

# Tens of thousands join protests against Israeli judicial overhaul

Tens of thousands of Israelis joined protests across the country on Saturday against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bitterly disputed plans to tighten controls on the Supreme Court. The planned overhaul, which would give the government control over naming judges to the Supreme Court and let parliament override many rulings, was paused after opponents organised some of the biggest street protests ever seen in Israel, now in their 18th consecutive week, Reuters reported. The government accuses activist judges of increasingly usurping the role of parliament, and says the overhaul is needed to restore balance between the judiciary and

elected politicians. Critics say it will remove vital checks and balances underpinning a democratic state and hand unchecked power to the government. Five months into the far-right coalition's term, 74% of Israelis think the government is functioning poorly, according to a poll released by the Israeli public broadcaster on Friday. Crowds gathered in central Tel Aviv on Saturday in a show of defiance against plans which they see as an existential threat to Israeli democracy. Israel's Channel 12 estimated 110,000 people demonstrated in Tel Aviv alone, with other demonstrations held in cities across the country.

The planned overhaul has been put on hold in an attempt to give time for Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who plays a largely ceremonial role, to broker a compromise between the coalition and opposition which could see the legislation softened, but so far compromise talks have not born fruit. "I'm sure that we are closer than we can imagine," lawyer Dor Lasker, 35, told Reuters regarding the compromise talks. "I'm positive that it could happen." A statement from the Israeli president's office said King Charles III greeted Herzog after the coronation ceremony in London and commended him for his mediation efforts.



An aerial view shows protesters holding a sign with the silhouette of the face of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as they take part in a demonstration against Netanyahu's planned judicial overhaul, in Tel Aviv, on May 6, 2023.   
● ILAN ROSENBERG/REUTERS

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Japan's PM expresses sympathy for Korean victims



AP – Japan's prime minister expressed sympathy for the suffering of Korean forced laborers during Japan's colonial rule, as he and his South Korean counterpart on Sunday renewed resolve to overcome historical grievances and strengthen cooperation in the face of shared challenges such as North Korea's nuclear program. Comments by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during his summit with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol were closely watched in South Korea, where many still harbor strong resentment against Japan's 1910-45 colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula.

## Fighting in Khartoum as mediators seek end to Sudan conflict



A Sudanese refugee boy who fled the violence in his country looks out from his makeshift shelter, near the border between Sudan and Chad in Koufroun, Chad May 6, 2023.   
● ZOHRA BENSEMRA/REUTERS

Fighting could be heard in south Khartoum on Sunday as envoys from Sudan's warring parties were in Saudi Arabia for talks that international mediators hope will bring an end to a three-week old conflict that has killed hundreds and triggered an exodus. The U.S.-Saudi initiative is the first serious attempt to end fighting between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has turned parts of the Sudanese capital Khartoum into war zones and derailed an internationally backed plan to usher in civilian rule following years of unrest and uprisings. Battles since mid-April have killed hundreds of people and

wounded thousands of others, disrupted aid supplies and sent 100,000 refugees fleeing abroad. Thousands of people are pushing to leave from Port Sudan on boats to Saudi Arabia, paying for expensive commercial flights through the country's only functioning airport, or using evacuation flights. While mediators are seeking a path to peace, both sides have made it clear they would only discuss a humanitarian truce, not negotiate an end to the war. Confirming his group's attendance, RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, said he hoped the talks would achieve their intended aim of securing safe passage for civilians.

Hemedti has vowed to either capture or kill army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and there was also evidence on the ground that both sides remain unwilling to make compromises to end the bloodshed. The conflict started on April 15 following the collapse of an internationally backed plan for a transition to democracy. Burhan, a career army officer, heads a ruling council installed after the 2019 ouster of long-time leader Omar al-Bashir and a 2021 military coup, while Hemedti, a former militia leader who made his name in the Darfur conflict, is his deputy. Prior to the fighting, Hemedti had been taking steps like moving closer to a civilian coalition

that indicated he had political plans. Burhan has blamed the war on his "ambitions." The extensive use of explosive ordnance throughout the fighting has increased the danger to civilians, especially children who can mistake the munitions for toys and play with them, said the United Nations Mine Action Service. Western powers have backed the transition to a civilian government in a country that sits at a strategic crossroads between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Africa's volatile Sahel region. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan was travelling to Saudi Arabia at the weekend for talks with Saudi leaders.

## Israel demolishes Palestinian school, drawing EU rebuke



● HAZEM BADER / AFP

Israeli forces on Sunday demolished a Palestinian primary school in the occupied West Bank citing safety issues, drawing sharp criticism from the European Union which had funded the project. Palestinians hurled rocks at Israeli forces who fired tear gas at them, as bulldozers moved in on the site at Jabbet al-Dhib village near Bethlehem, AFP reported. The EU said it was "appalled" after Israeli forces arrived at dawn at the school site, which a Palestinian Authority official said served 45 students and consisted of five classrooms. A caravan and classrooms constructed of tin sheeting were cleared out of their contents before the demolition, an AFP correspondent said. COGAT, the Israeli Defence Ministry body overseeing civilian affairs in the occupied territories, imposed in March a two-month deadline to vacate the premises following an order by an Al-Quds court. The body had determined

that the school had been "built illegally" and posed a "safety hazard". Ahmed Naser, a Palestinian Education Ministry official, said the school had replaced another school demolished by Israel in 2019. He noted its remote location, which he said prevents the "displacement and forced eviction" of local Palestinians, charging that Israel "wants to confiscate these lands". The EU called on Israel to "halt all demolitions and evictions, which will only increase the suffering of the Palestinian population and further escalate an already tense environment". "Demolitions are illegal under international law, and children's right to education must be respected," the office of the EU representative to the Palestinian Territories said in a statement. In January, a group of UN experts had called for action to stop Israel's "systematic and deliberate" demolition of Palestinian structures.

## Yellen warns against debt ceiling talks with 'gun to the head of the American people'

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday warned that a failure by Congress to act on the debt ceiling could trigger a "constitutional crisis," with consequences for financial markets and interest rates. Yellen in an interview on ABC News's "This Week" said debt ceiling negotiations should not take place "with a gun to the head of the American people," and reiterated a warning to lawmakers the government could pay its bills only through early June without increasing the limit, which the government hit in January, Reuters reported. Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo also sounded the alarm on Sunday about the risks of a default during an interview on MSNBC's "The Sunday Show." "Default is catastrophic for the United States," Adeyemo said. "If we



● SARAH SILBIGER/REUTERS

were to default on our debt, it would have a terrible impact on interest rates." U.S. President Joe Biden will meet at the White House on May 9 with Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and top Democrats, kicking off a frantic few weeks of negotiation before the U.S. runs out of money to pay its bills as soon as June 1.



REUTERS – The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency warned on Saturday that the situation around the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear station has become "potentially dangerous" as Moscow-installed officials began evacuating people from nearby areas. Rafael Grossi, director general of the IAEA, called for measures to ensure the safe operation of Europe's largest nuclear plant as evacuations were under way in the nearby town of Enerhodar.

## Eight killed in Texas shooting

AP – Hundreds of terrified shoppers fled in panic after a gunman stepped out of a silver sedan and opened fire at a Dallas-area outlet mall, killing eight and wounding seven before being killed by a police officer who happened to be nearby, authorities said.