiative aims to create an educational substream open to students from across Jerusalem, regardless of their family's level of religious observance.

"We want the school's Jewish identity to be something parents actively engage with and help to shape," says Keren Apfelbaum-Riff, one of the school's founders. "We're well aware that we're stepping into Israeli society's most sensitive minefield – Judaism. We're trying to neutralize the bomb and replace suspicion with trust."

Along the way to such a change, challenges and difficulties may arise, because, for example, Jewish studies have a central position at the school, both in the attention that they receive and in their importance. (Every morning following the prayer service, there will be a beit midrash-style period dedicated to a subject related to Judaism or the Hebrew language). This emphasis is also reflected in practice, in prayer. "We're still deliberating over the grace after meals," Apfelbaum-Riff said.

Nevia's location is also noteworthy. The school will begin operating in the coming school year as a first-grade class within the long-established Ge'ulim school, a state secular school in Jerusalem's Baka neighborhood ("which welcomed us generously," Apfelbaum-Riff noted).

This setting may raise concerns, particularly given the steady decline in the percentage of elementary school students in Jerusalem's state secular education system, which currently stands at 9 percent. In addition to the first-grade class, two kindergartens based on a similar state sec-



Children attending the open house at the Nevia school in Jerusalem in February.

Sraya Diamant

# In this first-grade class, children don't define themselves by religion

### The founders of Jerusalem's Nevia initiative are pursuing an approach that seeks to 'liberate Jewish education from tribal identity politics'

ular-Jewish educational approach will open next year.

Educator Rachel Sulski Myerson was involved in the early stages of the establishment of Nevia and considered sending her youngest son there. "I love the desire to strengthen common ground and finding compromises really appeals to me," she told Haaretz. "I believe in it."

But she ultimately decided not to pursue it – not because she opposed the initiative, but due to her support for other principles that she considers equally important.

**'I don't need the word "secular" to explain to my children why my mother drives on Shabbat. She drives on Shabbat because she drives on Shabbat,' says Apfelbaum-Riff.**

"I've concerned that a framework such as Nevia will attract secular students away from 'proper' state [secular] schools, and in the end, it would come at their expense," she said, echoing the concerns of a considerable number of secular parents in Jerusalem. The demographic concern over the shrinking of

so-called "regular" secular state schools in Jerusalem ultimately tipped the scales for Sulski Myerson.

"In the end, I'm secular. I don't want to erase my secular identity, and it's important to me to strengthen the secular schools in the city."

Apfelbaum-Riff acknowledges these concerns, particularly over the "flight" of secular residents from Jerusalem. But she believes the initiative meets the needs of a broad, traditional segment of the public that sends their children to Orthodox state religious state, for lack of an alternative – but not only to those schools.

"We're surrounded by friends 'on the spectrum' from the secular direction who are losing their connection to the city," she said, and she believes that Nevia, which seeks to give parents a significant role, will help strengthen a sense of belonging to the city even among secular residents.

As for the sense of belonging for future students, Nevia appears to have started off rather well. The excited kindergarten children who came to meet their future classmates a week ago didn't seem particularly concerned with questions of sectorial identity. For those with or without a skullcap, the truly important questions were whether the teacher would be nice and how hard it would be to learn to read. With the help of their parents, the children wrote down their expectations and concerns

on green leaf-shaped cardboard.

Later in the meeting, the children said goodbye to their parents and participated in an activity focused on the connection between trees and human beings. The continuous link to the Jewish bookshelf was evident even in this brief activity. Initially, the children read aloud a verse that is originally from the biblical Book of Deuteronomy, "for is the tree of the field man...." They then moved onto an ecological activity, sorting various items according to their role in the life cycle of a tree, from compost to fruit.

In the meantime, the parents were meeting with Nevia's founders. Questions about prayer and the beit midrash did not really concern them, since it was why they registered their children in the first place. What interested them more were questions about homework, exams and the method of teaching, which emphasizes active learning over the teacher delivering lessons to the class.

#### Beyond definitions

Nevia's guiding principles closely resemble an existing educational model that integrates religious and secular students – a trend that began around 30 years ago with the establishment of the Keshet School in Jerusalem (preceded by schools in the mixed religious-secular West Bank settlements of

Tekoa and Kfar Adumim) and has since grown slowly yet steadily.

Even before that, in the 1970s, the Tali school network – of enriched Jewish studies – was founded. In that case, it was parents who had immigrated from the United States and had ties to Conservative Judaism who sought to establish

a state school in Jerusalem's French Hill neighborhood where Jewish studies would be afforded a prominent place – independent of the Orthodox establishment that oversees state religious schools.

When the State Education Law was enacted in 1953, the goal was to eliminate the political divisions be-

#### 59 hostages, 514 days in captivity

## 'I thought nothing was worse than a father burying a son, but there is'

Ran Shimoni

"You know something?" says Avi Ohana, whose son Yosef Chaim Ohana is still being held hostage in the Gaza Strip. "Two or three days before the massacre, we were together at the synagogue during Sukkot. I gave him a blessing over the lulav and etrog. At that moment of the blessing, I put my hand on his head and said, 'God will save you from death and torment.' We hugged and I haven't seen him since. He is in my thoughts 24 hours a day, I dream of him every night. I still don't know why I told him that. That's what having a father's heart is like, I suppose."

Avi Ohana had already felt his heart beat with unbearable pain. 14 years ago, he lost his third son, Asher Yitzhak, who died of cancer at the age of 8. Yosef Chaim, the eldest, is now 24. That was the worst crisis in his life, a family trauma that took a heavy toll.

But since the abduction of his eldest son on October 7, 2023, he has been living through a nightmare unlike any he had ever experienced. "I thought there was nothing worse than a father burying a son, but it turns out that there is," he says.

"Asher Yitzhak was sick, but he was by my side. We cared for him. We knew of his every movement. Now I know absolutely nothing about Yosef Chaim. My son has been in an unknown place for so long and I cannot help him except through prayer. That is a crushing realization."

Ohana tries to avoid the news. He doesn't consume it and he doesn't appear in it. "It's too hard for me," he says. Faith saves him; he finds solace in prayer.

"I throw myself onto God, it's the only thing I can lean on," he says. "I



Avi Ohana holding a picture of his son Yosef Chaim. Ilan Assayag

don't understand how it's possible to tolerate this without faith. I believe that He protected him on that day, and that He is protecting him now."

A sign of life was received from Yosef Chaim last month, delivered by returning hostages. That was the first evidence that he had survived for so long, since the abduction from the Nova music festival.

Three friends who were with him there said that they ran along a road to help people escape, how they carried a stretcher with a woman wounded from gunfire on top, how Yosef Chaim was miraculously saved from a rocket-propelled grenade and how they lost track of him. His father says that an official notification arrived only three weeks later. He was abducted at around 9 A.M.

tween educational streams in favor of a unified state system, under which all students would study together. The system was to allow each community to provide education according to its beliefs and values for up to a quarter of the total study hours.

In practice, however, state religious education gained autonomy and remained under the control of religious Zionist parties, while the idea of secular schools that emphasized the wishes of parents and the community gradually faded.

At the heart of both initiatives – Tali and integrated education – is a dissatisfaction with the dichotomy between religious and secular Israeli identities and between state (secular) and state religious education. It may not be a coincidence that these initiatives gained momentum in Jerusalem and only later spread to other parts of Israel.

"Jerusalem, or at least parts of it, is home to a certain stream within Judaism consisting of people who could be described as 'in a gray area' – not Orthodox on the one hand, but also not fully secular," says Yair Ettinger, a commentator on issues of religion and state at Israel's public broadcaster, Kan.

"[These are] people many of whom were raised religious and today are somewhere on the religious spectrum, or more simply put, traditional," he says. "A large portion of them, by the way, are Ashkenazi traditionalists. In these areas [of Jerusalem], there's demand for schools that say to people: 'Come as you are.'"

Nevia's founders believe that despite the similarities with the integrated education model, their initiative has a right to exist in its own right. "Integrated education asks parents to define whether their child is religious or secular," says Apfelbaum-Riff.

As a result, in some integrated schools, children are divided every morning between a so-called prayer

group and a study group for secular students. In a certain sense, she notes, this actually accentuates the differences between the groups, whereas for many families today, these definitions are more flexible, existing on a spectrum when it comes to commitment to halakha, Jewish religious law, without necessarily requiring labels of "religious" or "secular."

"If Keshet's original message was about the meeting point between 'religious' and 'secular,' it has since changed," Ettinger says. "Those who are already between these two definitions are now seeking to meet others like themselves in school."

Apfelbaum-Riff intentionally avoids using the terms "religious" or "secular." She grew up in a home in which the religious commandments were never discussed while her partner grew up in the ultra-Orthodox Tel Aviv suburb of Bnei Brak.

The couple's home today, she says, is "very Jewish, with a lot of thought. I don't need the word 'secular' to explain to my children why my mother drives on Shabbat. She drives on Shabbat because she drives on Shabbat."

Gal Am-Shalom, whose eldest daughter, Yael, will start school at Nevia next year, is a representative example of the school.

"I come from a secular home, my partner is religious and our home is somewhere in between," she says. She and her partner met in the army, the first stop on the path through life for most Israelis, where religious and secular people have a chance to meet.

"Thoughts regarding how an 'interfaith' couple approaches their kids' education have been with us for a long time because once you enter the system, you suddenly have to decide," she says.

"What I liked about Nevia was the idea that you don't have to decide, that things aren't dichotomous."

Yair Aminoff, who worked with him in recent years at the bar of a well-known restaurant in Tel Aviv. "He was a true chemist of alcohol, creating drinks out of nothing. I remember he once prepared a cocktail with caviar. And to think he taught himself everything."

Yosef Chaim joined the restaurant a few months after Aminoff, and quickly became a prominent figure. "He has a different presence – strong self-assurance, full of curiosity and openness," he said.

Yosef Chaim's picture hangs over the bar since his abduction. For his colleagues, who took care to make toasts in his honor, talk about him, prepare cocktails according to his recipe – it all became too painful a reminder at some point.

"It was hard for me to stay there. You see his picture at every shift, you hear how customers ask about him and their subsequent shock. It is present all the time," says Aminoff, who left a few months later. Another bartender left at the same time. "The place became a trigger for her, and for all of us to some extent," says Aminoff.

At the start of the war, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised Ohana that the country would do everything to bring Yosef Chaim home. "We had a promise that there would be no political considerations, that he would bring home the hostages even at the expense of his government," says Ohana. "I heard that with my own ears."

As time passes, he still asks himself whether Netanyahu has kept that promise. "I don't know what to think. It sometimes feels yes and sometimes feels no," he admits. "I'm just waiting for my son to come, and I believe with faith that that will happen."

## sudoku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

5	9	2	6	4	8	1	7	3
7	8	6	3	5	1	4	9	2
4	1	3	2	9	7	6	5	8
2	7	8	5	3	6	9	4	1
3	4	5	1	8	9	7	2	6
9	6	1	7	2	4	8	3	5
8	2	7	9	6	5	3	1	4
1	5	4	8	7	3	2	6	9
6	3	9	4	1	2	5	8	7

Tips and a computerized version of Sudoku can be found at [www.sudoku.com](http://www.sudoku.com)

8		6						
			6				3	7
4		3	7		1			
			2		9	7		
9	4						3	5
				7	6	2		
5				6				
	3		9		8		7	
	6		3		4	8		1

Difficulty: Medium

# Kfar Azza is torn between memory and rebuilding

People describe feelings of abandonment as they struggle to live in houses that were the scene of Hamas’ massacre

Yossi Melman

Effie Skornik is perched on a ladder, tightening the last screws in a pergola above the entrance to an apartment in the renovated neighborhood of Kibbutz Kfar Azza. It's called Green Floors, after the color of the original floors in these kibbutz homes built about 50 years ago. Skornik isn't a certified builder, but he has learned about construction and renovation on the job.

A former combat soldier in the Paratroopers Brigade, Skornik used to work for the council of the sports betting lottery. Now in his 70s, he's one of thousands of volunteers from Brothers and Sisters in Arms, the movement that filled the vacuum created by the government's failure to rebuild the Gaza border communities.

This organization of men and women, who serve or have served in the reserves, mobilized to help the battered communities of the south. They collected donations of cash and equipment from Israel and abroad to fund the renovation of 16 homes severely damaged by the terrorist infiltration of October 7, 2023. Eyal Naveh, an activist in Brothers and Sisters in Arms, estimates that it will cost about 4 million shekels (\$1.1 million) to complete the work on Kfar Azza.

"We started working about a week after the war broke out," says Rafi Bielasiak, a director of the initiative who is also active in Brothers and Sisters in Arms. "In about two weeks the apartments will be ready, including a safe room, of course, and they'll be fully accessorized with refrigerators and cabinets."

"But more than the satisfaction from the work, I and almost everybody involved in the project has been moved by the chance to connect with the community. Liora Eilon, who lost her son Tal, who commanded the kibbutz's emergency squad, told me that we're giving them light and hope," Bielasiak says, referring to Sgt. Tal Eilon, who was 46 when he died fighting.

The kibbutz members hesitated about whether to give the renovation work to Brothers and Sisters in Arms, a group the pro-Netanyahu right has dubbed "traitors." The organization actively protested against the government's attempt



A house in Kfar Azza that was destroyed on October 7 and is waiting to be renovated.

Ellyahu Hershkovitz

to weaken the judiciary. Some members feared that the choice to give the work to Brothers and Sisters in Arms might be seen as a political move; others believed it would help the government shirk its responsibility to rebuild the communities. In the end, the decision was made when the kibbutz members couldn't resist the enthusiasm and heartfelt desire of the volunteers, both professionals and others willing to take on any job. They arrived from all over the country to spend weeks on the initiative.

### The landscape and the horror

On the coldest day in years, when temperatures at noon Monday dropped to 6 degrees Celsius (43 Fahrenheit) at the kibbutz, I took a walk along Azza's paths. The landscape is amazing. After the rains, even in an arid year, the Western Negev is splendid. The green fields are around 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) from Gaza; you can see the buildings in the Jabalya refugee camp. I visited Kfar Azza on October 9, 2023, and the sights, especially the young people's neighborhood next to the kibbutz fence, were shocking. Burned-out houses, and walls pocked with bullet holes and crushed by anti-tank missiles. Adhering to the concept that Hamas had been de-

terred, the Israel Defense Forces' Home Front Command had severely weakened the kibbutz's security squads. Two years before the October 7 massacre, officers from the Home Front Command and the Operations Directorate, and a representative of the National Security Council appeared before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. They tried to justify the decision that Gaza-border security squads should deposit their weapons in their community's armory, even though every squad member had a safe at home for storing a gun.

Col. (res.) Nira Shpak, a member of Kibbutz Kfar Azza and a former lawmaker for Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party, opposed the decision. She warned: "That's likely to end in a situation where terrorists infiltrate the kibbutz and the emergency squads have to run to the armory instead of coming out with guns and killing [the infiltrators]. When that happens, don't come to beg forgiveness." Her prophetic statement remains haunting.

At 6:33 A.M. on October 7 – that is, four minutes after making it through the border, hundreds of terrorists arrived in pickup trucks and stormed the kibbutz. Upon hearing the air raid sirens, Nira and her husband, Zohar Shpak, a former investiga-



A house riddled with bullet holes in Kfar Azza.

Ellyahu Hershkovitz

tions officer in the police, rushed to their safe room with their daughter Dor, their grandson Rif and their two dogs.

"Until that day we knew that the safe room was designed to be entered for a short period until the Qassam rockets fell; then we'd leave and return to our routine," Zohar Shpak says.

"Nobody prepared us for over 20 hours locked in a safe room. We didn't know what was happening outside, and only Nira's interactions... the requests for help on WhatsApp groups, allowed me to understand the severity of the event."

"Leaving the safe room and [seeing] the bodies scattered everywhere, mainly of terrorists, made it clear to me

that we had undergone a serious incident, but we didn't realize how serious. We understood the real picture only days and weeks later, and when we learned the numbers, we realized the magnitude of the government's neglect and abandonment." During Hamas' attack on the border communities, about 330 soldiers and officers were killed, 924 civilians were murdered (according to the figures of the National Insurance Institute that were published last week), and another 251 living and dead people were abducted to Gaza. Over two-thirds of the victims were slaughtered or abducted from four main venues: the Nova music festival and the kibbutzim Nir Oz, Be'eri and Kfar Azza.



Brothers in Arms working to rebuild Kfar Azza.

Yossi Melman

At Kfar Azza, 64 people were murdered and another 20 kibbutz members were abducted, among them entire families, including women and children. The terrorists looted property and set houses on fire with the people inside. A substantial number of the acts of sexual violence took place on the kibbutz's paths.

On Wednesday the IDF released its investigation into what happened at Kfar Azza, which was prepared by the Paratroopers Brigade commander, Col. Oded Ziman. His findings don't reveal anything new, and above all there's no answer on why the army needed three days before the last terrorist was killed or fled.

### Justice and humaneness

In his capacity as a lawyer, Shpak is a member of the nongovernmental organization October 7 Justice Without Borders, or 07J. The group strives to be a legal front against Hamas and its accomplices by providing pro bono legal advice to survivors of the October 7 atrocities. The organization's work is based on three principles: defending the rights of victims, pursuing legal procedures (diplomatic/international, criminal/civil and with international investigative mechanisms), and gathering and preserving evidence.

It intends to submit documentation and evidence to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and to war crimes prosecutors in Germany, France, the United States, Israel and other countries.

"We're doing what the government can't do, based

on universal principles of humaneness without borders. That's our mission," the group says on its website. "The evidence gathered by the NGO is even more terrifying than the horror film that the IDF distributed worldwide," Shpak adds, referring to the raw footage of the attack compiled by the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. In an interim report published last week, the State Comptroller's Office said that "the Prime Minister's

### Zohar Shpak: 'The Green Floors neighborhood has been renovated by a volunteer group, Brothers in Arms, not the government. The neglect and abandonment continue.'

Office is delaying projects for developing the Tekuma region" – the rebuilding of the Gaza border communities. According to the report, "The fact that for half a year no director has been appointed to the Tekuma Administration – for political reasons – and the government's deliberate foot-dragging in implementing the Tekuma Law are sabotaging efforts to rehabilitate the Gaza border communities."

"More and more bureaucratic departments have been set up," Nira Shpak says. "But there's no inspection and no keeping track

of every shekel they take from us, the public. They're investing in concrete rather than in communities, in the soul and in resilience." According to Zohar Shpak, "Physical and psychological rehabilitation is the government's obligation, an obligation that the State of Israel isn't meeting. And as proof, to this day the rehabilitation isn't even nearing its conclusion – just the opposite. The Green Floors neighborhood has been renovated by a volunteer group, Brothers in Arms, not the government. The neglect and abandonment continue. That hurts."

"There's another challenge. The houses that couldn't be used for residential purposes have already been demolished, but there has been no decision on those that were desecrated."

The members of the communities that suffered the greatest damage – Kfar Azza, Nir Oz and Be'eri – are trying to decide how to balance commemorating the murder victims and their destroyed homes with the strong desire to return to normal life. They're trying to decide how to remember and not forget, while realizing that it's impossible to live on a memorial site.

This dilemma is amplified when I continue on to our Kibbutz Nir Oz. There, I come across the home of the Bibas family – the mother and her two sons, one 4 years old and one a baby – who were murdered in Gaza. Their father was released from Hamas captivity last month. Visitors passing by stop to light a memorial candle, dozens of which have been placed at the entrance of the house.

# City bat, country bat: Urban life is changing the timing of birth

Groundbreaking Tel Aviv University study shows that urbanization is affecting procreation in mammals, especially in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Center mall

Ruth Schuster

Modern city life is an unnatural environment that affects our very biology. Light and noise pollution impair our sleep, smog affects our longevity and crowding shatters our nerves. All that could be expected.

It also turns out that Egyptian fruit bats in the city give birth earlier than their counterparts in the countryside. How much earlier? About 2.5 weeks on average, which is considerable given that gestation in this species lasts four months.

Previous research has shown that the city life brings substantial changes in the reproductive cycles of some seasonally breeding animals among us. It has been shown in some birds and lizards.

Now, a paper published in BMC Biology in January by the Tel Aviv University bat research team headed by Prof. Yossi Yovel links the urban environment to the timing of birth in mammals – specifically, Egyptian fruit bats – for the first time. Since we, too, are mammals, this study hits closer to home than afflicted reptiles even if human procreation isn't seasonal.

The Egyptian fruit bat's range spans much of Africa, the Middle East and parts of Eurasia. In Israel, the team confirmed, the species has two breeding seasons:



A fruit bat flying with a pup clinging to her belly.

Yuval Barkai

spring-summer (April to August) and autumn-winter (October to February).

The best time to sample the Israeli bat colonies for pregnancy was December and March-April, the team determined. They focused chiefly on the spring breeding season, because that is when the bats would face a problem. Fruit bats do not like the cold and, in winter, pup survival rates are lowest.

For the research, the team sampled five rural and five city colonies over three years – in total, 561 mothers and 123 pups, and factored in the human

population density in their foraging territories, among other things. Any male bats caught were immediately released since they were not germane to this study. The females were examined for pregnancy by palpation, by a bat specialist veterinarian.

Rural bats were sampled from colonies in caves in Tinsmet, Aseret, Bnei Brit, Segafim and Beit Guvrin. Many of these caves also have archaeological significance. Beit Guvrin features caverns carved into the bedrock by locals hoping to avoid the Romans and other invaders. Tins-

emet Cave was shared with early humans in the Middle Paleolithic – we are not sure which species.

City bat colonies were sampled in Herzliya, in Jaffa and at a few sites in Tel Aviv, including under a bridge and everybody's favorite colony – the one in the underground parking lot of Dizengoff Center mall.

The team reached the conclusion that the city bats are giving birth about 2.5 weeks before the country bats. Why might that be? And how?

They don't know how but can hypothesize why, especially noting the outlying re-

sults of the fruit bat colony in Dizengoff Center, which enjoys the warmest living conditions and gave birth the earliest of the lot.

### Honey trap

Imagine that you are a lady and, after sex, could choose when to give birth – within certain constraints. You can optimize parturition, to a degree. It is the dream.

"We don't know how they do it," Yovel tells Haaretz by telephone. "Are they mating earlier? Or perhaps shortening the pregnancy? A lot of bats can control their pregnancy, delaying the implantation of the fetus or by sperm storage. There are different forms of delay."

In the Fischer pygmy fruit bat, *Haplonycteris fischeri*, post-implantation embryonic development can delay for as long as eight months. The females get pregnant in June, the embryos undergo "superficial implantation" and then their development may almost stop. The pygmy bat can prolong pregnancy to 11 and a half months. We just note that the male pygmy bat is fertile the year round. The California leaf-nosed bat, *Macrotus californicus*, can suspend embryonic development for up to 4.5 months.

Back in the world of the central Israeli fruit bat, Yovel says, "I argue that the urban bats are operating on

a natural schedule. The ones delaying may be the rural bats."

Why would they do that? Because it's colder in the country than it is in the city. Say you are a bat who gets pregnant in the spring season and are "scheduled" to give birth toward winter – the toughest time for any micromammal, let alone an aviating one. You would do well to hold onto that fetus until the weather begins to warm, improving its probability of survival. Unless you live in a parking lot where you have less of a chill constraint because of the urban heat island effect.

"The Dizengoff Center colony, for example, offers a unique case in which the bats roost in an active suppliers' [truck] parking lot where the temperature is always much higher than the ambient temperature outside. On average, the pups in this colony were born earlier than in all other colonies," the team writes. Yay, trucks.

So the bats have the "winter" kids towards spring and then, if they have a second pup that year, it's at the end of summer.

And there you have the early birth of the country fruit bat. This enables the pups to eat as much as possible before the cold winter months, during which Israel's bats do not hibernate.

Note that in some birds in urban environments, earlier

procreation correlated with the heat effect is a two-edged sword. The white-winged chough breeds earlier than its country counterparts but it is also more likely to suffer from nest failures: City as honey trap.

The bats do not have the same problem: "Roosting in urban colonies did not decrease the bats' reproductive success, in contrast to

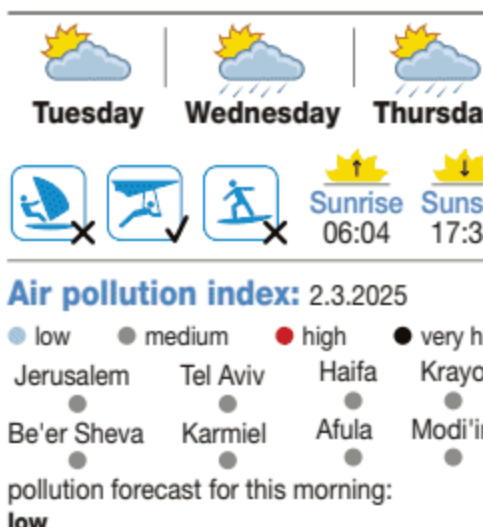
what has been suggested for some urban birds," the team reported.

Another possible contribution is food. Yovel and the team point out that urban fruit bats may also experience fewer constraints because we humans plant unseasonable, ornamental and exotic fruit trees in our cities and water them the year round.

### Weather

#### Slightly warmer

Monday will be partly cloudy and slightly warmer. Tuesday will be the same. On Wednesday, it will start to cool down; rain will fall, mainly in the center of the country and in the south, with possible thunderstorms and a risk of flash flooding in riverbeds in the east and south. Thursday will be partly cloudy and it will rain in the center and south, accompanied by thunderstorms. There may be some scattered showers in the north.



Ramadan Fast ends: 17:44 Fast starts: 04:40