

ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.
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IN DRAMATIC MOVE, PLO PULLS OUT OF ALL AGREEMENTS WITH ISRAEL (Israel Hayom 10/30/18)

The Palestine Liberation Organization's Central Council declared that it was suspending its recognition of Israel until Israel agrees to acknowledge an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and with east Jerusalem as its capital, Ramallah's Wafa news agency reported Monday.

The council further decided to suspend all security and economic ties with Israel, as outlined in the 1994 Paris Economic Protocol.

The decision, announced after a two-day meeting in Ramallah, is declarative and nonbinding, the report said. According to the report, the PLO essentially wants to cease compliance with the 1993 Oslo Accord, on which the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is founded.

"In view of Israel's continued denial of the signed agreements, the PLO Central Council, in confirmation of its previous decision and considering that the transitional phase no longer exists, hereby decides to end the commitments of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority toward its agreements with the occupying power, suspend recognition of the State of Israel until its recognition of the State of Palestine on the June 4, 1967 borders with al-Quds [Jerusalem] as its capital; end security coordination in all its forms, and disengage economically from Israel on the grounds that the transitional phase, including the Paris Economic Protocols, no longer exist," the PLO said in a statement quoted by Arab media.

The organization further asserted that the Trump administration is "a partner of the Israeli occupation government and a part of the problem, not the solution," and lauded Abbas' efforts "in continuing to reject the so-called 'Deal of the Century' proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump and confronting it with all available means."

The PLO's Central Council further stated that it holds Hamas, the Islamic terrorist group that ousted Abbas' Fatah government from the Gaza Strip in a military coup in 2007, for the prolonged failure of the Egyptian-brokered reconciliation efforts between the rival Palestinian factions.

It further affirmed its rejections of "various suspicious projects" meant to "split Gaza from the West Bank," referring to recent Egyptian and U.N. efforts to broker a truce between Hamas and Israel and facilitate an agreement that would alleviate the dire economic crisis in Gaza.

JERUSALEM RUN-OFF RACE TO GO DOWN TO WIRE (JPost 10/31/18)

Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Alter, the grand rabbi of the Gerrer Hassidim, is expected to crown the next mayor of Jerusalem just ahead of the November 13 runoff race between city councilmen Moshe Lion and Ofer Berkovitch, sources close to both candidates said Wednesday.

In Tuesday's first round of voting, Lion won 33% of the vote and Berkovitch 29%, earning their places in the runoff. Jerusalem Affairs Minister Ze'ev Elkin finished a disappointing third with 20%.

Berkovitch's Hitorerut Party won six seats in the city council, giving him an advantage over Lion, whose Jerusalem Sheli Party did not win a single seat. But Lion can use the six seats of the haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Degel Hatorah Party, which backed him, as a base.

The haredim won a majority of the 31 seats on the city council, including Degel's six, Shas's five, Agudat Yisrael's three, and Bnei Torah's one.

An aide to Lion's political patron, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman, met Wednesday with United Torah Judaism MK Yisrael Eichler, who is a Belz Hassid. Agudat Yisrael city councilman Yohanan Weizman, a Gerrer Hassid who is close to Berkovitch, is expected to ask Alter not to back any candidate

and let his followers vote for Berkovitch or not vote at all.

Ger is the largest and most influential hassidic sect. Alter is not expected to issue a ruling until just ahead of the runoff race. The religious Zionist Bayit Yehudi Party and Meuhadim leader Aryeh King are expected to endorse Lion, but many of their supporters will back Berkovitch.

Berkovitch came to the Kedma Restaurant that overlooks the Old City walls from the Mamilla Shopping Center to thank his supporters, while Lion's party was held at the Pavilion Hall in the capital's Talpiot neighborhood.

"We proved that we can run positive and optimistic campaigns," Berkovitch told Army Radio Wednesday. "We showed that people of different positions and religious views can work together."

When asked if he represents a secular party, Berkovitch replied that "you can't define me as the secular candidate. I represent a wide movement that includes secular people, conservatives, religious people and even haredim."

He said that he plans to give each resident what he deserves to receive from the city council, "regardless of the size of his kippa."

Lion told his followers that they would celebrate their victory in two weeks. But he said he would start building a coalition immediately.

"I promise that in five years, Jerusalem will be in a different place," Lion said.

'IF YOU DECIDE ON YOUR CAPITAL, WE'LL GO WITH THAT' (Arutz-7 11/1/18)

President-elect of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro made clear that his election-campaign promise to move the Brazilian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was not just an empty one.

Bolsonaro, a 63-year-old Rio de Janeiro federal deputy and former army captain who ran on the Social Liberal Party ticket, defeated Workers' Party candidate and former Sao Paulo Mayor Fernando Haddad 55% to 45% in

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Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, NY	Young Israel of New Rochelle, NY
Hillel at Baruch College	Young Israel of Sharon, MA

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Sunday's runoff election.

During his election campaign, Bolsonaro had promised to close the Palestinian Authority's "embassy" in Brasilia in addition to moving his country's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem if elected.

However, a source close to Bolsonaro suggested following the election victory that the embassy move was not yet a done-deal, according to a report by Kan. The source claimed that Bolsonaro wanted to fulfill his campaign promise, but would first examine the issue in-depth, to see whether it would "promote peace in the Middle East."

Speaking with Israel Hayom in an interview published Thursday morning, Bolsonaro emphasized that his support for Israel before being elected was not just a campaign gimmick.

"Israel is a sovereign state," he said. "If you decide on your capital, we will go according to that. When I was asked during the campaign whether I would [move the embassy if I was elected], I said yes, and the one who decides on the capital of the state of Israel is you, not other nations."

"As for the Palestinian embassy," he added, "it is built too close to the president's palace...No embassy can be so close to the president's palace, therefore we intend to move it and there is no other way, in my opinion."

"Besides, Palestine first needs to be a state before it has the right to an embassy."

BEIT SHEMESH: DRAMATIC UPSET AS ALIZA BLOCH OUSTS ABUTBUL (JPost 11/1/18)

In a stunning upset, religious-Zionist mayoral-candidate for Beit Shemesh Aliza Bloch has won the race to city hall and narrowly beat her haredi rival and incumbent Moshe Abutbul by just over 500 votes.

The result constitutes a veritable revolution in the city whose population has become majority haredi in recent years, and where strong inter-communal disputes have arisen due to mismanagement by the mayor and his administration and the actions of extremist haredi elements in the city.

Beit Shemesh has been run for the past 10 years by Abutbul and a predominantly haredi municipal council, during which time many non-haredi residents, and according to the election results significant numbers of haredim, grew increasingly dissatisfied and hostile to the mayor's administration which has faced allegations of corruption and mismanagement of the city's affairs.

When the votes were counted after the election on Tuesday, Abutbul had a razor thin lead of 250 votes, but just over 1,000 soldiers' votes and some 300 votes of disabled people which are counted later remained unopened.

In the early hours of Thursday morning after significant delays those votes were finally counted, with 965 going to Bloch and 432 going to Abutbul, leaving Bloch with a winning majority of just 533, just 1.3 percent of the 42,000 votes cast.

Bloch went to the town square and delivered a victory speech to dozens of her most loyal supporters at 3am. They had stayed up during the vote count, which went on for several hours, due to objections from Abutbul and his lawyers.

They greeted her with singing, dancing, hugs and chants of "upheaval!" Bloch, who was also congratulated by top haredi rabbis, started her victory speech by saying the Shehehianu prayer.

"The people of Israel look today to Beit Shemesh with new hope," she said. "Beit Shemesh decided to cancel its walls. Beit Shemesh decided to tear down its dividers."

Bloch used the word for the barrier that separates men and women in a synagogue.

"What won this journey is that we all put our differences aside and focused on what is truly important," she said. "From today, Beit Shemesh will be a model for the nation."

Bloch is a veteran educator and school principal. She was backed by Likud, Bayit Yehudi, Labor and Kulanu. Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett

congratulated her, five years after he refused to endorse her.

"I have been embraced by the haredi community," Bloch said in an interview with The Jerusalem Post. "I have backing not only from English speakers and modern haredim, but also from Hassidim, Lithuanian and Sephardi haredim, who just want the city to be run better."

INSTAGRAM PAGE SHOWING LIFE ON GAZA BORDER GOES VIRAL (YNet 11/1/18)

An Instagram account started by eight 16-year-old girls who live in communities near the Gaza border, where they post images that show life under the threat of rockets and incendiary balloons, has become quite popular.

The social media page, called Otef Gaza, managed to get more than 50,000 followers within days of being launched.

The girls—Lee Cohen from Moshav Yesha; Maya Caspi, Lian Yifat, Shani and Stav Peretz from Kibbutz Kerem Shalom; Kim Ovitz from Moshav Ami'oz; and Amy Stadim from Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha—are very good friends who attend the Nofei ha-Bsor High School in the Eshkol Regional Council.

The idea to open the page came up during a joint bus ride.

"We went on an 'Israeli journey' as part of a school trip," said Cohen. "During the bus ride, we started thinking about the situation and talked about it a lot. We felt very frustrated that no one in the country really cares."

"If the same incendiary balloons were landing in Tel Aviv, things would have been different. We decided that this issue has to be brought up to the attention of the public, and most importantly, to the attention of the decision-makers. We talked to our tour guides on the bus and opened the page during the ride," Cohen went on to say.

The photos the 11th graders are uploading to the account document the events that take place in border communities—including one of thick smoke billowing from burning tires during border riots, and fires started as a result of incendiary kites and balloons.

Each image is accompanied by a caption. For instance, under a picture showing a burning kite, there is a sentence saying: "It's no longer child's play."

The Instagram account went viral soon afterwards. "We were completely shocked," Cohen said, adding that "within hours, we were flooded with countless inquiries and pictures. We could not believe we had reached so many followers. Within the first three days, we had more than 30,000 followers."

Due to the account's popularity, the girls are now receiving countless photos in real time from all around the border region, which they upload right away.

"People, it turns out, do not even know what life is like in the Gaza border communities," Cohen said. "It's unacceptable that we have to lock ourselves in our houses because of tire smoke from Gaza riots, and no one in Israel is aware of it."

"We live in a warzone, and it does not interest anyone in Israel. We see it in the comments. People write to us, asking: 'How do you live there?' Our goal is to reach the decision-makers ... so they would put an end to it," the 16-year-old stressed.

She said she hopes their Instagram page will reach people from all around the world so that "the story of the Gaza border communities will be told."

MOSSAD-PROVIDED INTEL HELPED DENMARK FOIL IRANIAN PLOT (YNet 10/31/18)

The Mossad provided Denmark and Sweden with the intelligence used to thwart a plot by the Iranian government intelligence service to assassinate an Iranian Arab opposition figure on Danish soil, an Israeli diplomatic official confirmed Wednesday.

The official said that due to increased efforts to foil attacks on Jewish and Israeli institutions, the Israeli spy agency collects a lot of information, including intelligence about plots that don't necessarily target Israel or Jews.

It is believed the Israeli-provided information allowed the Danes to stop the assassins, who had explosives in their possession, early on.

According to Danish intelligence chief Finn Borch Andersen, the attack was meant to target the leader of the Danish branch of the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz (ASMLA)—an opposition organization that Tehran blames for a September 22 shooting attack on a military parade in Khuzestan in which 25 Iranians were killed, many of them Revolutionary Guards troops.

After the attack in Khuzestan, Iran summoned the envoys of the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain and accused the three countries of harboring Iranian opposition groups.

On September 28, Danish police shut two major bridges to traffic and halted ferry services from Denmark to Sweden and Germany in a nationwide police operation to prevent a possible attack.

A few days earlier, the Norwegian suspect had been observed photographing and watching the Danish home of the ASMLA leader, police said.

On October 21, a Norwegian citizen of Iranian background was arrested in Sweden in connection with the plot and extradited to neighboring Denmark, Swedish security police said.

The suspect has denied wrongdoing and is being held in pre-trial custody until November 8. The Iranian government also denied any connection with the alleged plot.

On Wednesday, Iran expressed a "strong protest" to Danish ambassador to Tehran Danny Annan over what it described as the Danish officials' "hasty, political" and "uncalculated actions" in the case.

This is the second time in the past few months that Iran has been accused of trying to harm exiled Iranian opposition activists on European soil. In June, France foiled an attempted Iranian attack on an Iranian opposition conference in Paris. That attempt was also thwarted with the help of the Israeli Mossad.

"The Mossad's efforts have led to thwarting Iranian terrorism in France, Belgium, Austria, Germany and now Sweden and Denmark," an Israeli official said.

WATER INSTITUTES IN LOUISIANA, ISRAEL INK JOINT RESEARCH DEAL (Israel Hayom 10/31/18)

A Louisiana water research institute has signed a five-year agreement with an Israeli organization to conduct research together.

The document signing Monday by the Baton Rouge-based Water Institute of the Gulf and the Israel-based Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research came during Gov. John Bel Edwards' visit to Israel.

The agreement commits each organization to work collaboratively on groundwater research, applications to improve farming, improvements to drinking water aquifer use and other areas.

Edwards said the document meets the trip's spirit, which he described as aimed at joining "two peoples and two cultures in a way that brings lasting benefit to both our lands."

The Democratic governor is leading a 24-person delegation for a weeklong trip focused on possible trade prospects, energy issues and the cybersecurity industry. The group returns Friday.

AGREEMENT SIGNED TO REDUCE MILK PRICES (Arutz-7 10/31/18)

An agreement signed Monday night between local dairy farmers and the Ministries of Agriculture and Treasury will allow for foreign imports in the dairy sector, Channel 2 reports. The aim of the agreement is to gradually reduce the target milk prices over an extended period of time while supporting local dairy farmers with grants and investment.

The agreement, which was reached only after lengthy debate and negotiations, is intended to regulate the dairy sector for the upcoming decade. In the framework of the agreement, prices of dairy products will be lowered, supporting grants and investments given, and the import market will

be developed in tandem with a gradual lowering of import duties.

Within the framework of the agreement the target price for milk will decrease in the first year by an average of 4 agurot and in the last year by 20 agurot. Beginning 2019, the import duty will be reduced to 4.9NIS a Kg. By the last year of the agreement the duty is expected to reach 3.2NIS with a maximum reduction to 3NIS depending on target prices of milk.

THE ISRAELI FAR RIGHT'S AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES (Editorial, Ha'aretz 10/30/18)

As if the political affiliation of the murderer from Pittsburgh weren't known to everyone, it was very important to Israel's ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer, to cover up the killer's connection to his ideological home.

"One of the big forces in college campuses today is anti-Semitism," he said in an interview with MSNBC. "And those anti-Semites are usually not neo-Nazis on college campuses. They're coming from the radical left. We have to stand against anti-Semitism whether it comes from the right or whether it comes from the left," he said in an interview with MSNBC.

The fact that the man who entered the Tree of Life synagogue Saturday morning and ended the lives of 11 people is a declared member of the far right, a xenophobic white racist ultranationalist, doesn't make any special impression on Dermer. He insists on pointing a finger at anti-Semites "from the radical left."

Instead of talking about the negative influence of the discourse of hatred and the far-right spirit in President Donald Trump's America, Dermer turns the spotlight across the sea to the leader of the British Labour Party, "the anti-Semitic Jeremy Corbyn," and to anti-Semitism in Europe.

Nor did Dermer miss an opportunity to blame the Muslims; he insisted on mentioning that Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan called the Jews "termites" the previous week. He was also asked about Trump's statement last year describing neo-Nazi demonstrators in Charlottesville who shouted "Jews will not replace us" as "good people."

Dermer said he "didn't think the president's comments after Charlottesville were very good." But he was "not aware of a single non-Israeli leader that has made such a strong statement in condemning anti-Semitism," he added, referring to Trump's condemnation of the murders in Pittsburgh.

Dermer's words reflect the abyss between American Jews and the Israeli government. Many American Jews believe that the massacre in Pittsburgh reflects the rise of the far right in the United States under the sponsorship of Trump, whom they say encourages racists and anti-Semites and defends their right to bear arms.

But while they criticize Trump's violent messages and his use of the term "globalists," for example, which has clear anti-Semitic connotations, Israeli officials prefer to handle the far right and Trump with kid gloves.

It's hard not to conclude that the government considers the far right in the United States and elsewhere a partner in the battle against extremist Islam and "infiltrators," and sees its strengthening as a stamp of approval for continuing the occupation and deporting asylum seekers.

When Dermer, as Israel's ambassador, chooses to divert the fire from those who are really to blame to the European left and the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement on campus, he's proving that continuing the occupation is the top priority of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. It's a government that's even willing to turn a blind eye to the political changes in the United States and Europe that are endangering the lives of Jews in the Diaspora – and in the long run in Israel as well.

THE OMANI WAY OF SOLVING ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT (Smadar Perry, YNet 10/29/18)

Oman has a unique method to resolve conflicts called Sabla. This is essentially a way of mediating between the two sides seated opposite each other, which allows them to present their arguments and demands, and helps them to reach an agreement. The meeting of Sultan Qaboos bin Said—the

ruler of Oman—with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last Friday, is an attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the method of Sabla.

Indeed, Netanyahu arrived in Oman for a brief visit after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited the country a few days earlier and presented his position on the issue. Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf Bin Alawi, views Netanyahu's visit as "completely natural." According to Bin Alawi, the prime minister had asked the Sultan whether he could present his position on the conflict as well, and they replied: "Yallah tefadal, come."

There are courts in Oman, but the residents prefer the Sabla method. That is how they end financial disputes, arguments between ordinary citizens and the government, as well as conflicts with neighboring countries.

When Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power 40 years ago (after his father was ousted from power), he extended the authority of the Sabla system to be used as a conflict resolution method outside of the Sultanate: between Iraq and Iran, between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Now, the Sultan and his foreign minister want to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table through the means of Sabla, and they are working together with the United States. The Palestinians can boycott the US and Trump, but they can not brush off the Sultan of Oman.

Netanyahu's reception in Muscat was very respectful, despite the demonstrations that took place in the country against the visit of "the devil's representative," and despite the claims made by Iran and Hamas—suggesting that Netanyahu only visited the state for a photo-op and had no serious intention to make progress on the Palestinian issue.

The front pages of all the Omani newspapers published pictures of the prime minister with the Sultan, and even images of Sara Netanyahu, who joined her husband on this trip.

As far as Oman is concerned, once they have identified an opportunity to renew negotiations—they decided to do what is necessary in order to help.

HOW ISRAEL MADE FRIENDS IN INDIA (Mayuri Mukherjee, JPost 10/30/18)

The recent award of a \$777-million contract to Israel Aerospace Industries for the supply of air and missile defense systems to the Indian Navy has re-emphasized how India-Israel relations have evolved in the last two and a half decades. From outright hostility at the time of independence seven decades ago to a strategic partnership today, the bilateral has come a long way.

That this has been possible in part because of robust defense cooperation between New Delhi and Jerusalem is well-known but what is less acknowledged is the importance of cooperation with Indian States, in fields such as agriculture and water-management. So while the IAI deal made international headlines, the Israel tour of the chief minister of one of India's most prosperous States, Punjab, went under the radar. During his five-day visit from October 21-25, Capt. Amarinder Singh toured the NaanDanJain agricultural facility, the Dan Region wastewater treatment plant, the Afikim dairy farm, and met with President Reuven Rivlin. Earlier in the year, his counterparts from the States of Gujarat and Haryana also visited Israel, and agriculture featured prominently on both their agendas.

This decentralized strategy of partnering with different political and private players including State governments, through cooperation in agriculture and allied fields, has long been an integral part of Israeli diplomacy in India – especially in the early years when Jerusalem had few friends in New Delhi.

For example, in 1949, Israel favorably considered India's request for assistance in agriculture even as India refused to recognize the Jewish State and opposed its UN membership. Israel's Histadrut maintained ties with India's labor leaders, many of whom visited the Jewish State. In 1960, two large Indian delegations – one comprising land reforms activists from the Bhoodan movement, and another comprising young farmers – visited Israel. In 1970, India's leading agriculturist Appasaheb Pawar lived in Israel for

months, studying new agro-tech. His brother, Sharad Pawar – who would later serve three terms as Maharashtra chief minister and two as Union Minister – also played an important role in building agri-ties between the two countries.

This decentralized approach to diplomacy continued even after India and Israel established diplomatic ties in 1992. A significant development in itself, it, however, did not translate into policy shifts on the ground. Delhi issued a curt official statement and kept the new bilateral on a low profile. Left-wing parties opposed diplomatic ties and argued that India should have waited till Palestinian statehood had been achieved.

However, the normalization of India-Israel ties coincided with the liberalization of the Indian economy – and States were now empowered to work with foreign governments to bring in economic investment. Israeli diplomats seized the opportunity. Often ignored in the power corridors of Delhi, they sought to build durable partnerships in state capitals.

A slew of chief ministerial visits to Israel, from across party lines, followed—starting with Gujarat's Chimanbhai Patel (Congress) in 1992, then Maharashtra's Sharad Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party), who led an 800-member strong delegation to the agritech conference in 1993, then Rajasthan's Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (Bharatiya Janata Party) in 1994, and Karnataka's Deve Gowda (Janata Dal-Secular) in 1995.

In 1996, Deve Gowda became Prime Minister and, within six months, hosted President Ezer Weizman in Delhi – even though his own party had opposed normalization. Gowda and Weizman signed four agreements, including one to set up a model farm at India's premier agriculture research institute near Delhi. By this time, Israeli firms had also begun to build a profile in India – Tahal was working on water management in Gujarat and Rajasthan while Netafim had a joint venture with an Indian firm that it had been doing business with even before 1992. Both Israeli companies now have a pan-India presence.

The bilateral grew stronger with the pro-Israel BJP coming to the helm in Delhi in 1998. In 2000, West Bengal's Jyoti Basu, a Communist party veteran, broke taboo and visited Israel with a large business delegation. This was a big win but it was derailed by the Second Intifada. Still, Prime Minister AB Vajpayee hosted Ariel Sharon in 2003, indicating a qualitative improvement in bilateral ties.

This was again taken down a notch when the Congress party returned to power in 2004 and rolled back public engagement. However, bilateral trade in general and cooperation in agriculture in particular continued to grow. In 2007, Israel's NaanDan joined with India's Jain Irrigation Systems to form NaanDanJain which now provides irrigation solutions across 100 countries. In 2008, the flagship Indo-Israel Agriculture Project was established. Jointly implemented by the India's horticulture mission and Israel's MASHAV, it now has more than 15 agricultural centers across nine Indian states.

When the BJP returned to power in 2014, the pro-Israel Prime Minister Narendra Modi was able to build on decades of quiet but effective diplomacy that had already delivered tangible benefits. Modi himself was chief minister of Gujarat for 14 years, during which time his state developed a close partnership with Israel. When he became Prime Minister, few other diplomats had the kind of access to him as the Israeli Ambassador in New Delhi.

Israel's bottom-up diplomacy has paid off. By focusing on agriculture and water management, instead of, say, lobbying to change India's foreign policy perspectives, Israel had shifted the core of its India's policy from a politically-charged single issue (the Palestinian cause) to a much wider non-political grassroots platform. This is not to suggest that cooperation in other areas, particularly defense, was not important – it was and is. But defense cooperation is also inherently susceptible to secrecy and negative opinion, which can be challenging for public diplomacy. In contrast, agricultural cooperation at the state level, allowed Israel to accrue the goodwill of the people, make friends across the ideological spectrum, and shield the bilateral from political upheavals.