

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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NETANYAHU BLASTS POLICE: STATE WITNESSES ARE TOLD THAT ONLY WAY OUT IS TO SMEAR ME (Ha'aretz, 3/7/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu harshly criticized the police for recruiting his confidants as state witnesses in the corruption cases against him.

"They're taking people they claim committed some offense," Netanyahu wrote in Hebrew on his Facebook page.

"They take them into detention, terrify them and tell them: 'Your life is over, your family's life is over. We'll take everything from you, including your freedom. You want to get out of this? There's one way – smear Netanyahu. It doesn't matter if you tell the truth – the main thing is you smear Netanyahu.'"

Nir Hefetz, a former chief spokesman for Netanyahu, made a deal with the police Sunday to turn state's evidence in a bribery case involving Israeli telecom giant Bezeq. In the case, dubbed Case 4000, Hefetz allegedly liaised between the Netanyahus and Bezeq's Walla news website. According to the police, Hefetz arranged for flattering items on the couple and censorship of less flattering items, in return for benefits for Bezeq.

Hefetz agreed to hand over recordings of Netanyahu and wife Sara as part of his deal with the police. In return for testifying against Netanyahu, Hefetz will not stand trial, face prison time or be fined. While he testifies, he will be housed at an isolated location.

Hefetz is one of a number of Netanyahu confidants to turn against the prime minister in five corruption cases plaguing him.

SAUDI CROWN PRINCE MEETS SENIOR ISRAELI OFFICIALS IN EGYPT (Israel Hayom 3/7/18)

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met with senior Israeli officials during his visit to Egypt this week, the London-based Arab newspaper Al-Araby Al-Jadeed reported on Wednesday.

The report said the meeting focused on the normalization of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and included Saudi Arabia's commitment to the "deal of the century," the Middle East peace plan being devised by U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration.

Within that framework, Israel would take part in the unprecedented real estate venture being sponsored by the Saudis in the Gulf of Aqaba. Crown Prince Mohammed first announced plans for the 26,500-square-kilometer (10,230-square-mile) zone at an international investment conference in Riyadh last October. Officials say public and private investment in the area is expected to reach \$500 billion. The mega-city would be built on Saudi territory on the eastern shore of the Red Sea near the border with Jordan, and connect to Egypt across the gulf via a bridge running through the island of Tiran.

Known as Neom – from the Greek prefix "neo" (new) and the first letter of the Arabic word "mostaqbal" (future) – the mega-city is being billed as "the world's most ambitious project" and is intended to become a transnational city and economic zone. The crown prince's stated objective for the project is to wean Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, off oil revenues.

The source who leaked the information about the prince's meeting with the Israelis said that in light of the shared sea border between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Israel, it is necessary to establish an international framework to include Israel in the Saudi project.

According to the report, the prince, who is currently in the U.K., is also applying immense pressure behind the scenes on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to be part of the American "deal of the century."

If an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is struck, the Saudis will reportedly be the

beneficiaries of considerable American investments, among other things in the Neom project. In exchange, they will act as the Americans' spearhead for implementing the peace agreement.

BREAKING TABOO, PALESTINIAN PARTIES TO RUN IN ISRAELI ELECTION IN JERUSALEM (Ha'aretz 3/8/18)

A Palestinian political party is set to contend in Jerusalem's municipal elections in October. This is the second Palestinian party to announce it will run in the elections, which East Jerusalem's Palestinians, on the whole, have boycotted since 1967.

Ramadan Dabash, a social activist from East Jerusalem, announced this week he will head a ticket in the election, in a bid to break the Palestinian taboo on voting since the 1967 conquest of East Jerusalem.

Dabash, chairman of the community administration of the Tzur Baher neighborhood, intends to include representatives of all the Palestinian neighborhoods in his party, which he plans to call "Jerusalem for Jerusalemites."

"I think people are ripe to vote. Some people object, saying this is Israelization and normalization, but I tell them this is everyone's municipality and everyone's country," Dabash says.

"I'm not telling them to give up Al Aqsa, or convert to Judaism or renounce Palestinian nationalism, but we must have our place in city hall," he says.

This week Dabash, who has close ties with politicians in local and national government and once even described himself a Likud activist, met Yossi Beilin and other left-wing public figures and asked them to support his move.

In the past, several Palestinians wanted to run in the local election, but stepped down after their cars set on fire by Palestinian nationalists. "I'm not afraid, my car is worth 5,000 shekels [a little less than \$1,500] and I don't

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leave documents in it," says Dabash. He notes, however, that he changes his route every now and then to make it harder to attack him.

Dabash is not the first Palestinian to announce his candidacy in the Jerusalem elections. About a year ago, the East Jerusalem Party, led by teacher Iyad Bibuah, registered to run in the 2018 election.

In a March 2017 interview with Haaretz, Bibuah, a teacher living near the Mount of Olives, said Israel's sovereignty was "a diplomatic, not a municipal issue. Our party will act in the municipal field and work so that the Arab residents of Jerusalem have the rights and infrastructure they deserve, along with reducing violence and terror in the city."

It is not clear if Bibuah's party still plans to run in the October election.

Jerusalem's Palestinian residents make up an estimated 37 percent of the city's population. If a large proportion of them were to vote, the political makeup of the city council – currently controlled by a rightist-Haredi coalition – could change. However, as the main Palestinian organizations are unlikely to change their policy against voting, turnout is expected to remain low.

"There's a feeling something must be done, but the public doesn't want to go with such people," an East Jerusalem activist, who asked to remain unnamed, said in response to Dabash's announcement.

"Even if the Palestinian Authority collapses, the public wants to follow a transparent, respectable person, not one close to the [Israeli] authorities. I won't vote, even if voting means getting the sewage system fixed and operating the kindergartens. It's a matter of principle," said the activist.

Despite the criticism, Dabash's announcement reflects the growing sentiment in East Jerusalem in favor of lifting the boycott on city elections. The Palestinians have boycotted the city election since 1967, claiming that voting is tantamount to recognizing the occupation and Israeli rule in the city. Jerusalem's Palestinians have no right to vote for the Knesset.

In recent years, however, due to the standstill in the peace process and frustration with the Palestinian Authority's performance, Jerusalem's Palestinians, especially the young, seem more willing to consider taking part in the election.

A survey conducted recently by Professor Dan Miodownik and Noam Brenner of Hebrew University, together with the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, indicates that almost 60 percent of East Jerusalem's residents believe Palestinians should take part in the municipal election, while 13 percent object. However, several officials said that without the support of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian parties or Jordan, the move will fail to draw a significant number of voters.

"People want to act, but the conditions aren't ripe yet," says media consultant Khatem Havis. "As long as the political bodies, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority aren't part of it, and without the Americans' and Europeans' sponsorship, it won't work."

IDF: EGYPTIAN CYBER WARFARE IN SINAI CAUSING CELL DISRUPTIONS IN SOUTH ISRAEL (JPost, 3/7/18)

Cellular blackouts across southern Israel are due to electronic warfare being waged by the Egyptian Army against Islamic State terrorists in northern Sinai, the IDF confirmed on Wednesday.

According to the IDF's Spokesperson's Unit, the disruptions, which have lasted for some two weeks will likely continue, the defense establishment "is dealing with the issue with their Egyptian counterparts. We have a dialogue with them on the issue."

An IDF Spokesman told *The Jerusalem Post* that they "are not surprised" by the electronic warfare component of the large-scale operation but stressed that the disruptions caused by the Egyptians "is happening on Egyptian soil." Nevertheless, the military has been coordinating with the Egypt on the issue. In an interview with Army Radio's Good Morning Israel, Communications Minister Ayoub Kara said that "in the past few days, we've been discussing ways to solve the issue." Kara said that "after the very important meeting

across the border yesterday, we've managed to reach agreements that will end the disruptions. I suggest waiting two or three days."

A report by Israel's Channel 10 quoted security officials as saying that the Egyptians have promised to resolve the issue within 24 hours.

In early February, the Egyptian military launched a major campaign against "terrorist and criminal elements and organizations" across the country, focusing on northern and central Sinai region where Islamic State terrorists have waged a deadly insurgency against Cairo.

Meanwhile, the Eshkol Regional Council is threatening to sue the cellular networks as disruptions continued into a second week, calling them "life-threatening." The letter of warning to the cellphone networks from the Eshkol Regional Council was written on behalf of the residents of the area.

Council head Gadi Yarkoni said that the "lack of response and failure to deal with the malfunction so far by the cellular companies and the Communications Ministry shows scorn for the residents of the Gaza vicinity who are carrying on their daily routine under constant security threat."

FROM VIDEO GAME TO DISASTER RELIEF, PIONEERING ISRAELI TECH SHOWCASED AT AIPAC (Times of Israel, 3/5/18)

Edgybees Ltd., an Israel-based startup, has developed a technology to enhance the awareness of first responders in emergency situations, by layering 3-D mapping and other data onto live video feeds from drones, airplanes, and cars. The startup, which has just completed a \$5.5 million funding round, was among one of three selected to present its technology at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) annual policy conference on Sunday.

The technology has received an "overwhelming response" from industrial and commercial drone users in the field of public safety and search and rescue, especially in the US, said Adam Kaplan, co-founder and CEO of Edgybees, in a phone interview upon arrival at the AIPAC conference.

"Seven months ago, we were entirely a video game company," he said. "After releasing our game to the public in May, we quickly adapted it to the needs of first responders, and by August and September, our software was running effectively to help first responders during Hurricane Irma," Kaplan said.

Edgybees's First Response app uses an algorithm to create and layer three-dimensional mapping onto visuals from live video-feeds of drones, cameras mounted on cars, and body accessories to provide a realistic picture to first responders in emergency situations.

The company's technological innovation is led by Menashe Haskin, ITS chief technology officer, who used to manage the Israeli development office of Amazon Prime Air, and holds over 35 US patents in the fields of aerospace, video and vision processing, and data processing and communication.

First Response was successfully used in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma to map and identify distress calls in flooded areas and the Northern California fires to keep firefighters out of harm's way last October, the company said.

While existing drone videos were already providing visual imagery to first responders, they were not capable of helping them make sense of what they were seeing and determining crucial information, like identifying the location of distress signals, the placement of power lines and the positions of other first responders

Edgybees's augmented reality software layers maps and data with this information onto videos in real-time, providing the first responders with a clearer picture of what is going on to help them better manage the crisis.

"Video without context is less powerful," said Kaplan, and Edgybees set out to provide the context needed.

Kaplan has co-founded and served on executive teams of several companies which have been acquired in recent years including Xennex Inc., Athoc, Digital Guardian and Tonian.

Among the investors of the startup are Motorola Solutions Venture Capital, Verizon Ventures, OurCrowd, 8VC, NFX and Aspect Ventures, the startup

said in a statement.

2017 was a record-breaking year for weather- and climate-related disasters in the US, with 16 separate billion-dollar disaster events reaching an accumulative cost of more than \$300 billion, according to the data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Aside from using the seed funding to bring its technology to areas such as defense, smart cities, and broadcast media, Edgybees plans to create a platform to enable developers to create their applications, Kaplan said.

THE SMART PERIPHERY: CISCO TO LAUNCH A NETWORK OF TECH HUBS IN ISRAEL (YNet, 3/7/18)

Cisco's CEO and Chairman Chuck Robbins inaugurated a network of technological hubs across Israel on Tuesday in a festive event attended by President Reuven Rivlin. As many as 100 hubs are expected to open in all parts of Israel by year-end and connect Israel's geographic and social periphery to central Israel and the rest of the world.

In the 18 months that elapsed since the MOU signed by Cisco and Israeli government, a pilot program has been implemented, including the establishment of three technological hubs in the Negev. The hubs constitute of space that offers advanced technological infrastructure, Wi-Fi and broadband connectivity, professional training provided by Cisco and communication and remote work tools that allow small business owners, self-employed and startups to work anywhere as well as create a new ecosystem. The event also included key tools for remote communication. Sapir College President Omri Yadlin, talked with the event's participants via Cisco's Spark technology directly from the Sderot Conference for Society, describing his vision for a near-term future of technology-enabled learning. "What we do here now is the future, the next decade: working on the local level while thinking on the global level. Connecting the hubs from the periphery creates a powerful fabric."

Activists from the tech hubs in east Jerusalem, Dimona and Khoura joined the event from afar as well. They told the participants about the activities and partnerships that have become possible with technological infrastructure and the major projects of the startups using the hubs.

Chuck Robbins, CEO and chairman of Cisco Corporation, said, "Cisco is present in Israel for 20 years already. This is one of my favorite places to visit. We built our company on technological innovation. Aside from Silicon Valley, I don't know of any place in the world that has more innovation than Israel. We are excited to announce this initiative and believe it is the first out of many more future ones. Mr. Robbins concluded by thanking President Rivlin for the opportunity to create this partnership.

AIR INDIA CONFIRMS: FLIGHTS TO TEL AVIV OVER SAUDI ARABIA (Arutz-7 INN.com 3/7/18)

Air India confirmed Wednesday that it has received permission to fly over Saudi Arabia during flights between Tel Aviv and New Delhi.

Assertions to that effect had been made by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu about the new flight path, a first.

Saudi Arabia has historically banned flights to and from Israel from using its airspace.

The new flight path will shave nearly two hours off the current flight times between Tel Aviv and New Delhi. Flights will begin on March 22, and will be offered on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, an Air India spokesman confirmed.

Tickets for the new route went on sale shortly after the announcement Wednesday, reported the *Times of Israel*.

The move is believed to reflect growing ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, although Saudi officials have repeatedly denied any ties with Israel.

El Al, which flies four weekly flights to Mumbai has also expressed an interest in flying over Saudi airspace in order to reduce flight time.

NO MORE SLOGANS, WE NEED ACTION! (Gershon Baskin, JPost 3/7/18)

The rulers of the Middle East are now beginning to see that working with Israel – instead of isolating it – can strengthen their own security and help them meet the needs of their people. These emerging relationships promise to be an example for other nations to follow, a force for moderation, and they are a message to the Palestinian leadership that a bright future is possible when you finally put aside generations of hatred and choose to live side-by-side in peace with the Jewish State of Israel.

We must all work for that, toward that future, two states for two peoples: one Jewish with secure and defensible borders and one Palestinian with its own flag and its own future.

Today that dream seems remote. This is tragic. The absence of a constructive peace process is nothing to celebrate. Israel's security cannot be fully assured and a promise cannot be fully realized until she is at peace with all her neighbors, and peace begins by talking.

It has been nearly eight years since Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had direct talks with an Israeli prime minister. There've been talks about talks and sessions where others have served as a go-between, but no Palestinian willingness to talk face-to-face. There is no substitute for direct negotiations.

Preparing for conflict may require eternal vigilance, but working for peace demands eternal faith – faith that there is a future beyond bloodshed and war. We share that faith and we are ready for that day.

Those are not my words. Those words were spoken by Howard Kohr, CEO of AIPAC. I can sign off on almost everything above. If I had written those words I would have added that working for peace demands not solely faith, but also initiative. What Kohr and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu don't say is that in the entire history of the State of Israel, there has never been an Israeli peace initiative.

I know the response will be – well where is the Palestinian peace initiative? On February 20, just two weeks ago, President Abbas presented a Palestinian peace initiative to the United Nations Security Council. It was fascinating to hear all of the Israeli responses to that initiative, that there was nothing new there. That is essentially correct – the Palestinian peace initiative has been on the table for a long time, it is based on the Arab Peace Initiative that was issued in March 2002 and ratified at least six times since, not only adopted by the Arab League but also by the Islamic Conference representing 56 countries, including Iran.

There has never been an official response by Israel to the Arab Peace Initiative, just as there has never been an Israeli peace initiative. In fact, there has never been an official Israeli government decision or even resolution in the Knesset supporting the two-state solution.

To me, as someone who grew up in the Zionist movement with the national ethos of taking our fate into our own hands, no longer being the victims of history but rather consciously being the shapers and makers of our own, the lack of Israeli initiative for peace is simply bewildering.

There is no doubt Netanyahu is one of the world's greatest orators. He is amazing in the way that he captures the audience, uses gimmicks, drawings, cartoons – he had the listeners in the palm of his hand. Unfortunately, his slogans never give way to real substance. Yes, he has a real, legitimate case when he talks about the Palestinian Authority paying the families of terrorists, and the Palestinians really do have to confront that issue, tell the world why they are doing that and how that does not encourage terrorism.

Netanyahu's argument about the non-recognition of Israel as the Jewish nation state is another good argument and the Palestinians have failed to explain what their problem is in recognizing the Jewish people's right to statehood. I have heard their explanation and I understand where it is coming from, and I have heard them say it will be dealt with toward the end of negotiations, not as a precondition. I do not believe that Palestinian non-recognition of Israel's Jewishness is an excuse for not recognizing the

Palestinian people's right to national statehood by Israel.

Why can't Israel present a peace initiative that goes beyond the slogans of calling on the Palestinians to negotiate? Israel is not giving away bargaining cards by stating a priori that the Palestinians have a right to a state and that it will be in within the territories that Israeli conquered in June 1967. Israel can declare that the negotiations will be based on those 1967 line with agreed upon territorial swaps. Israel can say that we must find a solution that recognizes Palestinian rights in Jerusalem, because Israel agreed in 1993 that Jerusalem is one of the core issues.

Neither US President Donald Trump nor Prime Minister Netanyahu can remove Jerusalem from the table.

Israel can also quote and agree with part of the statement on Palestinian refugees in the Arab Peace Initiative, that we must find a just and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee issue. Palestinians have wanted to hear the words of recognition of their national rights for as long as Israel has been waiting. The difference is that Israel achieved its national rights and after almost 70 years, is a strong state. In the words of Howard Kohr: "The story of Israel is the story of an idea, an idea that proved bigger, more durable, and more inspiring than any obstacle and any threat."

Israel is the victor in the Israeli-Palestinian story.

Israel is not the victim and it is long past the time to play the victim card – that is an anti-Zionist, Diaspora- mentality game. As victors it is time for Israel to take the initiative. Israel can also afford to demonstrate the generosity of a victor. This can be done without taking unreasonable risks. Peace will be built by changing the nature of relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

That will never be achieved through the barrels of rifles and the power of tanks. It can be achieved through the generosity of spirit and the true intention of turning slogans into deeds.

TRUMP-NETANYAHU MEETING: THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR (Orly Azoulay, YNet 3/6/18)

The storm that snapped trees on Washington's streets had already abated, and the prime minister woke up to a pleasant winter day in the capital. Blair House, where he is staying as the White House's guest, was shaken by a different kind of storm that day. Benjamin Netanyahu woke up to another morning in which one of his associates would turn state's witness.

In the midst of investigations, the prime minister went to meet with President Donald Trump, who is going through a hard time too: He is embroiled in criminal allegations and dealing with chaos in the White House, as his finest assistants and advisors are turning their backs on him and abandoning his ship. Like Netanyahu, he blames the media—and the entire world. His son-in-law got in trouble and lost his security clearance, and his associates say the president is "fuming and isolated."

Monday's meeting at the White House was, without a doubt, a meeting between two leaders who have a lot in common. They both believe there is a "witch-hunt" going on against them and can't understand how the world has failed to see the nature of their leadership. Being in the same boat, these two leaders need each other.

Trump needs Netanyahu's embrace and admiration to maintain his power base—which is made up primarily of pro-Israel evangelicals. Netanyahu needs Trump's good words to prove to his base once again that there is no other statesman like him, and that no one else can deliver the US president's blessing to Israel like he can. For a short while, Trump provided Netanyahu with a "supportive political asylum."

The issues on the table included the Iranian threat, the nuclear agreement, the tensions on Israel's northern border and in Gaza, as well as the peace plan that Trump had promised and that Netanyahu didn't shed a tear over when he saw it fade away. Trump said exactly what Netanyahu wanted to hear—that there is no Palestinian partner and that it's their fault: "If they don't return to the table, there won't be peace. It's possible."

Trump went out of his way to accommodate his good friend: He and Melania greeted Sara and Benjamin Netanyahu and sat down for a short conversation with them. Trump decided to go to great lengths to make Netanyahu feel comfortable, and even said he might attend the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem. In front of the cameras, the alliance between the two seems to exceed the political interest.

The two leaders avoided a press conference, and tough questions from the media. They wanted to use their friendship to their advantage, as long as they still can. The investigators' final word, on both of them, has yet to be said.

WORKING THE US CROWD: NETANYAHU SIDESTEPS LEGAL AND POLITICAL WOES AT HOME (Editorial, JPost 3/7/18)

If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is straining under the weight of the seemingly endless investigations against him, or the coalition crisis that has suddenly emerged, it was not apparent when he addressed AIPAC's annual policy conference on Tuesday.

This was vintage Netanyahu. He was articulate, he was animated, and he was – except when talking about Iran or the Palestinians – upbeat. Netanyahu's 30-minute address to the crowd of some 18,000 people included all the elements one has come to expect in a Netanyahu speech: great delivery, catchy phrases, some humor, even a gimmick.

This time the gimmick was not brandishing a piece of the Syrian drone shot down over Israel, as he did last month at the Munich Security Conference, nor the now-famous diagram of a bomb with a fuse that he used to illustrate Iran's nuclear threat at the UN in 2012.

This time the gimmick was more subtle: the words "1-800-How's-my-speech" written for all to see on the back of notes he carried as he strolled away from the podium on the large stage to get a "closer look" at the huge audience.

The gimmick worked, setting the Twitter-sphere all aflutter. Netanyahu did it again. He inserted an element into a speech that ensured people would remember the speech long after it was over. They might not remember exactly what he said, but they will remember and talk – even if mockingly – about this.

Netanyahu's detractors would argue that his entire speech, in fact his entire trip to Washington this week, was a gimmick meant to distract attention from his domestic woes. But it wasn't. There are serious issues on the table – Iran and Syria, for example – that do not rest and need tending to within the US administration, even as the police investigate.

Still, Netanyahu knows exceptionally well what plays with his crowd, and he hit all the right chords in his speech: He stressed the benefits the country is bringing to the world; he praised IDF soldiers; and he mentioned the biblical influences on Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

He steered completely clear of divisive issues. He did not talk about two states, the settlements, or the Western Wall issue. His mention of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was only within the context of something all could rally around: He should stop paying terrorists to kill Jews. Some will speak condescendingly about the AIPAC crowd that gave Netanyahu such a resounding welcome. They will wonder how the audience could give such a thunderous ovation to him – and to his wife – at a time when the police have indicted him for bribery, fraud and breach of trust and when every day seems to bring with it new allegations. Aren't they concerned about corruption?

But this misses the point. The 18,000 AIPAC supporters who poured into Washington did so to show the public – first and foremost their senators and congressmen – that they support Israel, that they care deeply about Israel, and that their support should be taken into account.

The enthusiastic reception for the prime minister was as much for Israel the state as it was for Netanyahu the man. Though, as was on full display Tuesday, few know how to work this particular crowd as well as Netanyahu.