

HAARETZ

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An avoidable clash in Tel Aviv

"We were very surprised by the level of violence, with sights you see only in the West Bank." That's what a senior police officer had to say about Saturday's violent events in Tel Aviv, in which supporters and opponents of the regime in Eritrea clashed with the police. But these violent outbursts against a festival scheduled to be held by the Eritrean embassy in Tel Aviv, were foretold. They could have been avoided.

Representatives of the Eritrean community asked that the event be cancelled, warning police last week of a violent conflagration, which is exactly what happened in Tel Aviv. Community leaders informed the police that similar events organized in recent weeks by Eritrean embassies around the world also led to numerous violent incidents. In Toronto, nine people were injured; in Sweden, 100 demonstrators were arrested and 50 injured, with similar events in Germany, the U.S. and Britain.

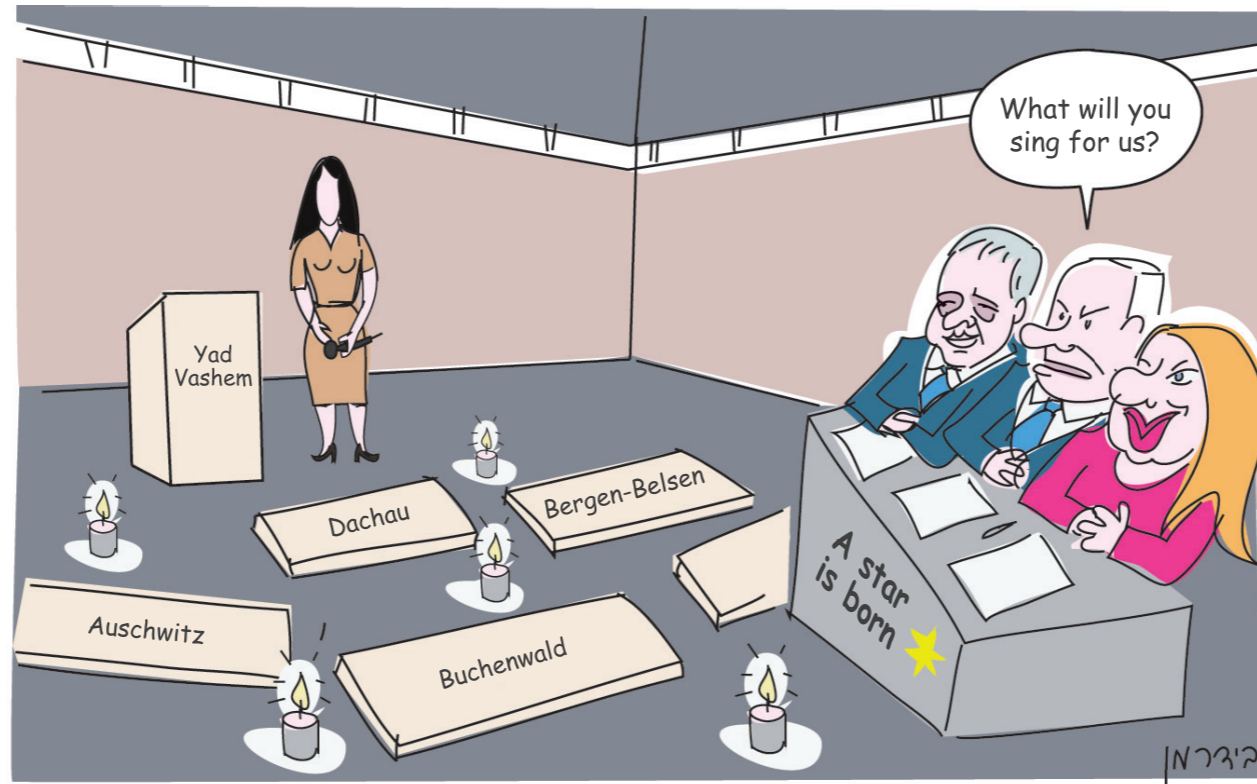
Community representatives explained to the police that clashes around the world had raised the tension between regime supporters and opponents among the Eritrean community in Israel. This tension was evident in the past in Israel, spilling over into violent incidents between the two sides. In 2020, a regime supporter was stabbed to death.

Despite this intelligence, the police forecast that the intensity of events in Israel would not be similar to that seen overseas. The event was not cancelled and the police made do with preparing crowd dispersal equipment.

The police erred in their assessment, and the result was total insanity. Hundreds of asylum seekers opposing the regime broke through police barriers and trashed the hall in which the embassy's festival was scheduled to take place. This was followed by violent clashes between regime supporters, opponents and police forces. Demonstrators broke the windows of stores, police vans and private cars, as well as beating policemen. The police responded by firing live and sponge-tipped bullets. Hours passed before the police succeeded in taking control of the riot. The result was 150 people injured, 19 of them seriously, including 15 from gunshot wounds. Forty nine of the injured people were policemen. Fifty Eritreans were arrested.

Saturday's unprecedented violence was a direct result of a lack of preparedness. If the police had arrived in force, its maneuverability would have been greater. Police sources admitted that they failed to identify the volatile potential of the event and did not gather sufficient intelligence, incorrectly assessing the expected level of violence. "All they had to do was to look at Facebook and listen to the warnings. They disdainfully dismissed the severity of the event as far as the regime opponents in Israel were concerned," said a police source.

The bottom line is that this contempt is not surprising. A straight line connects the contempt exhibited by the police and the awful and racist attitudes encountered in Israel by refugees and asylum seekers, particularly Eritreans.



Amos Biderman | amosb@haaretz.co.il

Iris Leal

Dear parents of soldiers

An officer and three soldiers were wounded last week by an explosive device while guarding worshippers at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus. If you think you've been hearing about this location with growing frequency in recent years, you're not mistaken. Over the last decade, the number of organized visits to the site has doubled, as has the volume of visitors.

Lawmaker Zvi Sukkot, a target of Shin Bet security service investigations, elicited much rage after he tweeted, "One cannot blink for a moment when facing terror" – while someone else's children were being evacuated to the hospital. "Our thanks go to [Israel Defense Forces] commanders and soldiers for guarding the [tomb's] entrance even when confronted with erupting terror. Terror will not win, thanks to the righteous Joseph!"

These few words contain so many elements that are foreign to the worldview of many parents whose children have been hurt while defending the delusions of Sukkot and his friends. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. For too long, military protection of sites such as Joseph's Tomb or the settlers in Hebron, or other "holy" sites, has been accepted by the majority as a "necessary evil."

The radiant, smug face of Sukkot on the night of the incident and the singing of "May your village burn" on the bus of worshippers heading to the tomb attest to the fact that this is an enterprise that blends a messianic vision, burning hatred, sadistic joy and a mystical belief of people visiting the tombs of *tzadikim*, or righteous men, and the power of prayer at those sites. Just like Sukkot promised, the righteous Joseph will protect worshippers. I'm not criticizing or mocking the custom of visiting these tombs. It's the right of anyone who derives consolation and hope from such visits, which aid some people in contending with hardship in their lives, as long as the tombs are not situated in the heart of Palestinian towns, and their protection does not risk the security of soldiers.

Ahead of the Knesset's winter session, many mothers have announced that they won't let their children serve in the army if the new draft law is passed, with yeshiva

students obtaining a blanket exemption. They are demanding equality in bearing the burden of service. They don't share the rabbis' belief that studying Torah protects the country, and that when people are required to make such a heavy sacrifice, with the story of Isaac's binding repeating itself in various versions on a daily basis, one cannot risk the most precious thing without the power of faith in Abraham.

That's all good and well. But what about the faith of Sukkot, Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir and all the rest, who are convinced that ruling over all our forefathers' domain is a reasonable basis for security, just like a true economic policy should be based on a biblical phrase conditioning favorable results on following God's injunctions? Do these mothers share their beliefs? Why does an exemption for the ultra-Orthodox on the basis of the belief that Torah studies protect the people of Israel evoke rage and contempt, but sending our sons to sacrifice their lives for the last five decades on the altar of the notion of a divine promise – a belief that's equally foreign to those protesting women – is perceived as reasonable and logical?

The debate over military service began because of the constitutional overhaul. Reserve soldiers are saying that the basic contract between them and the state has been violated, and that as long as the threat of this legislation is not removed, they will refuse to volunteer. On this backdrop, the draft bill is also evoking fierce opposition among cabinet members and voters. But if the status quo is broken, why can't we also start a discussion about serving in the occupied territories?

Every week, you can see the violence of settlers tormenting and humiliating Palestinians, with soldiers standing by and letting this happen. Are you, dear parents, willing to let your children serve such a vision? Perhaps it's better for them not to risk their lives just because Sukkot was stricken with a desire to pray and torment? If we open everything up for review, it's worth looking at the details of this old contract and demanding that people at least be allowed to choose whether they wish to kill and be killed in the service of the settlers.

Gideon Levy

Falling into the Oslo Accords trap

We fell into the Oslo trap. It was a honey trap, sweet and hope-inspiring. How pleasant it was to be enmeshed in its web for a few years, with all the conferences and meetings. But Oslo didn't advance peace, it only moved it farther away, beyond the horizon, consolidating the occupation and perpetuating the settlements. This is of course the wisdom of hindsight and no, it's not because of Rabin's assassination. History will not judge the Israeli instigators of Oslo favorably. They cannot be forgiven for missing an opportunity, no less fateful than the missed chances before the Yom Kippur War.

One scene in particular is etched in my mind from those heady days, and how gay they were. One day, when we left the Gaza Strip through the Erez border station, we turned around and waved goodbye to the Strip: Goodbye Gaza, we won't see you again, not under an occupation. Yasser Arafat was already stationed in Gaza, catching a cold in his Spartan office under the Tadiran air conditioner, left behind by the Israelis, and hopes soared. A tour for journalists, held a few months later in honor of the inauguration of a vacation village in the northern Gaza Strip, attended by Israeli celebrities, only heightened the sense of

delight. A delegation to Europe, consisting of members of the Knesset and a Palestinian legislative council, including Marwan Barghouti, only intensified the illusion.

We thought the occupation was about to end, that a Palestinian state was around the corner, and that we could vacation at a Club Med in Beit Lahiya; we thought Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon

The most fateful issue wasn't discussed. The Palestinians made the mistake of their lives, with the Israelis acting in their customary rapacious and scheming ways.

Peres wanted peace. Only a handful of sourpuss leftist radicals thought we should not be taking that road. They were right and we were wrong. We again have to apologize to the radical left, which saw it all before anyone else did.

The minutes of the cabinet meeting that ratified the accords 30 years ago, first published last week, tell the whole story. The querulous tone, the pessimism, the contempt, the almost physical revulsion at the Palestinians and their leader; the sense that Israel was "giving" more than it was "getting," the lack of any willingness to forge a belated justice, no taking of responsibility for

the crimes of 1948, not even for those of 1967; the total disregard for international law, the compulsive attention to security, only that of Israelis, obviously, the reference to Palestinian "terror" exclusively, not to Israel's actions, and the underlying fear of the settlers and their henchmen, who at that time were mere infants in comparison to the monsters they are now: All of these

mistake of their lives, with the Israelis acting in their customary rapacious and scheming ways. "What we were worried about was that they would raise the issue of the settlements," confessed Peres. "The issue of the settlements" as if this were the buzzing of a pesky fly that needs to be removed from the room. But the fly disappeared on its own. How fortunate. After all, if they had started pestering us with that "issue," we would have had to at least freeze settlement construction, the minimal step of any government striving to make peace.

That was the litmus test for ascertaining true intentions: If Rabin and Peres did not propose to freeze the construction of settlements, they did not intend for one minute to enable the establishment of a Palestinian state. It's that simple.

No, Rabin and Peres were not seeking justice or peace. They were seeking quiet, which enabled the tripling of the number of settlers and ensured the perpetuation of the occupation. For that, there is no forgiveness. Haaretz editor Aluf Benn misses Rabin (Haaretz, September 1). I find it hard to join him, despite my great admiration for the man and the pining for those days, which were indeed better. But there was no true striving for peace and justice there.

Eran Yashiv

Judges must be players in the political arena

The developments in recent weeks were supposed to clarify to Israel's judges the nature of the ongoing struggle between them and the politicians of the government coalition. But again and again, in statements and in court decisions, it seems as if the judges still do not understand their place in the political game. An example of their short-sightedness is the Supreme Court president's statement on August 3 to the effect that "we have received criticism every time a ruling was not to the liking of one party or another, but we insist on remaining apolitical." Another example was the court's August 6 decision, which signaled the possibility that it won't strike down the recent "incapacitation law." But the reality is that the Israeli justice system is a player in the political arena and must fight for its position and power.

In political economy research there is an approach positing that each branch of government pursues its own goals. A political player does not act only for the benefit of the people and of the state. In Israel today, the executive branch and the legislative branch, which are in practice a single branch, are led

by opportunists, messianic religious fundamentalists and extreme nationalists. Their main goal is to extract national resources.

In addition, there is the alarming possibility that the coalition will try to perpetuate its rule by creating various distortions in the Knesset election process. To stay on the field, the judiciary must internalize the rules and play by them. The judges cannot continue to play tennis when facing rugby players. The latter see the legal system as a barrier to the aforementioned extraction of resources. If the judges continue to show laxity, hesitation, cowardice and submission, it will not be long before they find themselves out of the game.

A striking example of the misunderstanding of the basic rules of the game is the behavior of the Jerusalem District Court judges presiding over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's trial. It began with the permission granted to Netanyahu, the defendant, to put on an aggressive performance for the media in the court building. It continued with the trial being conducted at a snail's pace for more than three years. It then featured Netanyahu's wife's devious presence at the testimony in the U.K. of witness Arnon Milchan. It culminated in the unbelievably irresponsible sugges-

tions made by the judges – in terms of contents and timing – to the prosecution in the so-called Case 4000. All these actions signal weakness and myopia. The disconnect from the political reality is reaching its peak now: While the country is burning, the court is in recess, and the defendant Netanyahu is hopping from one vacation spot to another.

No better is the conduct of the Supreme Court, which was supposed to put up a fight for its position and lead the entire court system. But in May 2020, 11 judges of the High Court rejected petitions to bar Netanyahu from serving as prime minister because he is a criminal defendant, with the court President Esther Hayut stating that "no fortress is falling." In this ruling, the judges allowed a bad player to continue to govern for his personal benefit and the benefit of his family. This decision is a stunning own goal that signaled to the man, who will go down in history as the greatest destroyer of the Jewish people from within, that he could continue unhindered.

Currently, the judges keep demonstrating that they are not interested, or are unable, to stay in the arena. How, for example, can it be explained that on July 25 petitions were submitted with respect to the Knesset law eliminating the

reasonableness standard – an issue at the heart of Israel's existential crisis – and the hearing was set for September 12, meaning it was postponed for seven weeks? It will probably take more than 10 weeks before a decision is made.

The judges should recall that this legislation was passed hastily, with violent debates, without taking into account the opinions of experts. And they give these brutes a leeway of months? How many more threats and how much more profanity can the judges take? In addition, Court President Hayut has decided that the court will convene to rule on that issue with the full team of 15 judges, with all the complications that engenders. It is not clear whether the judges understand the actions of the other players, or whether they have decided to give up.

Consider the counter-example of the United Kingdom in 2019, where 11 Supreme Court judges, after three days of intense deliberation, overturned the decision of then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson to prorogue parliament for five weeks, a step which would have weakened a significant arm of the three branches of government. The court's firm stance against the government signaled that it is a significant and powerful player.

Beyond these immediate, burning concerns, it seems that the judges have not sufficiently grasped the deep processes of economic and social destruction taking place here since January. In a country undergoing such destruction, the court system loses its status, even if it still exists on paper.

The courts, and especially the Supreme Court, are now getting the strong support of the very massive protest movement. Hundreds of thousands show up every week, and in a multitude of ways demand to uphold their rights as equal and free citizens. The protesters expect, and are entitled to, a strong and influential court system in Israel, one which protects human and civil rights.

The court has no right to continue to stutter and drag its feet. President Hayut must stop bowing her head, start playing by the rules demanded in this national emergency and lead the justice system to stand up against the attacks on democracy and against the corrupt, destructive politicians. If they do not do this today, she and her colleagues shall be kicked out of the game tomorrow.

Eran Yashiv is a professor of economics at Tel Aviv University and a member of the Center for Macroeconomics at the London School of Economics (LSE).

Kibrom Tewelde

Should we keep fleeing?

I'm writing this while I'm still upset, full of frustration and sadness. My friends were there, in the battlefield of south Tel Aviv. Some were injured and are still hospitalized. All of this could have been prevented, because for months we've been speaking out against this event.

The dictatorial regime in Eritrea has been pursuing us from our very first day in Israel. It's not enough that we fled from the regime in our homeland, it won't stop seeking us out in the places where we're seeking asylum and are trying to rehabilitate our lives. This cruel regime has tried to silence us and embitter our lives daily in the countries where we have sought asylum. It continues to try to do so today.

Recently clashes have broken out between the opponents and supporters of the Eritrean regime around the world. During the last month alone violent clashes were documented in Canada, Germany and Norway. Against the backdrop of these clashes, the cruel regime announced via the embassy in Tel Aviv plans to hold a political event. Government representatives, wearing identical shirts, explicitly threatened those who planned to protest. We warned about this.

Despite our repeated re-

quests last week, the police decided to permit this event by regime supporters, and the frustration mounted among asylum seekers. We set out to protest and the fears were realized: Harsh violence broke out from both sides, and things got out of control because the police were not properly prepared.

The dictatorial regime in Eritrea has been pursuing us from our very first day in Israel, trying to silence us.

You need to understand what it means to be an asylum seeker without legal status. Most Eritreans in Israel fled the cruel regime that has ruled the country since 1993, but Israel never seriously reviewed their asylum requests and therefore also never ruled on them. This means we are in limbo, sometimes unable to work and earn a salary, dependent on the goodwill of employers who turn a blind eye and on aid organizations.

On Saturday we learned – and you did too – that we're exposed not just to racism,

to pursuit by the immigration authority and to the poor living conditions of south Tel Aviv, but also to violence from the agents of the regime that we fled and to live fire by the police in the country where we hoped to find some quiet. The images of people fleeing police officers shooting at them, protesters strewn on the ground with bullets flying around them and the sound of stun grenades will stay with me for a long time.

I don't understand why supporters of the Eritrean regime are here in Israel, riding on the backs of us asylum seekers. Why does Israel let them be here, knowing full well that they serve a violent dictatorship? How could it be that Israel, a strong, democratic nation, repeatedly fails to protect true asylum seekers and permits those representatives of the dictatorship to persecute us within its territory?

I'm sure it won't end with Saturday's unrest. Dozens of injured people wound up in hospitals, but the lesson hasn't been learned. Regime supporters will continue to persecute us and the violence will escalate. The Israel Police must deal harshly with all violence and violations of the law.

The writer is an asylum seeker from Eritrea.