

## International

# ROW OVER WEST BANK OUTPOST EXPOSES ZIONIST ENTITY'S CABINET SPLIT

## THERE WON'T BE ONE LAW FOR THE ARABS AND ANOTHER FOR JEWS... LAW IS LAW!

**JERUSALEM:** Cracks have emerged within Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hardline government, with a row over the demolition of a settlement outpost in the occupied West Bank testing the fledgling coalition.

Netanyahu vowed in December to expand settlements across the West Bank, as he returned to power at the helm of the most right-wing government in Zionist history. But a split over policy on the ground surfaced last month, Zionist troops moved in to dismantle a wildcat outpost in the northern West Bank dubbed Or Haim on orders from Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. Despite such outposts being considered illegal by the state, two far-right members of the cabinet, Finance Minister Bezale Smotrich and Public Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, objected to its demolition. "There won't be one law for the Arabs and another for the Jews... law is law!" said Ben-Gvir, calling for the demolition of unauthorised Palestinian construction in the largest part of the West Bank where Zionist entity exercises civil as well as security control.

Ben-Gvir has authority over border police operating in the West Bank, while Smotrich has taken on an additional role overseeing civil affairs in the Palestinian territory.

Netanyahu backed Gallant over the outpost affair, saying settlements must be "coordinated in advance with the prime minister and security officials, which was not done in this case". While the Or Haim outpost consisted of just a handful of makeshift structures, the handling of its demolition hints at problems within the coalition.

Gideon Rahat, senior fellow at the Zionist

Democracy Institute, said the situation has "very dangerous potential for Zionist entity". "It's not normal to have two people that have parallel responsibilities when it comes to the use of force," he told AFP, with Smotrich sitting in the second ministerial post created in the defence ministry.

Smotrich boycotted a cabinet meeting in protest over the handling over the affair. Zionist soldiers returned to the Or Haim site two days after the initial evacuation, to expel settlers attempting to rebuild in the area.

"While this seems like a small conflict that was resolved, it shouldn't be there in the first place," said Rahat. The issue is bound to resurface because there are dozens of similar outposts dotted across the West Bank, which Zionist entity has occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967.

All settlements in occupied territory are deemed illegal under international law, but Zionist entity distinguishes between wildcat outposts, built without its permission, and state-approved settlements which are home to an estimated 475,000 Zionists.

At the Maaz Esther outpost, northwest of Ramallah, a 20-year-old resident said she hoped Smotrich will "take all of his ideals and implement them". "The fact that there is a right-wing government is good, but there are a lot of influences from outside," said Emona, who requested her surname be withheld for personal reasons.

Construction at Maaz Esther began more than a decade ago, according to Zionist anti-settlement movement Peace Now, and the outpost has been cleared and rebuilt repeatedly. For Emmanuel Navon, a politics professor at Tel Aviv University,



**KHAN AL-AHMAR:** File photo shows, Palestinian children sit outside their home in the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in the occupied West Bank, near the east Jerusalem suburb of Abu Dis, during a visit by the Head of the European Union's Mission. Zionist entity's Supreme Court on February 7 approved a new delay to the controversial demolition of the Khan al-Ahmar community. — AFP

Smotrich's decision to skip the cabinet meeting was intended to "show his constituents that he cares about his agenda".

### 'Hit the jackpot'

But he expected Netanyahu not to be swayed by his extreme-right allies. The prime minister will "focus on settlement expansion, not too much, not too little. He's always playing his game of equilibrium between international pressure and domestic pressure."

The dispute is unlikely to bring down the coalition,

because both the premier and his cabinet ministers, Smotrich included, are determined to stay in power. Netanyahu's "not going to let go, because of his legal troubles. They're not going to let go because they hit the jackpot" by entering government, Navon said. The prime minister has been on trial for months on corruption charges, which he denies. At another settlement outpost in the northern West Bank, resident Itamar Azulai was against Smotrich's support for Or Haim. "I think it was a mistake to build it from the beginning," said the 60-year-old, running a cafe at the Har Gidon outpost near Nablus. — AFP

## BRITAIN TO EXTEND N IRELAND ELECTION DEADLINE BY A YEAR

**BELEAST:** Britain will extend a deadline for elections in Northern Ireland, the government said Thursday, as an impasse over Brexit trade in the UK-run province shows little sign of swift resolution. In a statement the UK said it would push back the deadline for Northern Ireland's parties to form a government for a year to 18 January 2024 but reserved the right to call an election at any time in the intervening period.

The government's previous cut-off point for parties to form a power-sharing executive at Northern Ireland's devolved assembly expired on 19 January 2023. Northern Ireland has been without a devolved government since February last year because of a walk-out by the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

It had been due to share power with pro-Ireland Sinn Fein, which became the biggest party in the assembly after the elections last May. "Twelve months and one assembly election later, it is disappointing that people in Northern Ireland still do not have the strong devolved government that they deserve," Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said.

The DUP collapsed the power-shar-

ing executive in February 2022 because of its opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol. The protocol, signed between London and Brussels as part of the UK's Brexit divorce from the European Union, governs trade in the British province, and keeps Northern Ireland in the European single market.

The DUP wants the deal overhauled or scrapped entirely, arguing it casts Northern Ireland adrift from the rest of the UK and makes a united Ireland more likely. Heaton-Harris said that following discussions he had concluded "an election in the coming weeks will not be helpful or welcome".

He added the extension was designed to give Northern Ireland's parties "more time... to work together and return to government as protocol discussions continue between the UK and EU". Heaton-Harris met the Vice-President of the European Commission, Maros Sefcovic, in Brussels on Wednesday.

The British government said it is "working hard to resolve the problems caused by the protocol, and the desire to see an agreed solution with the EU". It added the extension to the Northern Ireland deadline "does not influence protocol discussions and that the UK Government wants to see a deal between the UK and EU as soon as possible". — AFP

## ERITREA LEADER CALLS TIGRAY RIGHTS ABUSE CLAIMS A 'FANTASY'

**NAIROBI:** Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki said Thursday that allegations of rights abuses by Eritrean troops in Ethiopia's Tigray region during the two-year war there amounted to "fantasy". "This is a fantasy in the minds of those who are... in this factory I call a factory of fabricating misinformation," Isaias told reporters during a visit to Kenya, deflecting questions about the presence of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia.

Eritrea's army supported Ethiopian forces during the federal government's war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and has been accused by the United States and rights groups of some of the conflict's worst atrocities.

The war ended with a peace deal signed in November last year that called for the withdrawal of foreign forces, but there was no specific mention of Eritrea, whose regime considers the TPLF its arch-enemy. Asmara was not a party to the agreement and its troops continue to be present in parts of Tigray, according to residents who accuse the soldiers of murder, rape and looting.

Asked about the continued presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray, Isaias said: "I have no intention of interfering in this matter in spite of the disinformation campaign going



**NAIROBI:** Kenya's President William Ruto (L) and Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki (R) walk together after a joint press conference following their meeting at the State House in Nairobi, Kenya on February 9, 2023. — AFP

on trying to disrupt the process of peace in Ethiopia and trying to create conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia."

"Don't take Eritrea as a pretext for the problems in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the whole region. Don't try to drag us into a situation. It is a fantasy of those who want to derail any peace process achieving its goal," he added. One of the world's most authoritarian states, Eritrea was sanctioned by the United States in 2021 following its decision to send troops into Tigray in support of Ethiopia and has been accused of massacring hundreds of civilians.

The devastating conflict in northern Ethiopia that erupted in November 2020 has killed untold numbers of civilians, displaced

more than two million and left millions more in need of humanitarian aid. Under the terms of the peace deal, the TPLF agreed to disarm and re-establish the authority of the federal government in return for the restoration of access to Tigray, which was largely cut off from the outside world during the war.

Since the peace agreement, there has been some resumption of aid deliveries to Tigray, which has long faced dire shortages of food, fuel, cash and medicines. Basic services such as communications, banking and electricity are slowly being restored to the stricken region of six million people, with national carrier Ethiopian Airlines resuming commercial flights between Addis Ababa and Tigray's capital Mekele in December. — AFP

## KUWAIT PLEDGES \$30 MILLION AS...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, hopes were fading Thursday for rescuing survivors of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, which has killed nearly 20,000 people in one of the deadliest tremors in decades. Bitter cold has hampered the four-day search of thousands of flattened buildings and the 72-hour mark that experts consider the most likely period to save lives has passed.

Relatives were left scouring body bags laid out in a hospital car park in Turkey's southern city of Antakya to search for missing relatives, an indication of the scale of the tragedy. "We found my aunt, but not my uncle," said Rania Zaboubi, a Syrian refugee who lost eight members of her family, as other survivors sought loved ones' bodies among the corpses.

The 7.8-magnitude quake struck as people slept early Monday in a region where many people had already suffered loss and displacement due to Syria's civil war. An official at the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing told AFP that an aid convoy reached rebel-held northwestern Syria Thursday, the first since the earthquake that has left survivors sleeping outdoors due to aftershock risks. A decade of civil war and Syrian-Russian aerial bombardment had already destroyed hospitals, collapsed the economy and prompted electricity, fuel and water shortages.

Temperatures in the Turkish city of Gaziantep plunged to minus five degrees Celsius (23 degrees Fahrenheit) early Thursday, but thousands of families spent the night in cars and makeshift tents-too scared or banned from returning to their homes. Parents walked the streets of the city-close to the epicenter of Monday's earthquake-carrying their children in blankets because it was warmer than sitting in a tent.

Some people have found sanctuary with neighbors or relatives. Some have left the region. But many have nowhere to go. Gyms, mosques, schools and some stores have opened up at night. But beds are still at a premium and thousands spend the nights in cars with engines running to provide heat. "When we sit down, it is painful and I fear for anyone who is trapped under the rubble in this," said Melek Halici, who wrapped her two-year-old daughter in a blanket as they watched rescuers working into the night.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after mounting criticism online over the initial disaster response, visited one of the hardest-hit spots,

Kahramanmaraş, and acknowledged problems. "Of course, there are shortcomings. The conditions are clear to see. It's not possible to be ready for a disaster like this," he said Wednesday.

Officials and medics said over 16,000 people had died in Turkey and 3,162 in Syria from Monday's 7.8-magnitude tremor, bringing the confirmed total to nearly 20,000. Experts fear the number will continue to rise sharply. "We are now racing against the clock to save lives together," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Twitter.

Despite the dimming hopes for rescues, thousands of local and foreign rescuers have not given up in the hunt for more survivors. Two dozen children and some of their parents from northern Cyprus - 39 Turkish Cypriots in all-were on a school trip to join a volleyball tournament when the quake hit their hotel in southeast Turkey's Adiyaman. Their home region's government has declared a national mobilization, hiring a private plane so they could join the search-and-rescue effort for the children.

Ilhami Bilgen, whose brother Hasan was on the volleyball team, looked at the frightening pile of concrete slabs and heavy bricks that used to be the hotel. "There's a hollow over there. The children may have crawled into it," Bilgen said. "We still haven't given up hope." Dozens of nations, including China and the United States have pledged to help, and search teams as well as relief supplies have already arrived.

In Brussels, the EU is planning a donor conference in March to mobilize international aid for Syria and Turkey. The European Union said the conference would be held in coordination with Turkish authorities "to mobilize funds from the international community in support for the people" of both countries.

The bloc was swift to dispatch rescue teams to Turkey after the massive 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country on Monday close to the border with Syria. But it initially offered only minimal assistance to Syria through existing humanitarian programs because of EU sanctions imposed since 2011 on the government of President Bashar Al-Assad in response to his brutal crackdown on protesters, which spiraled into a civil war.

On Wednesday, Damascus made an official plea to the EU for help, the bloc's commissioner for crisis management said. The Turkey-Syria border is one of the world's most active earthquake zones. Monday's quake was the largest Turkey has seen since 1939, when 33,000 people died in the eastern Erzurum province. In 1999, a 7.4-magnitude earthquake killed more than 17,000. — Agencies

## MAN UNITED 'IN TALKS' WITH...

Continued from Page 1

regulations. Britain's Press Association said QSI was considering the purchase of a minority stake in United or another Premier League club. The organization is a subsidiary of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the country's sovereign wealth fund, which has assets worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

The chief executive of the QIA, Mansoor Al-

Mahmoud, told Bloomberg last month: "Sovereign wealth funds are becoming investors in some of the clubs and you will not be surprised if we invest in this (area) but again we go into a very fundamental process and making sure if we invest this is very commercially driven for our future generations."

The unpopular Glazers saddled United with huge debts and further angered fans by backing the failed European Super League project in 2021. The club have not won the Premier League since 2013 and have failed to win any silverware since 2017. United are third in the Premier League this season after an improvement in form under manager Erik ten Hag, who took over before the start of the current campaign. — AFP

## N KOREA UNVEILS 'RECORD' NUMBER...

Continued from Page 1

North's largest Hwasong-17 ICBMs, as well as vehicles apparently designed to carry a solid-fuelled ICBM, Seoul-based specialist site NK News reported.

North Korea has long sought to develop a solid-fuel ICBM because such missiles are easier to store and transport, are more stable and quicker to prepare for launch, and thus harder for the United States to detect and destroy pre-emptively. KCNA said the crowd broke into "enthusiastic cheers" when the ICBMs appeared in the square, and that the parade also featured "tactical nuclear weapons operation units".

North Korea stages military parades to mark important holidays and events and are closely monitored by observers for clues about the reclusive regime's progress on its banned ballistic and nuclear weapons. The parade showcased the "tremendous nuclear strike capability of the DPRK", KCNA said, referring to North Korea by its official name. Commercial satellite images taken by Maxar Technologies at 10:05 pm on Wednesday night showed a large North Korean flag and thousands of people assembled at Kim Il Sung square.

### 'Full-fledged nuclear power'

Analysts said the scale and scope of the weaponry on display showed advances that represented a challenge to the United States. "They've shown more ICBMs in the latest parade than they've ever shown before, consistent with a longstanding directive from

Kim Jong Un on mass producing nuclear weapons and delivery systems," US-based analyst Ankit Panda told AFP. This is an issue, he said, because Washington has planned its homeland missile defense system to deal with a "limited" missile threat from North Korea.

"North Korea has now demonstrated that their nuclear forces are far from 'limited'," Panda said. Other analysts said Pyongyang was sending a clear message by parading more of Kim's most advanced Hwasong-17 missiles. "This is North Korea trying to declare itself a full-fledged nuclear power," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, told AFP. "Kim Jong-un let North Korea's expanding tactical and long-range missile forces speak for themselves."

Pyongyang's state media had for years never mentioned Kim's children - Seoul's spy agency believes he has three with wife Ri - but he appeared with his daughter Ju Ae at an intercontinental ballistic missile launch in November last year. The 10-year-old has since appeared alongside her father at several high-profile events, most recently a banquet on Tuesday to mark the army's founding anniversary. Analysts say she is the equivalent of a North Korean "princess" and that her appearances with her father could indicate she is his anointed successor.

North Korea has held four night-time military parades in recent years, including the latest on Wednesday. The parade comes after North Korea vowed to expand and intensify military drills to ensure its readiness for war. This followed a record-breaking year of weapons tests, including firing its most advanced ICBM. Kim recently called for an "exponential" increase in Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal, including mass-producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes. — AFP