

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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IDF TO BOLSTER FORCES AS MANHUNT FOR ARIEL TERRORIST CONTINUES (YNet 2/7/18)

The IDF will send more forces to the Nablus region Thursday to assist in the manhunt for terrorist Abed al-Karim Adel Assi, who murdered Rabbi Itamar Ben-Gal in Ariel Monday. Several of the terrorist's relatives, including his father, were detained for questioning in the last 24 hours, with additional effort exerted on gathering intelligence to locate him.

Two days after the attack that took her husband's life, Ben-Gal's widow Miriam sought solace in the tragedy that befell her family. "I think the only consolation I can find is seeing our community growing and developing, and becoming a city.

"Let them know that their actions lead to the Israeli people's development and strengthening in the Land of Israel. And let it be the last blood spilled."

"Itamar was vivacious and full of love for all," his widow said. "He loved his community, his people and his country. He always thought about ways of improving the settlement, nurturing and developing it."

Education Minister and Bayit Yehudi Chairman Naftali Bennett visited the family for a condolence visit Wednesday, and joined the call to declare Har Brakha a city. "The murder's goal is to cause despair and break our spirit. Beyond the reply soon to be provided to the terrorist himself, the true reply is tripling your settlement and declaring Har Brakha a city.

"An urban planning scheme is awaiting approval, it's merely a political decision. I'm taking it upon myself to work to triple this community's size to send the message that we are here to stay."

"In our 120 years of settling, many cities were unfortunately founded in reply to a murder," Bennett added. "Kiryat Shmona, Ma'ale HaHamisha—they were all replies. More families, more children, more schools, more communities and more homes. When they see this thing growing, they will realize they're banging their heads on concrete walls and wasting their time."

DISPUTE BETWEEN MINISTERS PREVENTS DEBATE ON HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GAZA (Israel Hayom 2/7/18)

The Diplomatic-Security Cabinet will not convene for a discussion on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip due to a dispute between Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Yisrael Katz, who holds the intelligence and transportation portfolios, over the construction of an artificial island off the Gaza coast.

A month ago, the cabinet discussed the defense establishment's concerns that an exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in Gaza could lead to a military escalation. At the end of the discussion, it was decided that the National Security Council would appoint an emergency task force to prepare a plan of action, including proposals to cope with the situation and present it at a follow-up meeting scheduled for three weeks later. That meeting has not been convened, even though the three-week deadline has passed.

One of the more common proposals for de-escalating the situation calls for countries in Europe and the Far East to support Hamas economically – something Israel has already lent its hand to for years. Another proposal involves Katz's plan to build an artificial island off the Gaza coast where a seaport funded by the Europeans would be built, along with a power station, water desalination plant and other essential infrastructure. These facilities would provide jobs, and release Israel from its responsibility for Gaza.

Cabinet ministers and the defense establishment support Katz's proposal, but Lieberman opposes it. According to the defense minister, the island would be a "prize" for Hamas. Katz was able to secure a commitment from Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to put his proposal up for a vote at the next cabinet meeting, but due to Lieberman's objections, it appears Netanyahu will hold off for the time being.

Katz and Lieberman's dispute over the island issue also led the two to exchange barbs over the past week. "The defense minister, right now, is raising funds to transfer to Hamas in Gaza before a collapse," Katz said.

Lieberman said Katz's actions were politically motivated.

ISRAEL APPOINTS NEW AMBASSADOR TO JORDAN IN MOVE TO CLOSE DIPLOMATIC RIFT (Ha'aretz 2/8/18)

The Foreign Ministry has decided to appoint a senior ministry official, Amir Weisbrod, as the country's new ambassador to Jordan. The appointment of Weisbrod, who headed the Middle East division at the ministry's Center for Political Research and also served in Morocco and as the spokesman at the Israeli embassy in Amman, is subject to approval by the Israeli cabinet.

There has been no Israeli ambassador in the Jordanian capital since an incident in July in which an Israeli security guard shot a Jordanian citizen who allegedly tried to stab him. A Jordanian bystander was also shot and killed in the incident. Israel immediately withdrew its embassy staff, including the ambassador at the time, Einat Schlein.

Jordan refused to allow Schlein to return to the embassy, and expressed indignation over how Israel depicted the incident and the warm reception that she and the guard, Ziv Moyal, received from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on their arrival in Jerusalem. The Foreign Ministry's appointments committee, however, had praise for Schlein and reiterated the ministry's intention to appoint her to another post reflecting her abilities.

The resumption of operations at the Israeli embassy in Amman was made possible after Israel expressed regret over the shooting and agreed to pay

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compensation to the families of the two Jordanians who were killed. Last month, the Jordanian newspaper Al-Ghad reported that Israel had paid a total of \$5 million to the two families and the family of a Jordanian judge who was killed at the Israeli border crossing at the Allenby Bridge in 2014.

Commenting last month on the shooting incident in Amman, Prime Minister Netanyahu said: "I am certain that the two sides are drawing lessons [from the case]. I am doing so on my side, and I think Jordan is for its part. We have an important interest in contact, and that has found expression in the resolution [of the case]. I would like to express appreciation to the people who worked to bring the case to an end." A statement last month from the Prime Minister's Office said: "Israel attributes great importance to the strategic ties with Israel, and the countries will work to advance cooperation between them and to strengthen the peace treaty [between them]."

In the July incident, the Moyal, the guard, killed 17-year-old Mohammed al-Jawawdeh after the Jordanian attacked him with a screwdriver. Jawawdeh had come to install furniture in the guard's Amman apartment. A bystander, the guard's Jordanian landlord, Dr. Bashar al-Hamarnah, was also killed shot and killed.

For the 24 hours following the shooting, 20 Israeli diplomats and security guards were holed up in the embassy until their passage to Israel was arranged.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES MINISTER REQUESTS SECURITY FOR CHIEF RABBI (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/8/18)

The Chief Rabbinate on Wednesday filed a complaint with the police over incitement and threats of murder, after leaflets were published in Gaza calling for the assassination of the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, MK Yehuda Glick (Likud), former MK Moshe Feiglin and other rabbis.

In addition, Religious Services Minister David Azoulay (Shas) requested that Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan (Likud) provide the Chief Rabbi with security detail until the security threat is removed beyond any doubt.

In his letter, Minister Azoulay wrote that action must be taken quickly to ensure the safety of the Chief Rabbi.

"I would request that action be taken as soon as possible to clarify the threat with the relevant parties and to ensure the immediate security of the Chief Rabbi of Israel until the threat is removed," he wrote.

The inciting leaflets distributed on Tuesday night by the military wing of the Hamas terrorist organization included a picture of the rabbi alongside a picture of MK Glick and of Feiglin.

SAUDIS DENY PROVIDING AUTHORIZATION FOR ISRAELI FLIGHTS TO PASS THROUGH AIRSPACE (YNet 2/7/18)

Mere hours after Israeli officials claimed that Air India received authorization to fly over Saudi airspace in its New Delhi-Tel Aviv line, a spokesman for Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation said Wednesday they provided no such permission.

Previously, an Air India spokesman officially announced the airliner was awaiting authorization from Indian authorities to fly over Saudi Arabia. No incoming or outgoing flights have yet to pass through the skies of the Arab kingdom, with which Israel has no diplomatic ties.

If approved, the move will shorten flight time to India to only five hours, instead of seven, also causing ticket prices to dip.

Air India reported it planned to commence operations mid-March on a direct line from New Delhi to Tel Aviv. Final talks began during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to India, during which he convened with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In addition to the economic agreements signed by the two colleagues, the pair also signed an aviation agreement determining changes will be made possible to flight pricelists and security arrangements, and that coordination on the matter between the parties will be strengthened.

The national Indian air carrier received a 750,000 euro (NIS 3.2 million) grant from the Tourism Ministry to operate the line, which is expected to provide an additional boost to improving relations between the countries.

The grant effectively signifies 250,000 euro for each weekly flight, and is awarded to every airline that opens a line to a new destination.

The Indian company is expected to commence flights this coming Passover, according to plans, using Boeing 787 Dreamliners. Flights will operate three days a week—on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Israeli officials have yet to sign off on any Saudi authorization, even if one was given, but a senior Israeli official noted the Indian airline stated the flight's path will take it over Saudi Arabia.

El Al Vice President of Incoming Commerce Michael Strassburger said that should such an authorization be provided, it will also change flights operated by his own company on the line to Mumbai.

"This will significantly shorten flight times, leading to lower operating costs and ticket prices for passengers. We hope and believe that this agreement will also be valid for all Israeli airlines, because there's no difference between passengers flying Israeli airlines and those flying foreign ones.

"It is also congruent with an agreement Israel signed with India regarding air carriers," he concluded.

CHABAD HASID DONATES A QUARTER MILLION SHEKELS TO IDF, POLICE (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/8/18)

Australian Chabad philanthropist Saul Spigler led a delegation of 15 Australian Jews on a trip to Israel, to provide warm clothing to IDF soldiers stationed in Judea and Samaria, and to inaugurate event halls for them worth a quarter of a million shekels (\$71,508).

On Wednesday, the delegation visited several Border Police bases, held a special ceremony for the units, met their commanders, and heard about the challenges the soldiers face. The main event was held on Wednesday night in the Samaria town of Yitzhar, where a new event hall was inaugurated.

The soldiers and commanders were very moved, and said that the gesture gave them a lot of motivation. They also gave the delegates a shield of honor for their generous gift.

The delegates explained that they see great importance in ensuring the welfare of soldiers stationed in conflict-ridden areas. They also noted the great appreciation of IDF soldiers around the world, and that it crosses sector lines.

BENNETT: WE WON'T USE SURGICAL PRECISION, NEIGHBORHOODS WITH ROCKETS ARE FAIR GAME (JPost 2/7/18)

Amid reports that the Israeli air force struck an Iranian base in Syria overnight Tuesday, security cabinet member Naftali Bennett said he's advancing a strategy in which Israel will confront Iran directly rather than just going after its proxies.

"Iran is behind the anti-Israel activity in Syria and Lebanon," Bennett said in an interview to Israeli Radio 103 on Wednesday. "It is an octopus that sends out tentacles and expects us to act against its proxies, while it sits safely in its place. I am promoting a policy that calls for focusing our efforts against Iran itself."

"[Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei is willing to fight Israel until the last drop of Syrian, Lebanese and Gazan blood, but does not send his own troops. For 30 years we have been sending our soldiers to fight Iran, while they sit in safety. It is illogical," Bennett said.

When asked by the show's veteran host Nissim Mishal whether an attack on Iran was imminent, Bennett responded enigmatically.

"The force behind everything is Iran and we must pinpoint the laser on it. I am putting forward a strategic line and saying that we will not be handling things with surgical precision, we view neighborhoods that have rockets as legitimate targets."

Bennett also called out past Israeli governments for allowing Hezbollah to arm itself with hundreds of thousands of rockets that could be used against Israel in future conflicts.

"In Lebanon there are more than 100,000 imprecise rockets. If they were accurate, they would constitute a significant threat to Israel, something we will not allow to happen at any cost. Between the years 2006-2012 Israel allowed Hezbollah to arm itself with 130,000 rockets. It was a strategic failure. Now they are seeking to make all those rockets precise and we will not allow that to happen," Bennett said.

That said, Bennett suggested that he didn't see a direct conflict around the corner. "In order to prevent a war in the north, we must move our enemy away from the border. That is the correct policy."

Israeli officials have repeatedly voiced concerns over the growing Iranian presence on its borders and the smuggling of sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah in Lebanon via Syria, stressing that both are red lines for the Jewish State.

Israel's Security Cabinet went to the Mt. Avital outlook on the Golan Heights Tuesday and received a briefing from Chief-of-Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, OC Northern Command Maj.-Gen. Yoel Strick and other senior officers.

Following the briefings, Netanyahu said that while Israel wants peace, it is "prepared for any scenario, and I suggest that no one test us."

ISRAEL SEEKS TO DIVERT PALESTINIAN FUNDS FOR TERRORISTS TO JEWISH SETTLERS (Ha'aretz 2/8/18)

The Ministerial Committee for Legislation will consider a bill on Sunday that would let the government reduce tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority by the amount the PA spends on payments to terrorists and their families.

Israel collects various taxes on the PA's behalf and transfers the money to the PA on a monthly basis.

The bill, sponsored by the Defense Ministry, states that the government will be able to use any withheld funds for infrastructure work "for the benefit of residents of Judea and Samaria," as the West Bank is known in Hebrew. The bill's explanatory notes say this provision is intended "for the benefit of the entire population of the region."

The government could also use the withheld funds to pay compensation or damages awarded by Israeli courts in suits against the PA or individual terrorists. In addition, the money could be used for projects aimed at preventing terror.

The bill would require the defense minister to give the security cabinet an annual report on how much money the PA paid to terrorists and their families, either directly or indirectly, that year. The security cabinet could then decide to withhold all or part of that sum from Israel's transfers to the PA, temporarily freeze the funds, or transfer them to the PA as usual.

If the money is withheld, it will be deposited in a special fund managed by the government's administrator general. He will be able to disburse the money in line with regulations that will be drafted by the justice, finance and foreign ministers and approved by the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee.

Last month, after attorney Gal Cohen of the Defense Ministry's legal department presented the bill's main points to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, committee chairman Avi Dichter (Likud) slammed the fact that the security cabinet will be able to decide not to withhold any of the money.

"This 'flexibility' in judgment, to the point of not deducting any funds at all, contracts the bill's basic rationale," he said at that meeting. "The Palestinian Authority has brought its financial situation upon itself by transferring 1.2 billion shekels [\$340 million] – which amounts to seven percent of its budget – to terrorists, and therefore, its budgetary hole can't be Israel's problem."

"The absurd situation over there is that a Palestinian who engages in terrorist activity essentially immediately becomes a civil servant, and he or his family gets a regular monthly salary, with no discretion on the PA's part," he added.

"Continuing to transfer money that funds both the terrorists and the weapons is like financing the hangman and the noose against ourselves."

MK Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid), who submitted a private member's bill on this issue that the committee has discussed over the past few months, offered more muted criticism.

"I understand that it's necessary to leave the security cabinet, which I generally trust, with some flexibility," he said, "and therefore, it might be possible to talk about percentages, about amounts. But there shouldn't be a situation in which this [legislation] is completely neutered by this option."

GERMANY EXTENDS ISRAEL AEROSPACE INDUSTRIES DRONE CONTRACT (Israel Hayom 2/7/17)

Germany on Tuesday announced that it has extended its agreements with Israel Aerospace Industries for the use of its Heron 1 reconnaissance drones in German military missions in Afghanistan and Mali for another year.

According to an IAI statement, the contract includes the supply of assets and manpower to support Heron 1 systems in the two nations where it is deployed.

The systems are operated by Airbus subsidiary DS Airborne Solutions GmbH.

The Heron has the ability to stay airborne for up to 45 hours. It has a maximum takeoff weight of 1,270 kilograms (about 2,800 pounds) and a payload of 250 kilograms (550 pounds).

The German Air Force has been operating the Herons in Afghanistan since 2010, where they were involved in thousands of missions, IAI said. In Mali, the system is stationed at the Gao Air Base as part of the U.N.'s Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission.

According to a statement by IAI, forces in Afghanistan and in Mali have logged more than 38,000 flight hours since 2016.

DS Airborne Solutions said the Heron drone "has proven itself with a system readiness level greater than 95%."

Shaul Shachar, IAI's corporate vice president and general manager, said that "the extension of the contracts in Mali and Afghanistan is a confirmation of Heron's proven ability to support missions around the world."

PA SPOKESMAN: MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS ARE ISRAEL'S FAULT (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/8/18)

Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh on Wednesday said that the conflicts in the Middle East are Israel's fault.

The official PA news agency Wafa quoted Abu Rudeineh as saying that "Israel's insistence on continuing the occupation of Palestinian lands and advancing settlement policy is the main reason for the continued violence in the region."

He further claimed that "Israel's conduct legitimizes acts of violence in the entire Middle East - and the statements made by the American ambassador raise the suspicion that he is also responsible for this. It is unclear whether he represents the United States or Israel."

"Instead of Ambassador Friedman helping to create an atmosphere of peace, he works to create tension and provide excuses for these violent actions to which we are opposed," said Abu Rudeineh.

Abu Rudeineh opined that "the only way to bring an end to all acts of violence in the region and in the world is by solving the Palestinian problem."

It is unclear to which statement by Friedman he was referring, but the American ambassador this week condemned the PA and its conduct, following the terror attack in the city of Ariel, in which Rabbi Itamar Ben Gal was stabbed to death.

"20 years ago I gave an ambulance to Har Bracha hoping it would be used to deliver healthy babies. Instead, a man from Har Bracha was just murdered by a terrorist, leaving behind a wife and four children. Palestinian 'leaders' have praised the killer. Praying for the Ben Gal family," the ambassador tweeted.

While the Wafa news agency reported about the Ariel attack, citing Israeli media, the report was not accompanied by any statement of condemnation of the attack from the PA or its representatives.

PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas has regularly refused to condemn terrorist attacks against Israelis and, in fact, has been directly involved in inciting terror.

Rather than condemning deadly attacks against Israelis, he insists that attacks carried out by his own people against Israelis are the result of Palestinian "frustration".

UNRWA: THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO PEACE (Gregg Roman, Israel Hayom 2/7/18)

U.S. President Donald Trump's State of the Union address, alongside reports that his administration intends to put an end to the problematic definition of Palestinian refugeeism by which descendants of refugees are also granted refugee status, constitutes an important turning point in efforts to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unlike the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which is dedicated to helping the world's refugees, the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, the agency dedicated solely to Palestinian refugees, has created its own unique definition of who is considered a Palestinian refugee. As a result of UNRWA's criteria, there are now around 5.3 million Palestinian refugees around the world. This definition is significant in that it ensures the number of refugees will continue to grow and so make a solution to the conflict ever more elusive. Furthermore, instead of incentivizing initiatives that promote a culture of peace among Palestinians and pouring money into purely humanitarian efforts, UNRWA works to create and cultivate a victimhood mentality in Palestinian society through ongoing incitement and the rejection of peace. In UNRWA-run schools, students are taught to believe they will one day be able to "return" to all the lands of Israel and bring an end to the Jewish state. Here, too, the dangerous irony of a humanitarian organization, which, instead of solving the refugee problem, in fact, works to ensure its perpetuation, is apparent.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' recent remarks against Zionism and the Jews' right to self-determination make it clear that Palestinian recalcitrance is the root of the conflict. As with every other conflict in human history, this conflict will end only when the side that created it is willing to abandon its grandiose ambitions. This position has recently been presented in the Middle East Forum's Israel Victory Project, which calls for the suspension of diplomatic ties with the Palestinians until they renounce their efforts to bring an end to the Jewish state. In addition, the Middle East Forum calls for major reforms to UNRWA so as to separate its political efforts from the agency's humanitarian mission.

The United States' definition of a refugee is similar to that of other countries. According to this accepted definition, refugee status is not passed down by inheritance and is not valid for those persons who are citizens of other countries or who live in what is supposedly their own territory. In contrast, more than 2 million Palestinian "refugees" live in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, lands they claim constitute part of their territorial homeland.

If we remove from UNRWA's list of refugees those people who do not meet any of the three criteria, we will then come back to a more reasonable number of somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War of Independence. The remainder could, of course, request humanitarian aid, but they would not be considered refugees by UNRWA.

If the countries of the world are interested in funding genuine humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, this can be done through a variety of alternative channels, whose aim is to create a better future for the population. But first, they must stop using the term "refugees." This is not just a question of semantics: A change in terminology could give the Palestinians hope for a better future instead of ensuring they maintain the victimhood mentality and pass it on to future generations. Second, they must only release funds for the

Palestinians on the condition they are then integrated into their host countries or alternatively, those Palestinians living outside Judea, Samaria Gaza find a third country to which to emigrate. Third, they must ensure the funds do not go toward terrorism and incitement.

The implementation of these steps will lead the PA to acknowledge its defeat in the war against the Jewish people's right to self-determination and will put an end to the Palestinian leadership's cynical use of their people and their supporters for the prevention of a solution to the conflict and finally bring about peace.

There are numerous indicators that the situation in the Gaza Strip has gone from bad to worse. And this has direct implications for Israel. The likelihood of another war with Hamas-controlled Gaza has increased; environmental dangers such as sewage and diseases have become more acute; and Israel's moral obligation as a neighboring country with the ability to help has become more pressing.

THE WEST SLEEPS PEACEFULLY BECAUSE OF ISRAEL (Giulio Meotti, Arutz-7 INN.com 2/7/18)

While Turkish President Erdogan and Pope Francis were in Rome complimenting each other on Jerusalem and the European Union was rolling out red carpets to Mahmoud Abbas, Israel was protecting the West.

This small state has hitherto prevented Iran from manufacturing the atomic bomb, it has ruined the nuclear plans of Saddam Hussein and Bashar el Assad thanks to two solitary bombings, it guards the security of Jordan that without Israel would collapse today like a cooked pear, it has foiled attacks by ISIS on European civilian flights and we now discover that Egypt's el Sisi has recently asked Israel to bomb ISIS posts in Sinai.

Israel today is the fireman of the Middle East. Imagine the region, from time to time, without Israel as the anti-Semites of the whole world dream of it. A Middle East of beheaders facing the Mediterranean, a Middle East of planes full of Westerners flying from Sharm el Sheikh and sinking in the Red Sea, a Middle East of a race to atomic weapons by dictatorships of all kinds, a Middle East of even more millions of refugees going to Europe. Tonight we will sleep more peacefully thanks to Israel.

What an extraordinary country is the Jewish State! Tension is rising and extensive military simulations are under way, with the participation of the US Army, in the event of a missile attack. Defense Minister Liberman has just warned that Israel will not allow images like those of 2006 to repeat themselves, when the citizens of Beirut were on the beach while the Israelis in Tel Aviv were in shelters.

Yet, this extraordinary little country has just been named the third most innovative in the world by the World Economic Forum. The others are all democracies that have known war 70 years ago, often succumbing to evil. How did Israel innovate despite the fact that it is a democracy at war since its creation? Brain, grit and the prospect of the imminent destruction.

In the air of Israel one breathes a kind of anxiety of happiness and creation that derives from the fragility of this extraordinary adventure. A miracle.

Israel does not have time to finish the announcement of the construction of a handful of houses in the post-1967 Judea and Samaria that the UN Security Council is already reunited against, that the European Commission already sent its official declaration about, that the editorials condemning the decision are already being printed and that the lists of products to be boycotted have already been drawn up.

In the last two weeks Israel has buried two Israeli rabbis, killed in cold blood by their "peace" partners, but the same condemnation of those houses has not been seen or heard for the murder of the Jews who live there.

Are we sure that the blood of the Jews is red, that they too have children and mothers, that after the Shoah they really regained their right to exist? I begin to doubt it. Every day we watch a streamed new episode of the series "Destroying Israel, a Jew at a time". It is one of the most popular television productions in history.