

For thousands of Jews, Israel is still not safe after October 7 brutal attack by Hamas

LONDON, DEC 21

Leaving Israel is easier, Shira Z. Carmel thinks, by saying it's just for now. But she knows better.

For the Israeli-born singer and an increasing number of relatively well-off Israelis, the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack shattered any sense of safety and along with it, Israel's founding promise: to be the world's safe haven for Jews. That day, thousands of Hamas militants blew past the country's border defences, killed 1,200 people and dragged 250 more into Gaza in a siege that caught the Israeli army by surprise and stunned a nation that prides itself on military prowess. This time, during what became known as Israel's 9/11, the army didn't come for hours.

Ten days later, a pregnant Carmel, her husband and their toddler boarded a flight to Australia, which was looking for people in her husband's profession. And they spun the explanation to friends and family as something other than permanent — "relocation" is the easier-to-swallow term — acutely aware of the familial strain and the shame that have shadowed Israelis who leave for good.

"We told them we're going to get out of the line of fire for awhile," Carmel said more than a year later from her family's new home in Melbourne. "It wasn't a hard decision. But it was very hard to talk to them about it. It was even hard to admit it to ourselves."

Thousands of Israelis have left the country since October 7,



2023, according to government statistics and immigration tallies released by destination countries such as Canada and Germany. There's concern about whether it will drive a "brain drain" in sectors like medicine and tech. Migration experts say it's possible people leaving Israel will surpass the number of immigrants to Israel in 2024, according to Sergio DellaPergola, a statistician and professor emeritus of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"In my view, this year people entering will be smaller than the total of the exit," he said. "And this is quite unique in the existence of the State of Israel."

The October 7 effect on Israeli emigration is enough for prominent Israelis to acknowledge the phenomenon publicly — and warn of rising anti-semitism elsewhere.

"There is one thing that worries me in particular: talks about leaving the country. This must not happen," former Premier Naftali Bennett, a critic of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, tweeted in

June after a conversation with friends who were leaving. Israel, he wrote, needs to retain the talent. "Who wants to return to the days of the wandering Jew, without real freedom, without a state, subject to every anti-Semitic whim?"

Thousands of Israelis have opted to pay the financial, emotional and social costs of moving out since the October 7 attack, according to government statistics and families who spoke to The Associated Press in recent months after emigrating to Canada, Spain and Australia. Israel's overall population continues to grow toward 10 million people.

But it's possible that 2024 ends with more Israelis leaving the country than coming in.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics estimated in September that 40,600 Israelis departed long-term over the first seven months of 2024, a 59 per cent increase over the same period a year earlier, when 25,500 people left. Monthly, 2,200 more people

departed this year than in 2023, CBS reported.

The Israeli ministry of immigration and absorption, which does not deal with people leaving, said 33,000 people have moved to Israel since the start of the war, about on par with previous years. The interior minister refused to comment for this story.

The numbers are equally dramatic in destination countries. More than 18,000 Israelis applied for German citizenship in 2024, more than double the same period in 2023 and three times that of the year before, the interior ministry reported in September.

Canada, which has a three-year work visa programme for Israelis and Palestinians fleeing the war, received 5,759 applications for work permits from Israeli citizens between January and October this year, the government told AP. In 2023, that number was 1,616 applications, and a year earlier the tally was 1,176 applications, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Other clues, too, point to a notable departure of Israelis since the October 7 attacks. Gil Fire, deputy director of Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Centre, said that some of its star specialists with fellowship postings of a few years in other countries began to waver about returning. "Before the war, they always came back and it was not really considered an option to stay. And during the war we started to see a change," he said. "They said to us, 'We will stay another year, maybe two years, maybe more.'"

Ukraine mourns loss of journalist fearlessly reporting from places scary to others

KYIV, DEC 21



Viktoria Roshchyna reported from places most other Ukrainian journalists would not go. She was one of the last to report openly from the territory in Ukraine forcibly taken by Russian troops. And then she went further and entered Russia.

Roshchyna, known as Vika, was arrested her father said, and died in September, more than a year later. The circumstances of her death remain unclear, as is what she intended to do in Russia. Some have suggested she planned to travel through Russia into occupied Ukraine. She was 27.

Ukrainians have mourned Roshchyna's death, for the tragic loss of a young life, but also because of the stories she wrote from parts of the country where many had been forced to flee. Her stories had been an important lifeline for them.

Roshchyna was known as a brave, stubborn and driven journalist. Soon after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, she joined a humanitarian convoy and tried to cross into the besieged southeastern port city of Mariupol, as almost everyone else was trying

to leave. Russian forces captured her in March. They released her a week later, after beating her, she said.

Instead of fleeing, Roshchyna bought a new camera in Zaporizhzhya, a city in southern Ukraine, and hopped on a bus back into Russian-occupied territory. She appeared not to tell anyone where she was going, not even her bosses at Hromadske, the online news outlet where she worked.

When Russia invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014, many Ukrainian journalists unexpectedly became combat reporters. Back then, I, too, travelled to the frontline many times. But my biggest fear was being captured by Russian troops and I never went to what became known as the "occupied territories".

Many other journalists did, wanting to show the world what was happening in the Ukrainian cities and towns that had been taken

by the Russians.

At a certain point, editors and colleagues tried to stop her from going across the frontline. But she was determined. Hromadske stopped working with her after she bought the new camera and went back into Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory without telling her bosses.

She did leave Ukraine that August, travelling to Poland, Latvia and then, finally, Russia. Many of the people who knew her assumed she planned to cross from Russia into occupied Ukraine. It is still not clear where exactly she was arrested.

She wasn't heard from for eight months, and then there was news that she had been arrested in Russia. On September 19, she was scheduled to be transferred to a Moscow prison from a pretrial detention centre. Roshchyna died before she arrived at the prison and her family was informed about her death by 3 weeks later.

'US has twice as many declared troops in Syria,' says Pentagon spokesperson Major General Pat Ryder

WASHINGTON, DEC 21

The Pentagon on Thursday said it has 2,000 US troops in Syria, more than twice the 900 it has previously said it has, and that the additional troops are considered temporary forces that were sent to support the mission against Islamic State militants.

Pentagon spokesperson Major General Pat Ryder told reporters he did not know how long the number had been 2,000, but it was probably months at a minimum and predated the fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "I learned the number today ... as somebody who's been standing up here telling you 900, I wanted to get you what we had on that," Ryder said. Asked by reporters how long the number of troops had been at 2,000, Ryder did not provide a specific length of time but said: "I think it would probably be



fair to say, at a minimum, months... it's been going on for a while." The US had said publicly for several years that it had 900 troops in Syria who were working with local forces to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State, which in 2014 seized large swathes of Iraq and Syria but was later pushed back. President Joe Biden's administration has said that US troops will be staying in Syria, though President-elect Donald Trump could remove them when he takes office on January 20. During his first administration, Trump attempted to remove US troops from Syria but had

been met with resistance from officials and ultimately some troops remained. Earlier this month, Syrian rebels toppled Assad's government and seized control of the capital Damascus. The US military has continued carrying out strikes against Islamic State militants.

This is not the first time in recent years that the Pentagon has had to revise the number of troops it has in a country. In 2017, the US military disclosed that it had 11,000 US troops in Afghanistan, thousands more than it had previously disclosed.

Eight idols in three Hindu temples vandalised in Bangladesh's Mymensingh and Dinajpur over two days

DHAKA, DEC 21

In fresh incidents, miscreants have vandalised eight idols in three Hindu temples in Bangladesh's Mymensingh and Dinajpur over two days, a media report said on Friday. Police have arrested one person in connection with vandalism at one of the temples, The Daily Star newspaper reported.

These are the latest in a series of incidents against the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh.

In Mymensingh's Haluaghat sub-district, three idols of two temples were vandalised early Thursday and Friday.

Quoting temple sources and locals, Abul Khayer, officer-in-charge (OC) of Haluaghat Police Station, said miscreants ransacked two idols of Bonderpara Temple in the Shakuai union of Haluaghat in the early hours of Friday.

No case was filed and no arrests have been made in the incident yet, he said.

In another incident, criminals vandalised an idol at Polashkanda Kali Temple in Beeldora union of Haluaghat early Thursday.

Police on Friday arrested a 27-year-old man of the Polashkanda village over his alleged involvement.

During interrogation, the man, Alal Uddin, confessed to the crime, said the OC.



He was produced before a Mymensingh court this afternoon, which sent him to jail, he added.

Earlier Thursday, Suvash Chandra Sarker, president of the Polashkanda Kali Temple committee, filed a case accusing unidentified persons.

In Dinajpur's Birganj sub-district, five idols were vandalised at Jharbari Shashan Kali Temple on Tuesday.

The incident came to light on Thursday, according to the report.

"We've never seen such an act here," Janardan Roy, president of the temple committee, was quoted as saying.

Officer-in-Charge Abdul Gafur said they are investigating the incident.

Last week, law enforcement agencies arrested four people for vandalising and damaging a Hindu temple and houses and shops of the community in Sunamganj district in north Bangladesh.

Earlier on November 29, three Hindu temples were vandalised by a slogan-shouting mob in Bangladesh's Chattogram which witnessed protests and violence since a former ISKCON member was booked under sedition charges.

The relations between India and Bangladesh came under strain after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus came to power after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country on August 5 following a student-led protest.

The relations deteriorated further in recent weeks over continued attacks on Hindus, especially after the recent arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, a former member of ISKCON Bangladesh and now, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote organisation.

Last week, Bangladesh acknowledged 88 incidents of communal violence against minorities, primarily Hindus, following Hasina's ouster.

The increasing number of anti-Hindu incidents has led to a diplomatic row between India and Bangladesh.

Earlier, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri flagged regrettable incidents of attacks on minorities and conveyed India's concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities, during his meetings with the Bangladeshi leadership in Dhaka.

Key ally vows to topple Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in fresh blow to his government

TORONTO, DEC 21

The future of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership appeared increasingly uncertain after New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, a key ally, said he would introduce a motion to topple the minority Liberal government. Singh, whose party has been helping keep Trudeau in office, announced in an open letter posted on social media that he would declare a loss of confidence in the Trudeau-

led Liberal government next year, a move that would trigger an early election if other opposition parties support his move. Canada's next election must be held on or before October. Singh is the last of Canada's three main opposition parties to turn on Trudeau.

In his letter, Singh said the Liberals were undeserving of "another chance." "That's why the NDP will vote to bring this government down and give Canadians a chance to vote for a government who will work for them,"

he wrote.

He said the New Democrats plan to use their next opposition day in the House of Commons — during which opposition priorities are given precedence over government business — to introduce the vote.

The House is currently on its winter break and is set to resume on January 27.

Singh's letter came as questions swirled about the future of Trudeau, with at least 21 Liberal MPs now calling for him to resign, CBC News



reported. Freeland quit hours before she was set to deliver an economic political setbacks suffered by Trudeau this week after the resignation of Chrystia Freeland, his deputy prime minister and finance minister. Singh's announcement is the latest in a series of political setbacks suffered by Trudeau this week after the resignation of Chrystia Freeland, his deputy prime minister and finance minister. Singh's announcement is the latest in a series of political setbacks suffered by Trudeau this week after the resignation of Chrystia Freeland, his deputy prime minister and finance minister.

threats posed by US President-elect Donald Trump.

"No matter who is leading the Liberal party, this government's time is up," Singh's letter read.

Singh also said the Liberals have frequently not lived up to their promises and that the time for change is now.

The letter was released just before Trudeau announced his revamped front bench on Friday morning.

The New Democrats ended their parliamentary alliance with the Liberals

in early September, but have repeatedly declared confidence in the government when the Conservatives have introduced votes to bring the Liberals down.

Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has repeatedly called for an election as soon as possible.

Had Singh voted with the Conservatives, "we would be a third of the way into an election campaign right now," Poilievre told reporters on Friday. "But he suddenly had an epiphany and says

that he can no longer support the costly chaos that he has enabled as part of the NDP-Liberal coalition."

The Conservative leader said he was writing to Governor General Mary Simon "asking her to urgently reconvene Parliament and require a non-confidence vote" to end Trudeau's reign.

Trudeau has not responded publicly to these calls and has reportedly told members of the party that he will take the holidays to reflect and decide what to do.