

# TACTICAL RETREAT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON BENJAMIN NETANYAHU AND ISRAEL'S JUDICIAL OVERHAUL BILLS

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When Benjamin Netanyahu began his current term as Israel Prime Minister in December last year, he identified four main goals for the country's 37th government: block Iran; restore Israel's security and governance; deal with the cost of living problem; and expand the "circle of peace" (with Arabs). But in the past four months, his government's single-minded focus was on passing its judicial overhaul Bills in the Knesset, [triggering unprecedented protests](#). Initially, Mr. Netanyahu, whose coalition has a comfortable majority (by Israeli standards) in Parliament, vowed to press ahead. As protests grew, rebellion broke out. He fired his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant after he called for a delay in passing the Bills, citing national security risks, but the crisis had already grown out of his hands. On Monday, amid protests and a paralysing general strike, the Prime Minister announced the suspension of the Bills, not wanting to push Israel into a civil war. Earlier, [Itamar Ben-Gvir](#), National Security Minister, had warned the Prime Minister against "surrendering to the anarchists" and threatened to quit the coalition if he did so. But Mr. Netanyahu has managed to keep his coalition together, for now. To ensure the support of Mr. Ben-Gvir, a Jewish extremist, the Cabinet would transfer the National Guard to his Ministry.

Mr. Netanyahu, who first came to power in 1996 defeating Shimon Peres, has seen many ups and downs. Yet, the current crisis is arguably his toughest. Mr. Netanyahu has overseen a dramatic shift in Israel's polity towards the extreme right. Its result: the current government, comprising the right-wing (Likud), religious (Shas and United Torah Judaism) and far-right (Religious Zionist and Otzma Yehudit) parties. The extreme right has long argued that the judicial checks and balances are preventing the country from realising its true Jewish identity; the planned judicial reforms, which would give Parliament control over judicial appointments and the powers to override Supreme Court rulings, are a part of this push. Mr. Netanyahu and his allies have been able to control the narrative when it came to the occupation of Palestine or countering external threats, but their move to consolidate more power has triggered widespread resistance from different sections, including from the defence establishment. By suspending the Bills, Mr. Netanyahu has only delayed, and not resolved, the impact of the crisis. He has promised to return the Bills to the Knesset after a month through consensus. But it remains unclear how there will be nationwide consensus on such a polarising issue that has seen even diplomats on strike. He should rather convince his allies of the crisis their government is in, abandon the plan to weaken the judiciary altogether, and focus on the more pressing challenges Israel faces.

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