



PM advisers passed Qatari messages to journalists, presented them as from PMO

Bar Peleg and Chen Maanit

The Rishon Lezion Magistrate's Court on Tuesday extended by two days the detention of Yonatan Urich and Eli Feldstein, two advisers to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the so-called Qatargate affair – advancing Qatari interests from within the Prime Minister's Office.

In addition, Jerusalem Post Editor-in-Chief Zvika Klein was identified as the journalist questioned as a suspect in the scandal.

Urich and Feldstein are suspected of contact with a foreign agent, money laundering, bribery, fraud and breach of trust. Police had asked the court to extend their detention by nine days.

In his decision to extend their detention, Judge Menachem Mizrahi said that the evidence suggests reasonable suspicion that the two acted with an additional suspect to "promote Qatar in a positive light and spread negative messages about Egypt," while downplaying

Qatar's role in mediating between Israel and Hamas. The judge also determined that their release could disrupt the investigation.

Due to developments in the investigation, police have added an additional charge against Urich – sharing classified information – on suspicion he passed intelligence to Jay Footlik, a U.S. citizen who lobbied on behalf of the Qatari government.

Footlik has been summoned to testify, and sources say he has agreed to coop-

erate. Israeli police are expected to travel to the United States to collect his testimony.

Klein is suspected of contact with a foreign agent, and according to investigators, he acted as a middleman, allegedly facilitating communication between Feldstein and Footlik as well as Israeli businessman Gil Birger.

A police representative told the court that the central suspicion in the Qatargate affair is that officials in the Prime Minister's Office promoted Qatari interests. Ac-

ording to police, Urich and others are suspected of passing messages from Qatar to journalists, which were presented as if they originated from the Prime Minister's Office. Another investigator raised concern over a potential conflict of interest in the legal proceedings, noting that attorney Amit Hadad is representing both Urich, a suspect in the case, and Netanyahu, who testified in it.

"Hadad knows what the prime minister said in his testimony, so there is a sig-

nificant concern over obstruction of the investigation," the investigator said. Mizrahi responded: "That's like representing both the state's witness and the suspect. What steps have you taken in this matter?"

Police also suspect Urich interfered in the so-called BibiLeaks affair – Feldstein is also accused of leaking classified Israel Defense Forces material to foreign media in an effort to undermine a hostage deal – and fear he may obstruct the current investigation as well.

At the start of the hearing, Mizrahi granted a re-

quest by Haaretz and other media outlets to lift a gag order on the case. However, he granted the police's request to delay implementation of the decision by 24 hours.

Mizrahi harshly criticized the police for failing to enforce the original gag order, saying: "This is an extraordinary case in which the gag order was left in shambles, partly due to repeated and massive leaks. The matter was not enforced by Israel Police. The investigation became public when the suspects

PM rescinds Shin Bet chief pick amid Likud backlash

Jonathan Lis

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday said he would consider other candidates to head the Shin Bet security service, a day after he announced that he would appoint Eli Sharvit to lead the organization. His office's statement did not provide any explanation for this decision.

Likud officials and others close to Netanyahu had pressured him to withdraw the appointment because of Sharvit's previous criticism of the coalition's judicial overhaul efforts.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid said Netanyahu's decision to switch so quickly harms national security. "The head of the Shin Bet is not just any appointment. It's not some desk job that you announce and then change your mind about 24 hours later because of some whining. It's the Holy of Holies. This harms national security. The October 7 government has lost the nation's trust," he said.

National Unity chairman Benny Gantz said, "This morning, Netanyahu proved yet again: For him, political pressure supersedes what is good for the country and its security."

On Monday, Netanyahu announced his intention to appoint Sharvit even though the petitions that have been filed in the High Court of Justice against the firing of current Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar will not be heard until April 8. The court froze Bar's dismissal but permitted Netanyahu to interview candidates to replace him.

Netanyahu's announcement of Sharvit's appointment prior to the hearing on the petitions against Bar's ouster defies Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara's position that the prime minister should not proceed with the selection process

PM's panic shows which aide knows too much Yossi Verter Page 2

Gazan aid workers' bodies found shot outside vehicles

Nir Hasson, Liza Rosovsky and Jack Khoury

UN teams and rescue services in the Gaza Strip recovered earlier this week the bodies of 15 humanitarian aid workers who were killed by Israel Defense Forces fire in the Tel al-Sultan refugee camp in Rafah last week. According to

were buried and instructed them to bring digging tools. UN teams received approval to recover the bodies five days after submitting their request. One of the rescuers on site told Haaretz that one of the bodies was found with its legs bound, reinforcing suspicions that some of the aid workers may have been executed. On Sunday, Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry said that some of the workers were found with their hands tied.

Dr. Bashar Murad, the head of health programs for the Red Crescent in Gaza, told The Guardian on Monday that the autopsy of the bodies clearly showed that the rescue workers were shot in the upper parts of their bodies and were then put into a pit, one on top of another.

Murad added that one of the paramedics in the convoy was on the phone with other rescue workers at the ambulance station during the attack.



The funeral for some of the Gazan aid workers who were found shot and buried days after contact with them was lost, in Khan Yunis.

Hatem Khaled/Reuters

Atrocity in Rafah

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the rescue teams, an IDF engineering vehicle buried the bodies along with the vehicles they were traveling in under two large piles of sand, with a rotating emergency light from one of the rescue vehicles placed atop one of the mounds.

Members of the rescue team say an IDF official directed them to the exact location where the bodies

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Settlers raid Duma, days after massive Jinba assault

Hagar Shezaf, Jack Khoury and Yaniv Kubovich

Dozens of settlers raided and torched property in the village of Duma in the West Bank on Tuesday.

The Israel Defense Forces said a force that reached the village shot a bullet in the air "after feeling threatened."

A riot broke out on the scene, leading Border Police to use live fire and tear gas against Palestinians.

The IDF said that while the chain of events is not yet

clear, they know that around 6 P.M., dozens of settlers set fire to Palestinian property. Duma's council head said that hundreds of settlers were involved in the attack, adding that soldiers who were at the scene shot tear gas at Palestinians.

The Red Crescent said that three Palestinians were wounded and taken to the hospital: a 35-year-old man who was shot in the leg, a 40-year-old man with gunshot wounds in his arm and eye, and an 18-year-old wounded in the eye by a rubber bullet.

Israeli military forces tried to detain suspects involved in the attack, but they got away. A police officer was hit by the settlers' getaway car but was not injured in the incident.

Also Tuesday, the Ofer military court ordered the release of the seven Palestinians arrested in the village of Jinba on Friday on suspicion of throwing stones at settlers. The judge noted that evidence indicated that settlers started the violence and the Palestinians may have acted in self defense.

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Nearly \$9 billion in question

Trump threatens Harvard's grants over 'illegal' pro-Palestinian protests

Rachel Fink

The U.S. government announced on Monday its plans to conduct a "comprehensive review" of Harvard University's federal grants and contracts as part of ongoing efforts to crack down on what it calls illegal pro-Palestinian protests and alleged antisemitism on campus.

The Ivy League institution has become the latest target of the Federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, which vowed to continue its scrutiny of educational institutions across the U.S. "Any institution found to be in violation of federal compliance standards may face administrative actions, including contract termination," the task force warned.

The announcement was made via a press release posted on the websites of the three agencies responsible for the coordinated investigation – the departments of education and health and human services, and the U.S. General Services Administration.

According to them, the inquiry will involve an examination of more than \$255.6 million in contracts and nearly \$9 billion in multi-year grant commitments between Harvard and its affiliates and the federal government, ensuring the university "complies with federal regulations, including its civil rights responsibilities."



A pro-Palestinian rally at Harvard University on October 14, 2023.

Joseph Prezioso / AFP

According to reporting from The Crimson, Harvard's student newspaper, the university's administration has been preparing for such an investigation with a two-pronged approach: trying to mitigate accusations related to pro-Palestinian partnerships and saving funds in anticipation of potential financial losses.

Last week, Harvard suspended its research partnership with Birzeit University in the West Bank. Additionally, in January, Harvard Vice Provost for Research John H. Shaw notified faculty that the university would begin assessing National

Science Foundation grants following the NSF's directive to cease activities prohibited under U.S. President Donald Trump's new executive orders, including a moratorium on diversity-related components of research projects.

In March, University Provost Alan Garber announced a school-wide hiring freeze, and prior to that, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences advised leadership to curb spending ahead of the 2026 fiscal year. "We could not carry out our mission the way we do now without substantial federal research support, nor could we provide the benefits to the nation that we do now

without that support," Garber told The Crimson in December, just before Trump began his second term.

The planned investigation, for which a date has not yet been set, follows a similar review conducted at Columbia University earlier this month. That investigation culminated in significant changes after the Trump administration announced it would cut off \$400 million in federal funding, citing the university's failure to adequately address antisemitism on campus.

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Bypassing top court, gov't moves to reject non-Orthodox converts

Judy Maltz

Four years ago, the High Court of Justice handed down a landmark ruling recognizing conversions performed in Israel by organizations and movements that operate outside the auspices of the state-sanctioned Orthodox religious establishment.

In theory, it meant that any individual converted in Israel by the Reform or Conservative movements, or by privately-run Orthodox organizations, would be eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return, pending approval from the Ministry of Interior.

But new criteria issued by the ministry for approving

citizenship requests from such individuals are so stringent that it is almost impossible to fulfill them, according to organizations that advocate for immigrants in Israel.

The new criteria were prepared by the ministry several months ago, at the request of the Jerusalem District Court, after it was sued by a convert whose application for citizenship under the Law of Return was rejected. The woman had been converted by private group of Orthodox rabbis known for their more liberal approach.

The criteria, which now appear on the ministry website, were never officially announced. Although

they were supposed to have been modeled on the criteria established for recognizing conversions performed outside Israel, organizations that advocate for immigrants say they are far more stringent.

Moreover, representatives of these organizations note that the criteria are retroactive, meaning that individuals who have already converted but do not fulfill the new requirements will be forced to convert again.

The purpose of the new criteria, the ministry document explains, is to prevent foreigners from exploiting the conversion system in order to obtain immigrant