

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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PM WEATHERS POLITICAL CRISIS, SAYS 'I DON'T NEED SUPERVISORS FROM THE RIGHT' (Israel Hayom 11/20/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed eager to put the latest political crisis behind him Monday, telling Likud lawmakers the government "has a lot of work to do" until the next elections, scheduled for November 2019.

Since last Wednesday, Netanyahu has been sparing no effort to prevent snap elections in the wake of Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman's surprise resignation as defense minister.

Early elections seemed inevitable as Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett threatened to pull his party out of the coalition unless he was named defense minister in Lieberman's place, but on Monday, Bennett and fellow party member Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked backtracked the demand and announced that they were putting the good of the state ahead of their own political considerations and remaining in the coalition, withdrawing all demands.

The announcement came after Netanyahu named himself defense minister and urged the coalition parties to "act responsibly" and prevent early elections.

Despite Bennett's decision to keep the coalition intact, it still numbers only 61 out of a total of 120 MKs, giving it a very narrow majority with which to function until the next election.

Addressing the issue in a Likud faction meeting on Monday afternoon, Netanyahu stressed that "to carry on, we have to adhere to coalition discipline. No one can go rogue. These are sensitive times security-wise and the cabinet cannot become a source of leaks [to the media] or the scene of political bullying. Israel's security must outweigh politics."

"I don't need the Right's supervision, as it were. I keep this country safe," he added, alluding to the criticism leveled at the government's security policy, mainly by Bennett.

THE RUSSIA-IRANIAN DEAL OFFERED TO ISRAEL (Arutz-7 11/21/18)

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said in a closed hearing on Monday that Russia recently proposed to Israel and the US that Iran be granted relief from some US sanctions that were imposed on it, in return for the removal of Iranian forces and proxies from Syria, *Axios* reports Tuesday.

Netanyahu's statements came during a hearing of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee of the Knesset, according to the report.

MKs who attended the hearing said Netanyahu did not say whether the Russian proposal was made during his short conversation with President Vladimir Putin in Paris last Sunday, but that it definitely seemed that way from the prime minister's comments.

Iranian retrenchment in Syria is a huge concern for Israel, but the Russian position until now has been, at least publicly, that Iran's presence is legitimate because it came at the Assad regime's invitation. This is the first we're hearing that the Russians have floated an idea for Iran's withdrawal, and that they're linking it to US sanctions.

US President Donald Trump withdrew in May from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, and has since imposed two rounds of sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Russia and other European signatories to the 2015 deal did not agree with Trump's decision to leave the agreement and have been trying to save the accord.

The MKs quoted in the report said Netanyahu spoke favorably about his

meeting with Putin, and said the Russians cannot push the Iranians out of Syria on their own, but need help from other world powers.

According to the members of Knesset who attended the hearing, Netanyahu said Russia and the US were discussing ways to limit Iranian influence in Syria — including the Russian proposal on sanctions relief.

ISRAEL JOINS U.S. AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN PULLING OUT OF MIGRATION PACT (JPost 11/20/18)

Israel will not sign a nonbinding, first-of-its-kind migration pact aimed at managing migration and making it more orderly and safe, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday.

"I have instructed the Foreign Ministry to announce that Israel will not accede to, and will not sign, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration," the prime minister said. "We are committed to guarding our borders against illegal migrants. This is what we have done, and this is what we will continue to do."

The move comes after the US, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic have all said they will not be a part of the UN pact. Australia, Romania and Slovakia have also signaled that they may not join.

A number of the Central European and Eastern European countries that have pulled out have governments that ran on planks of limiting migration, and have been at odds with Brussels over the EU's immigration policies.

Israel's decision to withdraw comes even though Israeli foreign ministry officials took part in drawing up the pact, which grew out of the migration to Europe crisis in 2015, which saw the biggest influx of refugees and migrants since World War II.

The pact is to be signed during a meeting in Morocco in December, a meeting that Israel will now not attend.

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Alex Ostrin, Yoav Zolty, Editors-in-Chief

Akiva Sturm, Eli Jarashov, Ezra Sepowitz and Bentzion Rotblat, Editors

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Diplomatic sources said that a number of countries, including the US, Hungary and Austria, turned to Israel with requests to withdraw from the pact, but that the decision was made based on Israel's interests.

"This agreement includes elements that are not in line with Israel's interests," one diplomatic official said. "For instance, family reunification for migrants. We are a small country in a very complicated geographic position. We are not like Germany, which can absorb a million people."

US President Donald Trump, who has made stopping the flow of migrants to the US a core issue of his presidency, pulled Washington out of the pact in 2017, saying that it was not compatible with US sovereignty.

The pact has been billed as an instrument to govern and manage migration around the world. The UN estimates that there are some 250 million migrants around the world. The pact deals with issues such as why people migrate, how to protect them, how to combat human trafficking, how to integrate the migrants into home countries, and what means can be used to return them home.

Meretz MK Michal Rozin, former chairwoman of the Knesset's committee on foreign workers, blasted Netanyahu's decision, saying it "is another example of the process of Israel's moral bankruptcy."

She said this is the "result of the prime minister joining with the extreme Right in Israel, Europe and the US. It cannot be that Israel – founded by many people who were refugees who fled murderous and cruel regimes, and which was among the leading countries in drafting the UN's Refugee Convention – will join with the forces of hatred, division and nationalism."

ISRAELI TOP ELITE UNIT 669 HOSTS LARGEST INTERNATIONAL RESCUE DRILL (JPost 11/20/18)

The Israel Air Force's elite Airborne Combat, Search and Rescue Unit 669 held its first international rescue exercise, hosting elite units from six foreign countries in the largest rescue exercise ever held in the Jewish state.

Dubbed "Sky Angels," the exercise was held from November 4 until November 15, and brought units from the IAF and ground forces together with units from the United States, Italy, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Canada and the Netherlands to participate and observe the drill.

The drill took place at 669's training facility at the Palmahim Airbase, as well as in various locations in the north and south of the country. Led by the air force's elite special units, various air force squadrons took part in the exercise, including the IAF's 118 Night Riders Squadron.

"This drill was a strategically important exercise," a senior air force officer said Tuesday, explaining that the different languages and mentalities allowed the participants to see different perspectives in combat rescue operations.

According to the military, the drill consisted of defensive and offensive combat rescue operations, including multi-casualty events.

"International cooperation enables training with armies that deal with combat extractions which deal with and investigate scenarios in a different manner, [and] contributes to the challenges and learning of all sides, as well as increases mutual understanding between the armies," the military said.

According to a senior officer in the air force, troops in 669 were able to share their perspectives and experiences from both combat operations as well as rescuing civilians.

"At the end of the day, there is no other unit in Israel like 669," the officer said, adding that "669 is on alert 24/7, ready to jump to any rescue operations within a few minutes, at all times, in all scenarios."

The IAF's elite 669 Unit is one of the four special forces of the IDF which has rescued over 10,000 people across Israel and the world.

Formed in 1974 following the Yom Kippur War, Unit 669 is one of the four special forces of the IDF with troops trained in combat medicine, parachuting, scuba diving, counter-terrorism, rappelling, rescue under harsh conditions and navigation.

Initially charged with extracting Israeli pilots who were shot down in enemy territory, it later began undertaking rescue missions of Special Force soldiers

as well as injured or stranded Israelis, both at home and abroad. In the four decades since its founding, the unit has received several IDF chief of staff commendations for its work.

AIRBNB REMOVING LISTING IN WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS (YNet 11/19/18)

Airbnb, the short-term apartment rental giant, surrendered to the boycott movement and announced on Monday that it has decided to remove from its site apartments for rent in Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

"We concluded that we should remove listings in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank that are at the core of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians," a statement on the Airbnb website said.

"Our hope is that someday sooner rather than later, a framework is put in place where the entire global community is aligned so there will be a resolution to this historic conflict and a clear path forward for everybody to follow."

An Airbnb spokesman said the decision, affecting some 200 listings, would take effect in the days ahead.

"We are certainly not experts when it comes to historic conflicts in this region," the company stated. "Our team is struggling with this problem and we have been working hard to reach the right approach. As a global platform operating in 191 countries and regions and more than 81,000 cities, we must consider the impact we have and act responsibly."

Oded Revivi, mayor of the West Bank town of Efrat and a representative of the settler council described the Airbnb decision as contrary to its mission, as stated on the website, of "help(ing) to bring people together in as many places as possible around the world".

"When they make such a decision, they get involved with politics, which ... is going to defeat the actual purpose of the enterprise itself," he told Reuters.

Dep. Minister Michael Oren criticized Airbnb for blacklisting and singling out Israel while ignoring other regions involved in land disputes, such as Turkish Cyprus, Tibet, the Crimea and Western Sahara.

The left-wing Peace Now movement issued a response to the Airbnb decision: "Even if Netanyahu and Bennett refuse to see the Green Line, the rest of the world differentiates between Israel and the occupied territories. International companies are interested in doing business with Israel but are not ready to accept the continuation of military control over millions of Palestinians."

ETHIOPIA'S JEWS PROTEST ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S IMMIGRATION DELAY (Israel Hayom 11/20/18)

Hundreds of Ethiopian Jews gathered in the capital, Addis Ababa, to protest the Israeli government's decision not to allow all of them to immigrate to Israel, leaving their families divided between the two countries.

Representatives of the 8,000 Jews living in Ethiopia urged the Ethiopian Jews living in Israel to think carefully before voting for Israel's ruling party, the Likud, over the delays in repatriation to Israel.

The Ethiopian Jews claim they are being blocked from immigrating to Israel, despite a 2015 pledge by the Israeli government to bring them to Israel.

"I urge Ethiopian Jews to think twice before voting for the Likud party because the party's leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, is not keeping his promise to help us immigrate to Israel," Neggousa Zemene Alemu, head coordinator of the Ethiopian Jews in the Ethiopian cities of Addis Ababa and Gondar, told The Associated Press Monday, as hundreds gathered at a synagogue in Addis Ababa on Monday.

"I don't believe the Israeli government has a financial problem [that would prevent it from bringing] the remaining Ethiopian Jews back to Israel," he said. "I rather think it is a political move, or racism."

The Israeli government decided on October 7 that only 1,000 Ethiopian Jews would be permitted to relocate to Israel, which would leave many families divided, according to leaders of Ethiopia's Jewish community. They said

Ethiopian Jews are starving, ostracized and deprived of basic needs in Africa while the government in Israel is "dragging its feet to come to our rescue."

Eyayu Abuhay, a community organizer, said 50 Ethiopian Jews have died since 2015 while waiting to join their family members in Israel. "We want Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to come to our rescue before we all die here," he said.

In 1991, with Ethiopia in civil war, Israel launched the dramatic Operation Solomon, in which some 14,500 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in less than two days.

"Why are we not allowed to immigrate to Israel? Is it because we are black or uneducated?" asked Melese Sidisto, a coordinator for Ethiopian Jews in Addis Ababa, who then burst into tears. "We are being cheated like a child. This is not right."

In a letter addressed to Netanyahu, the Ethiopian Jews in Addis Ababa said they wanted to go to Israel immediately and without any preconditions to join their families.

"Our family members are dying here while we are waiting for your promise to be implemented," the letter reads. "Not implementing the promise amounts of playing with Israeli citizens lives. This is not expected from a democratic state like Israel."

ARCHITECTS, ACTIVISTS SLAM JERUSALEM OLD CITY CABLE CAR PLAN (YNet 11/16/18)

An Israeli plan to build a cable car to Jerusalem's historic Old City has united architects and Palestinian activists in opposition to a project they say is both an eyesore and a ploy to entrench Israeli control over the city's contested eastern sector.

Developers say the proposed project is meant to relieve snarling traffic and will ferry some 3,000 tourists an hour from the western sector directly to the Old City, in east Jerusalem. It follows a series of Israeli projects in the volatile city that have enraged the Palestinians.

Further complicating matters is the project's association with the Elad Foundation, a group that has settled Jewish nationalists in the heart of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods. The final cable car station will be integrated into a future tourist center run by the organization.

"The cable car will send oblivious tourists flying over the heads of Palestinians and drop them off in the middle of occupied east Jerusalem, the eye of the storm, the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said Betty Herschman of Ir Amim, an advocacy group that promotes equality in the city.

"This cable car is putting new facts on the ground that undermine any possibility for a peace process."

In recent years, Israel has carried out a series of initiatives, billed as development projects, that have infuriated the Palestinians. Israel built a light rail train through both parts of the city, abutting the Old City and snaking through predominantly Arab neighborhoods. The train is popular with Arabs and Jews, but it has also been the target of Palestinians when tensions rise.

Another proposed plan involves digging a railway tunnel under Jerusalem's Old City, passing near sites holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The proposed line would end at the Western Wall, with a station named after US President Donald Trump, who is cheered in Israel for having recognized Jerusalem as its capital.

Beyond political opposition, the cable car has faced an outcry from urban planners and architects.

"This project is an outrage, an affront to our historic skyline," said Moshe Safdie, a renowned architect who signed a petition against the plan along with 70 Israeli figures from architecture, archaeology and academia. "This will Disneyfy a sacred place. Imagine a huge cable car flying over the Vatican and dumping tourists in front of St. Peter's. It's unprecedented."

No image says Jerusalem like the postcard view of its Old City—with its towering ancient walls, the Western Wall and the glimmering gold-topped Dome of the Rock.

The cable car would run 1,400 meters (nearly one mile), launching from the First Station, a popular food and cultural center in west Jerusalem, sailing over the city's ancient valley, stopping at Mount Zion, a hill just outside the Old City walls, and proceeding through the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan before alighting at the tourist center.

Aber Zayyad, a Palestinian resident of Silwan and director of its women's community center, said she fears the cable car flying overhead will infringe on residents' privacy and that its construction may harm houses and a local cemetery.

"Our tombs will likely be damaged, not to mention our lives," she said. "And of course it will further attempts to make Jerusalem a solely Jewish city."

The cable car's destination at the tourist center has sparked concern about the project's potential to serve settler interests by promoting Elad's exclusive Jewish narrative of the city.

"We believe that this is an attempt to change the character of the city and its face ... its culture and identity," said Adnan Hussein, the Palestinian minister of Jerusalem Affairs.

Israel's Tourism Ministry denies any political motivation. It says the cable car presents an environmentally friendly solution to the crisis of congestion, accessibility and parking at a time of record-breaking tourist visits. The Old City is Israel's No. 1 tourist destination.

Israel's National Infrastructure Committee, which fast-tracks transportation projects of national importance, has given approval to the project. A building permit is to come after a 60-day period of public review—a step that developers believe will be a formality.

In May, Israel allocated some \$55 million to the project and, barring major complications, cars should be crisscrossing the valley by 2021, the Tourism Ministry said.

Amir Halevi, the ministry's director general, said he sympathizes with concerns about the sensitivity of the site but claimed that the rapidly rising tourism rates demand a dramatic response.

"There is always the question of how to balance developing and preserving," he said. "But you cannot stop development."

Halevi added that the Ministry mapped the cable car route carefully to "minimize" the evacuation and demolition of buildings.

He stressed the cable car would not enter the Old City or go over its walls, but would stop just outside. "We're doing this to prevent the need to construct more invasive things," he said.

Urban planning experts disagree that the cable cars, which hold 10 people per carriage, will resolve the city's daunting transportation problems.

Salmah Milson Arad, director of the Jerusalem chapter of the Association of Architects and Urban Planners, estimated the cable cars will relieve only around 30 percent of bus traffic.

Other critics have questioned whether the massive undertaking will even appeal to customers.

"Israelis come to the (Western) Wall in their cars, the ultra-Orthodox walk, Arabs won't use this, and it's hard to imagine tourists in massive buses going out of their way to get to First Station," said Giora Solar, former director of conservation for Israel's Antiquities Authority. "So who's going to benefit?"

KKL-JNF OFFERS HELP FOR CALIFORNIA FOREST FIRES RECOVERY (Arutz-7 11/20/18)

The Israeli environmental organization Keren Kayemet L'Israel-Jewish National Fund offered its assistance in helping California recover from its recent devastating forest fires.

"We have been following the situation with the horrific wildfires in California including the unprecedented destruction of communities and the devastation to surrounding forests. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of those who have perished. We want to express our solidarity, encouragement and support and offer our assistance if there's anything we can do to help," Daniel Atar, world chairman of KKL-JNF, said in a letter sent

on Tuesday to Vicki Christiansen, chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service.

The two organizations have worked together for some 30 years, including offering assistance and knowledge-sharing in the field of forestation whenever necessary, according to JNF.

Most recently, the U.S. Forest Service aided KKL-JNF in cases of forest fires in northern Israel during 2006 and 2010.

"We pray for your success in extinguishing these fires quickly and without further casualties," Atar concluded.

'LET'S DO BUSINESS,' TOURISM MINISTER TELLS GLOBAL HOTELIERS (JPost 11/21/18)

Global hoteliers, entrepreneurs and senior representatives from international tourism chains gathered in Tel Aviv on Tuesday for the inaugural Israel Hotel Investment Summit.

Attracted by record-breaking incoming tourism expected to top 4,000,000 visitors in 2019 and opportunities presented by a shortage of accommodation for tourists to Israel, tourism leaders were provided with an analysis of foreign investment opportunities in Israel's hospitality sector.

"Let's do business," Minister of Tourism Yariv Levin told the audience, presenting a range of incentives and simplified regulations for businesses seeking to enter the local market.

"For the first time in Israel, we have gathered in one place property owners, investors, hoteliers and representatives of hotel chains. This, with the sole purpose of promoting the rapid establishment of thousands of hotel rooms throughout the country," Levin said.

"Israel is at the height of a tremendous momentum in tourism. We have already surpassed the number of tourists who arrived during all of 2017."

Record rates of tourism have translated into approximately NIS 18 billion in revenue since January, according to Tourism Ministry data.

"The growth in tourism that is happening is very positive but there is a lack of supply, which is being addressed by Airbnb and the shared economy," Gal Mor, co-owner of Abraham Hostels and Tours, told the *Post*.

"Israeli tourism used to be very group based, but we're seeing a strong growth in independent tourism. We believe in a much more social travel focus. Fewer people traveling by themselves or with their partners alone, and more people traveling to meet other travelers and locals," said Mor.

'LET US GROW QUIETLY' (Yitzchak Eldan, JPost 11/19/18)

Israeli children from all over the country have recently joined an unprecedented march initiated by the children of the Gaza envelope under the slogan "Let us grow quietly!"

Since Israel's 2005 disengagement from the Gaza Strip, the residents of the Gaza envelope have been living under fire of terrorist organizations from Gaza: rockets, terrorist tunnels, booby traps, burning fields and more.

The children of Gaza envelope haven't had a day or night without fear of "Color Red" alerts, fear of being killed in their homes by rocket attacks or infiltration of terrorists into their communities.

The Israeli children of the Gaza envelope are denied all basic rights as described by United Nations: the right to a normal life, the right to security, the right to go to school and the right to play outside without fear, the right to sleep peacefully in a regular room not in a shelter, the right to live without missile alerts on a daily basis and the right to breathe fresh air and not the thick smoke of burning tires.

Today, November 20, Universal Children's Day, marks the anniversary of the day that the UN Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

On this day, while we identify with the suffering of children all over the world, we must remind the international community that it should look with empathy to the plight of the Israeli children.

How long will those responsible for the implementation of the Convention on

the Rights of the Child at the United Nations, UNICEF and Save the Children remain silent? They should care for all children equally – Israeli children as well as Palestinian children.

Today, on International Children's Day, our heart goes to the suffering of all children of the world – and certainly to the ones who are subject to daily indiscriminate rocket attacks: the Israeli children.

LATEST POLITICAL TURMOIL PAINTS CLEAR PICTURE OF WINNERS, LOSERS (Yehuda Shlezinger, Israel Hayom 11/20/18)

As the dust settles on the political battlefield, it is becoming clear that some of those involved in the political turmoil that threatened to bring down the government over the past week, gambled – and lost.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emerged from the latest coalition crisis as a determined leader who does not yield to political pressure. He weathered the threat of early elections, triggered by Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman's surprise resignation as defense minister, and withstood the ultimatum presented by Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett, who demanded to succeed Lieberman in exchange for remaining in the coalition. Netanyahu rejected Bennett's demand and appointed himself defense minister, thereby nearly guaranteeing Likud a bump in the polls in the next elections, scheduled for November 2019.

Habayit Hayehudi's leader, for his part, did the math and opted to withdraw all demands and remain in the coalition, citing the "good of the country."

Bennett's decision to remain in the government still means the coalition numbers only 61 out of a total of 120 MKs, giving it a very narrow majority with which to function until the next election. The coalition may not be stable, but Netanyahu has regained control over when to call early elections, if at all. Bennett narrowly avoided being labeled as the one who brought down a right-wing government. For the most part, he was able to do some damage control before being seen exclusively as someone who makes empty threats. Yes, he will be the butt of many jokes and jabs in the next few days, but in terms of public memory, he will probably be perceived as a responsible adult who was willing to "take a hit" rather than destabilize the entire country.

Kulanu leader Moshe Kahlon emerged from the coalition crisis unscathed. While it may have appeared for a moment as though he held the coalition's fate in his hands, Kahlon made neither threats nor promises, preserving his Teflon image. Still, it remains to be seen what the future holds for his party, especially in the polls.

The big loser to emerge from all this is undoubtedly Lieberman. Yisrael Beytenu's chairman had hoped to see the election year through as a hawkish defense minister that out-rights the right-wing government at every turn, but given that his resignation failed to trigger snap elections, all he is looking at now is months of boredom on the benches of the opposition.

Moreover, his failed gambit has made him an easy target for other right-wing parties in the coming election, as his rivals will constantly remind him how, as defense minister, not only did he fail to defeat Hamas, but also bolted when the going got tough and nearly brought down a right-wing government.

