

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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ISRAEL ADMITS: PLAN TO RELOCATE ASYLUM SEEKERS HAS COLLAPSED, NO WAY TO FORCIBLY DEPORT AFRICANS (Ha'aretz 4/24/18)

Israel has admitted in court on Tuesday that its plan to relocate African asylum seekers has fallen through and that there is currently no possibility to forcibly deport them. A statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in response that Israel would reopen the detention facilities it established for asylum seekers.

In a statement, the state said it would stop holding pre-deportation hearings for the asylum seekers and that any previous decisions on the matter are now nullified.

A coalition of human rights groups petitioned the High Court of Justice last month to demand that those who face deportation be allowed to see the agreements Israel allegedly signed with Rwanda or Uganda, the countries to which it planned to deport them. Both African nations deny the existence of such deals.

At pre-deportation hearings, a state representative tells asylum seekers that they must leave for "a safe third country under the agreements Israel has with both countries," even though the agreement with Rwanda collapsed months ago and efforts to negotiate a revised agreement with Uganda have failed.

Israel said on Tuesday that those who had received a deportation date would now have their status renewed every sixty days, as was the case before the attempt to expel them.

"Israel will continue to act on the issue of the infiltrators," said the statement, referencing the term the government uses to describe asylum seekers, "including attempts to encourage them to leave on their own accord or relocating them involuntarily, in accordance with the law. Israel's immigration officials will continue to refer infiltrators to the 'voluntary departure' office, allowing them to relocate to a third country, but without conditioning the renewal of their legal status of their willingness to leave to a third country."

Eighteen Jewish members of the U.S. Congress sent a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, urging him to reconsider the deal his government reached but then canceled with the United Nations at the beginning of the month regarding the deportation of African asylum seekers.

The signatories of the letter, all Democrats, said they were "heartened" by the agreement and "disappointed" by Netanyahu's swift decision to retract it on April 3 following strong pressure from the right wing in Israel.

According to the UN deal, Israel would have sent as many as 16,500 asylum seekers to be resettled in Western countries while allowing a similar number to remain in Israel until a better solution is found.

Israel negotiated the UN agreement following the collapse of a prior arrangement it reportedly had with Rwanda to deport thousands of asylum seekers there.

NETANYAHU THANKS ROMANIAN PM FOR PUSHING TO MOVE EMBASSY TO JERUSALEM (JPost 4/25/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked his Romanian counterpart Viorica Dancila for her efforts to relocate her country's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

He spoke with her at his office in Jerusalem on Wednesday at the start of her two-day visit to Israel, her first since taking office in January 2018.

Dancila is in Israel to bolster bilateral ties with Israel and to prepare for a joint Israeli-Romanian governmental meeting that will take place in Romania later

this year.

In advance of her visit, Dancila announced that her country plans to follow US President Donald Trump's lead by relocating its embassy and submitted a proposal to do so to the cabinet.

But approval will be needed from Romanian President Klaus Johannis, who has opposed the move.

To date, only Guatemala has committed to an embassy relocation. It plans to open its Jerusalem embassy on May 15, one day after the US embassy opens its doors in the country's capital.

Honduras and the Czech Republic have also spoken of such a move, but no final decisions have been made.

STATE DEP'T WON'T SAY IF IT VIEWS JUDEA, SAMARIA AS 'OCCUPIED' (Arutz-7 4/26/18)

The U.S. State Department has refused to say whether it views Judea, Samaria, the Golan Heights or Gaza as "occupied territory" after removing the term from its annual human rights report, i24news reported Wednesday.

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, which covers 2017, the first year of President Donald Trump's presidency, was released by the State Department on Friday.

While in previous years, the report's section covering Israel was entitled "Israel and the Occupied Territories", Friday's report refrained from using the term "occupied", and instead entitled the section "Israel, Golan Heights, West Bank, and Gaza".

In the body of the text, the State Department also scrubbed the term "occupied", often used by critics of Israel's presence in Judea, Samaria, Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights to delegitimize Israeli control of those areas.

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Last year, U.S. Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, reportedly urged the State Department to end its use of the term “occupied” with regard to Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem.

ISRAELI GROUP SEEKS ICC ACTION AGAINST HAMAS FOR USING CHILDREN AS HUMAN SHIELDS (Israel Hayom 4/25/18)

The Shurat Hadin Israel Law Center is seeking International Criminal Court action against Hamas over the terrorist group's use of children as human shields in the riots that have taken place over the past month on the Israel-Gaza Strip border.

The lawsuit is based on a clause in the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the ICC's work, which says that recruiting children under the age of 15 to any militant organization is a war crime.

The suit names former Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal, current deputy leader Saleh al-Aroui, and moneyman Zahar Jabarin as guilty of war crimes, saying that as all three are nationals of Jordan, which is a signatory to the Rome Statute, they are subject to the court's jurisdiction.

"The death of a 15-year-old boy near the Gaza border last week was a direct result of the war crimes committed by Hamas leaders against their own people," said Shurat Hadin Director Nitzana Darshan-Leitner.

"It is not Israel that should face an investigation, or fend off criticism by the European Union and a demand by the U.N. for an investigation into the death of [Palestinian] children – it is Hamas leaders who send these children to be human shields, to be killed in battle. They are the ones who should be made to answer for their actions before the International Criminal Court," she said.

BENNETT WOVES VISITING INVESTORS WITH TALES OF WAR AND START-UPS (JPost 4/26/18)

It's not every day that nearly 300 high-profile venture capitalists from the prestigious Kauffman Foundation visit Israel.

Meeting with the investors on the rooftop of the five-star Mamilla Hotel overlooking Jerusalem's Old City on Wednesday was none other than Education Minister Naftali Bennett – who regaled them with tales of entrepreneurship and the battlefield.

The right-wing, sometimes controversial minister kicked off the speech by reminiscing about being commander of an elite platoon unit, then recounting how his first startup, Cyota – launched in Manhattan – was later sold for \$145 million.

"I was the happiest guy in the world; it was a nice exit in those years," Bennett said. "I was going to go back to hi-tech, which was really my passion. But then the Second Lebanon War happened, and I was called to command my soldiers.... I was planning to go to the Caribbean and have cocktails; instead, that war changed the path of my life."

After serving as Netanyahu's chief of staff for two years, Bennett ran and sold another software company, before entering politics himself. Today, he runs the third-largest party in the coalition.

"Israel is on a very good track. If Israel were a share, I'd buy it," he told the visiting venture capitalists.

In terms of what makes Israel such a strong source of startups, the minister cited both a culture of strong youth movements – often led by teenage counselors – and mandatory military service as incubating endless innovation.

"At the young age of 22, I find myself planning and leading an operation of 100 soldiers behind me in enemy territory. I'm in charge of their lives. You come out at the age of 22 and you feel like you can do anything. It's like the Hebrew expression, 'It's small on me (katan alay).'"

Bennett added that the army mandates you overcome obstacles, regardless of what may lie in front of you.

"If you can get in through the door, fine. But if you can't get through the door,

get through the window. If you can't get through the window, punch a hole in the ceiling.... It's the same thing as entrepreneurs – infiltrate into that building.... It's your problem, ain't my problem, no limits, so do it."

As education minister, Bennett has taken an eagle-eyed approach to boosting Israel's PISA math scores – relying on Tel Aviv University Prof. Dan Ben-David's startling findings about how Israeli students' test scores lag behind the OECD.

One finding caught Bennett's attention: High school students who struggled to matriculate with five units in math – the most difficult level – earned much more in future salaries than those who passed math with flying colors in three or four units.

Since then, Bennett has prioritized math.

In contrast to the minister's hawkish politics, Bennett talked often about integrating Israeli Arabs – who comprise around 1.8 million people or 25% of the population – into hi-tech and the general economy.

"Short story, the Arab population is on a very strong trajectory, and in five years they'll reach results similar to the Jewish population – in math, science, Hebrew," Bennett said, adding that today more than 35% of Arab women work, up from almost 20% some six years ago. "Israel wants them to be part and parcel of the country."

More challenging for Bennett than integrating more Arabs into hi-tech is the ultra-Orthodox. Despite sitting in a government coalition with haredi parties, Bennett called for teaching core subjects in their schools and for haredim to join the workforce.

"These ultra-Orthodox are afraid that we want to impose our values on them. We don't. All I want is for them to work and to pay taxes. I'm willing for them not to serve in the military."

Bennett added, on an optimistic note: "I'm trying to bring them into math, English, the core curriculum, so they'll be able to get good jobs.... It will get solved for one reason: the younger generation is fed up with being poor."

BDS' LATEST TARGET: ISRAELI BANKS (Arutz-7 4/26/18)

A new stage of the BDS movement's war against the Jewish state is now underway, as anti-Israel groups convince financial advisors to divest from Israeli banks and financial institutions.

According to a *Channel 20* report, BDS activists have recently been working to convince financial advisors, mainly in the US, that investing in Israel is tantamount to supporting human rights violations.

Among other means, the anti-Israel activists cite documents and reports authored by the UN Human Rights Council against Israel to make their case.

The efforts are already having an effect on two of Israel's largest banks, Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim.

"There are two very large churches, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church – each one has a pension fund of tens of millions of dollars – that pulled their investments in Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim, because they convinced them that investing in Israel equals violating human rights," Israeli attorney Calev Myers, Chairman of the Anti-BDS Commission of the Israel Association of Bi-National Chambers of Commerce, told *Channel 20*.

Myers explained that the "quiet" nature of the latest BDS attack makes it hard to combat. "Boycott" is something public against which you can fight through legislative means. Investments – each person invests where he wants. He simply decides to invest here, or withdraw his investments there..."

TWO TEENS DIE IN FLASH FLOODS AS STORM HITS ISRAEL, WEST BANK (Ha'aretz 4/25/18)

Two teenagers died in flash floods on Wednesday as Israel endured heavy rains and hail. Towns in the northern Negev were hit hard by the rains and Dimona and Arad saw heavy flooding and all the nearby streams overflowed. A 16-old-year died after being swept away by floods in the Mamshit Stream

in the southern Negev. He was swept away near his home in a Bedouin encampment a few hundred meters from the Mamshit National Park. He was found about 3 kilometers further down the stream in critical condition by a relative, who called in the rescue unit. He was evacuated by an Air Force helicopter but died on the way to the hospital.

A 17-year-old Palestinian girl died in the desert hills east of Bethlehem in the West Bank. She was herding sheep and was swept away by the flood.

The north saw more breaks in the showers but was hit with very heavy winds and haze. Heavy rains and hail struck in the afternoon in the center of the country.

The Sde Dov Airport in Tel Aviv was closed because of the weather, and a planned race was canceled in the north.

Route 90 along the Dead Sea was closed because of flooding north of the hotels in Ein Bokek after the Rahaf Stream flooded the main road.

Twenty-five millimeters of rain fell in Tel Aviv in just one hour. This is 25 percent more than the entire average rainfall for the entire month of April in the city, 20 millimeters. Large amounts of rain also fell in Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh, 45 to 50 millimeters.

Some 60 youths were treated for mild hypothermia in the Arad area after they were caught in flooding near Kfar Hanokdim. All the injuries were minor. Police and volunteers from the local rescue unit evacuated the students.

Bathers were told not to enter the Sea of Galilee because of the high waves and the fear they would be dragged out away from the shore.

Part of the Ayalon Highway in the middle of Tel Aviv was closed by flooding, and a number of roads in the city were blocked by fallen trees. In Rishon Letzion, a ceiling collapsed in a commercial center. No injuries were reported. A main thoroughfare in the city, Jabotinsky Road, was closed to traffic in both directions because of flooding.

The rain will continue overnight in the south but will weaken in the center of the country.

ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE COMPANY MINING FACEBOOK FOR COUNTERTERRORISM DATA (Times of Israel 4/24/18)

An Israeli cyber-intelligence company is offering facial recognition counterterrorism services based on tens of thousands of photos and videos it has siphoned from the internet — including from social media giant Facebook, which is currently struggling to defend its reputation for protecting users' privacy.

Netanya-based Terrogence, co-founded by former Israeli intelligence officer Shai Arbel, offers a range of products and reports based on data and facial identification that it openly admits to having harvested from sites such as Facebook and YouTube and other internet forums, Forbes reported last week.

Terrogence has been marketing its facial recognition service, called Face-Int, for at least the past five years. According to the company website about Face-Int, "Terrogence actively monitors and collects online profiles and facial images of terrorists, criminals and other individuals believed to pose a threat to aviation security, immigration and national security."

"The Face-Int™ database houses the profiles of thousands of suspects harvested from such online sources as YouTube, Facebook and open and closed forums all over the globe. It represents facial extractions from over 35,000 videos and photos retrieved online portraying such activities as terrorist training camps, motivational videos and actual terror attacks," the site boasts.

A spokesperson for Facebook said Terrogence would be violating policies by taking data from Facebook for surveillance purposes, Forbes reported. A spokesperson noted that Facebook had not found any apps operated by Terrogence.

Arbel declined to speak with Forbes about the company and its operations.

Facebook is reeling from its worst-ever privacy failure following revelations last month that the political data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica, which was hired by the Donald Trump presidential campaign, improperly scooped up data on about 87 million users.

Company CEO Mark Zuckerberg went on an apology tour in recent weeks, culminating in appearances before congressional committee.

A British television undercover investigation caught senior Cambridge Analytica executives admitting that the company had also engaged in bribery stings, honey traps and spying with the help of ex-spies from Britain and Israel.

According to Forbes, Terrogence was bought in 2017 by Verint, which lists its head office in New York but also has an office in Herzliya, Israel, as well as many other locations around the world.

The report said both Verint and Terrogence have provided technology in the past to the NSA, US Navy, and other security agencies. Public records show that Terrogence has two contracts with the US Navy, worth a total of \$148,000 for subscriptions to its Mobius and TGAAlertS counterterrorism report services. However, there is no evidence that American agencies have purchased the Face-Int product.

Earlier this month Verint also launched FaceDetect, a software that uses facial recognition to add suspects to watch lists.

Some have warned of the dangers posed when people are automatically added to various blacklists without knowing about it.

"We've been fighting with the government for years over due process on those lists," said Jay Stanley, senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union. "People being put on them without being told why and not being sure how those lists are being used.

"A lot of those problems could intensify if you have a bunch of private quasi-vigilantes making their own blacklists of all kinds," Stanley told Forbes. "If private companies are scraping photos and combining them with personal info in order to make judgments about people — are you a terrorist, or how likely are you to be a shoplifter or anything in between — then it exposes everyone to the risk of being misidentified, or correctly identified and being misjudged."

ISRAEL TO INVEST \$5.6 MILLION IN ARAB HIGH-TECH SECTOR (Israel Hayom 4/25/18)

The Ministerial Committee on Arab Sector Affairs announced on Tuesday that the government had invested 4.5 billion shekels (\$1.3 billion) in the sector in the last two years.

Established in 2015, the committee counts among its members Social Equality Minister Gila Gamliel (Likud) and Economy and Industry Minister Eli Cohen (Kulanu).

During the meeting, the committee announced it would invest NIS 20 million (\$5.6 million) in a new program aimed at helping integrate minority communities in the high-tech labor market.

According to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who heads the committee, the government was on track to meet the committee's goals of investing NIS 15 billion (\$4.2 billion) in the Israeli-Arab sector by 2020 in order to "reduce the social and economic gaps between the minority sectors and the general population in Israel, through changing the mechanisms for allocation [of funds]."

During Tuesday's meeting, Gamliel said the goal of the plan was to bring the Arab sector's performance in the fields of infrastructure, transportation, education and employment up to par with that of the general population.

Gamliel said, "The fact the plan was so successful is a testament to the government's commitment cutting across ministries and party lines."

Several representatives from a number of government offices were in attendance at the meeting.

Cohen said that "the promotion of industry and employment in the minority sectors is of strategic importance to the reduction of gaps, economic prosperity and for social mobility. The integration of the sector into the workforce is in the economic interest of the State of Israel, and its contribution will impact many fields."

NATALIE PORTMAN IS JUST A SYMPTOM OF US JEWRY'S CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARDS ISRAEL (Attila Somfalvi, YNet 4/24/18)

We don't have to agree with Natalie Portman or support her boycott of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. We can even disagree with her opinions and perceptions on the Palestinian issue and on whether there is or isn't an occupation. But we definitely shouldn't ignore the nervously ringing alarm bells emerging from the famous Jewish actress's declarative move.

This move may have been the result of her own personal feelings. That's possible. But Portman, in her boycott of Netanyahu and his policy, stands firm on stable ground (which is expanding, unfortunately)—fertile ground of a deep ideological dispute from which US Jewry is growing these days.

The figures are familiar and have been rehashed numerous times: About 80 percent of US Jews voted for Hillary Clinton in the last presidential election. In other words, they voted for the Democratic Party. In other words, they voted for the complete opposite of everything represented by Donald Trump, Netanyahu's soul mate and the person many US Jews despise.

Portman is part of this Jewry—enlightened, progressive, self-confident, well-established, humane and engaged—a Jewry which doesn't turn a blind eye to human rights, Jewish morals and universal values, in America or in Israel.

This Jewry isn't ignoring Israel and its policy, as it is portrayed in recent years, but has no trouble criticizing it. It isn't ignoring it, because Israel is still part of the DNA of most of America's Jews.

But even a DNA changes through the generations. Indeed, US Jewry has undergone a considerable change in the past two decades. Israel may still cause vibrations among some people, but many people see it as annoying and divisive.

American Jewry's ideological detachment in 2018 from what the only democracy in the Middle East represents is a *fait accompli*. We can be moved to tears by the prime minister's reception at the recent AIPAC conference, and we can also remember that the 20,000 attendees are exactly what they are: 20,000 people out of almost 7 million, or a bit less.

And those who didn't applaud enthusiastically slightly outnumber those who stood there and cheered as if they were at a rock concert.

We can rely on the Pew studies and polls to feel good about ourselves concerning Americans' love for Israel. On the other hand, we can also remember that the Democrats haven't really forgotten about the brawl between Netanyahu and former president Barack Obama and are still looking into its impact in an era of rapid changes in American demography.

Back to Natalie Portman: It would be very dangerous to see her defiant move as a passing episode or a meaningless provocation.

She is much more than that: She is a symbol of dramatic changes taking place in the interfamilial relations, a sign of US Jews' profound disapproval of what they see as a very problematic direction the Jewish state is headed in. At the end of the day, it's their state too.

THE STATUS QUO IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA POSES A DANGER TO THE STATE (Nadia Matar and Yehudit Katsover, Arutz-7 4/25/18)

As part of our efforts to promote the vision of Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, we appear before groups throughout the entire country. Military preparatory schools, high schools, religious and secular schools, from the Left and the Right, invite us for discussions, panels and lectures. Sometimes these meetings are held as part of what is called "Judea-Samaria Week", when young students come to Judea and Samaria to meet with spokesmen

from across the political spectrum.

In these meetings we present the youth with our point of view, the main idea of which is that the Land of Israel belongs to us and we must not surrender it; the plan of "two states for two peoples" constitutes an existential, spiritual, ideological and security threat to our country. We lay out the plan for the application of sovereignty that we have been promoting in recent years before the visitors and hosts and explain the ramifications of applying sovereignty.

During the second part of these meetings there is a lively discussion where serious and profound questions arise. The young visitors demand real answers to various questions. One of the questions that comes up in almost every group goes something like this: "It is clear to us that dividing the Land and establishing a hostile Arab state in its heart would be a disastrous step for the State of Israel to take, but it is also clear to us that the application of sovereignty is very complex and the main difficulty is the status of the Arabs. Therefore, maybe the best thing and most correct thing to do is to leave the situation as it is now- status quo."

At a time when the status quo in every area has become almost sacred, apparently, why would it be wrong to take that approach in this area as well? The IDF's deep and daily involvement in the field prevents terror attacks and maintains a relatively low level of terror (despite the deep pain and sorrow over any loss or injury that does occur) it sometimes seems that all is quiet and calm and "that we need not endanger ourselves by establishing a Palestinian state, but on the other hand, we also do not want to cope with the complexities of applying sovereignty and thus best is to simply keep the status quo."

We hear things of this sort not only from the youths in the seminars and discussions, but also from average citizens, among them public figures and academics.

Here is where we explain one basic foundational fact. Even if it does not seem so, there actually is no status quo. The calm is nothing more than an illusion. We are living next to a ticking time bomb and things are happening - every minute that passes, facts are being established on the ground and are becoming a basis for additional facts on the ground and this phenomenon is growing and pushing the State of Israel off its Land. Beneath the camouflage of calm and quiet the Palestinian Authority is taking over more and more of Area C, land which even according to the Oslo Accords is to be under Israel's exclusive authority. Every day, Salam Fayyad's plan for the Arab takeover of land in this territory is being realized by strangling the development of Jewish settlement.

The residents of Judea and Samaria can see this reality happening around them every single day. Hills that were arid wasteland until recently, are being built up, funded and supported by the European Union, and the closer the construction is to the traffic arteries leading to the Jewish communities, the more support is given. And along with the illegal construction, there is illegal agriculture as well and illegal quarries, lands that have been bought by Jews are becoming enclaves, surrounded by Arab construction and agriculture and sometimes these lands as well are being appropriated by Palestinians without the appropriate and necessary Jewish response.

The Palestinians are determining facts on the ground and with characteristic Arab patience are quietly building a state for themselves without any objection and without handshakes or signed documents in brightly lit halls. They understand well the value of land and we, with our diaspora complexes, still prefer a signed piece of paper of no real value.

And what about us? We are indifferent. We are convinced that the surrounding calm is evidence that the holy status quo is being maintained by the other side as well. Like fish that swim in an aquarium without knowing that someone has drilled a tiny hole in the bottom and the water is slowing leaking out.