

Ynet-News February 14, 2020 – Friday –

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Iran sent militias from Tehran to Damascus & Israeli missiles rocked the city airport late Thursday

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UN Human Rights Councilor Bachelet published database of companies in Israel territory Wednesday

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Education chief forced to cease talks with security on Islam ISIS material in schools

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PA officials phones hacked by Gaza spyware, monitoring files, calls & location

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Netanyahu seeks deal with Jewish Power party Ben-Gvir for a Knesset majority

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UN to issue instructions to Israel companies in West Bank to end work immediately

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Qatari, Egypt, Jordan and possibly Morocco set to sign non-aggression pact with Israel

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Abbas, Olmert grandstand at UN to denounce peace plan in rare joint address

02.11.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in Feb 10 spot - Monday

Gaza leader Sinwar fearing Israel assassination halts balloon bomb attacks

02.11.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in Feb 11 spot - Tuesday

Burn-off blast of rolling thunder at Leviathan rig triggered by a power cut incident

02.11.20 – Tu -

Fearing Israeli assassination, Hamas head Sinwar skipped a meeting with Egypt

02.10.20 – Mo - - - News

Police shut down Tel Aviv's last three strip clubs for criminal offense of exploitation

02.10.20 – Mo -

Palestinians withdraw UN vote on peace plan for wide divergences in positions

02.10.20 – Mo -

Phone app leaks personal information of 6.5 million Israelis to hackers

02.14.20 – Fr - - - News

Lebanon new prime minister Diab showing signs of economy collapse & facing poverty

02.13.20 – Th - - - News

Senate moves to limit ability to wage war against Iran, Trump promised a veto

02.11.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in Feb 14 spot - Friday

Lebanon government risk of collapse needs critical imports of food, fuel & medicine

02.11.20 – Tu -

Iranians rally on 40 yr anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini 1979 Islam Revolution

02.14.20 – Fr - - - News

1,716 China health workers had confirmed virus, WHO team arrives this week

Coal Plants Inbox Tue, Feb 11, 2020 at 12:18 AM

Shermie Wiehe<shermiewiehe@gmail.com>

scburen@gmail.com

How many coal plants are there in the world today?

The EU 468 - building 27 more Total 495

Turkey 56 - building 93 more Total 149

South Africa 79 - building 24 more Total 103

India 589 - building 446 more Total 1036

Philippines 19 - building 60 more Total 79

South Korea 58 - building 26 more Total 84

Japan 90 - building 45 more Total 135

China 2,363 - building 1,171 more Total 3,534

Total existing 3722 - Adding 5,615 more coal powered plants in just 8 countries.

USA has 15 - building 0 more Total 15

And Democrat politicians with their green new deal want to shut down those 15 plants in order to save the planet.

This is EXCELLENT!! I knew the rough idea about the number of coal plants, but had not yet seen actual numbers until now.

This makes the point. Whatever the USA does or doesn't do won't make a Tinker's Dam regarding CO2 unless the rest of the world, especially China and India reduce coal-fired power plants, too.

02.14.20 – Fr -

Iran sent militias from Tehran to Damascus & Israeli missiles rocked the city airport late Thursday

02.14.20

Airstrike in Damascus Thursday said to target Iranian backed militias, seven reported killed

Syrian news agencies report missiles were fired over the Golan Heights and the British based observatory for Human Rights reported seven fatalities in the attack among them four from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
Associated Press, Ynet| Updated: 02.14.20 , 09:00

Syria's air defenses engaged "hostile targets" over the capital of Damascus, state-run media said late Thursday. Residents reported loud explosions that rocked the city shortly before midnight.

State news agency SANA quoted reports saying Syrian air defenses intercepted a number of missiles.

It said the missiles approached from the southwest over the Golan Heights. No further details were immediately available nor was it clear what was hit.

A video carried by SANA showed what appeared to be Syrian air defenses firing over Damascus.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war, said seven people were killed in the attack of suspected Israeli missiles that targeted posts for Iranian-backed militias in the area between the Damascus international airport and the Sayeda Zeinab neighborhood, south of the capital.

The Observatory said some of the missiles hit their targets. It didn't say whether there were any casualties.

On Wednesday Iran vowed to deliver a crushing response to any Israeli action against its interests.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will give a crushing response that will cause regret to any kind of aggression or stupid action from this regime against our country's interests in Syria and the region," ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

The unusual statement came after a plane belonging to the Revolutionary Guard Corps took off from Tehran to Damascus.

The plane had been out of commission for the past six months after it was damaged in a June 2019 airstrike on Syria attributed to Israel. Shortly before the Boeing 747 cargo plane landed in Damascus, Iranian officials accused Israel of carrying out attacks against military forces in Syria that are allied with Tehran.

At least 23 people were killed in Syria in a pre-dawn raid attributed to Israel last week, according to the London-based Observatory for Human Rights, three of the victims were reported to have been Iranian nationals.

Israel does not usually comment on reports concerning its airstrikes in neighboring Syria, though it has frequently attacked what it says are Iranian targets there.

Iranian-backed fighters, including those of Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, have joined Syria's war and are fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar Assad's government forces. First published: 07:15 , 02.14.20

02.13.20 – Th -

UN Human Rights Councilor Bachelet published database of companies in Israel territory Wednesday

02.13.20

U.S. rejects 'anti-Israel' UN database of companies in settlements

Pompeo says black list of more than 100 firms 'confirms unrelenting bias so prevalent at United Nations' and hurts efforts for Mideast peace, vows American government will not provide any information; Dem, GOP senators slam potential for boycott of U.S. businesses

Ynet, News Agencies | Published: 02.13.20 , 18:42

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday said the U.S. government would not furnish any information for a database of companies operating in Israeli-controlled territories that the United Nations Human Rights Council recently released, and said the compilation hurts peace efforts in the Middle East.

After repeated delays, the UNHRC on Wednesday released a list of more than 100 companies it says are operating in the settlements — a first-ever attempt to name and shame businesses that has drawn fierce criticism from Israel and the U.S.

"The United States has long opposed the creation or release of this database," Pompeo said in a statement Thursday.

"Its publication only confirms the unrelenting anti-Israel bias so prevalent at the United Nations," he said.

"Attempts to isolate Israel run counter to all of our efforts to build conditions conducive to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that lead to a comprehensive and enduring peace."

Two leading U.S. senators also assailed the release for its potential of making companies boycott targets.

Democratic Senator Ben Cardin and Republican Senator Rob Portman, who sit on the Finance Committee and Foreign Relations Committee, called it an "anti-Israel database, akin to a blacklist, of companies" that made major U.S. companies, including General Mills and Airbnb vulnerable to boycotts.

"The Human Rights Council should use its energy to encourage both Israel and the Palestinians to return to good faith negotiations," said Cardin.

"The United States cannot stand by while American businesses are being pressured by a foreign entity because of their work in Israel, one of our key allies."

Israel hit back furiously Wednesday at the publication, accusing the UN of bias and surrendering to anti-Israel elements and freezing ties with its human rights chief. In its report, the office said the companies' activities "raised particular human rights concerns."

"The UN Human Rights Council is a biased and uninfluential body," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

"Instead of dealing with human rights this body is trying to blacken Israel's name. We reject any such attempt in the strongest terms and with disgust."

He also took a more pugnacious tone, vowing to "fight this declaration with all our might... When the world recognizes our sovereignty on these regions and settlements, this list will become void."

Israel also said Wednesday evening that it will freeze ties with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet over the publication of the list.

The step was taken at Netanyahu's direction.

The list is dominated by Israeli firms, including Hapoalim and Leumi banks, the Bezeq telecom giant and HOT cable and YES satellite companies.

But it also lists a number of international firms, including travel companies Airbnb, Expedia and TripAdvisor, tech giant Motorola, consumer food maker General Mills and construction and infrastructure companies including France's Egis Rail and British company JC Bamford Excavators.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz called the list a "shameful surrender" to countries and organizations that want to hurt Israel.

President Reuven Rivlin said boycotting Israeli companies is not conducive to peace and the building of trust.

"We call on our friends to oppose this shameful initiative," the president said, "I will stand by these businesses that are now under threat."

02.13.20 – Th -

Education chief forced to cease talks with security on Islam ISIS material in schools

02.13.20

Education Ministry chief discusses Arab schoolkids with Shin Bet

Meeting at Shmuel Abuav's office, which the security service says was initiated by the ministry DG, discussed trends in informal education among Arab students and their participation in youth movements and organizations

Adir Yanko | Published: 02.13.20, 18:05

Education Ministry Director-General Shmuel Abuav recently met with representatives of the Shin Bet domestic security service to discuss various issues related to the education system in the Arab sector and East Jerusalem.

This existence of the meeting was listed in Abuav's diary, which was obtained by Ynet following a petition by the the Movement for Freedom of Information.

A security establishment official stressed that the meeting was initiated by the Education Ministry.

During the meeting, which was held in Abuav's office last November, the ministry chief and two Shin Bet representatives discussed events among students in the Arab schools. Sources in the ministry said that the meeting had, among other things, significant security objectives, such as preventing radical Islamists from working in schools.

This stems from a 2015 case in which four teachers in the Negev were charged with disseminating ISIS material in educational institutions.

The meeting was also attended by Abdullah Khatib, who heads the Arab Education Department at the Education Ministry, and while the conversation covered civil issues concerning all Israeli students, but the focus was solely on the Arab student body.

Among other things, the Shin Bet representatives received an overview of the trends in informal education among Arab students and their participation in various youth movements and organizations.

The meeting also discussed a five-year program by the Education Ministry in East Jerusalem and the efforts to introduce the Israeli curriculum to schools in the area. The attendees also discussed educational networks affiliated with the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement and its efforts to gain a foothold in East Jerusalem schools.

In 2017, Ynet's sister publication Yedioth Ahronoth reported that the Education Ministry and Shin Bet had cooperated on the appointment of Arab teaching staff, despite public criticism.

Three former education ministers - Yossi Sarid, Shulamit Aloni and Amnon Rubinstein - had also claimed that the intelligence service was indeed involved in the appointment of Arab teaching staff.

Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, petitioned the High Court in 2004 demanding that this cooperation – which included a position inside the ministry's department for Arab education - be stopped.

In 2005, the National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel (commonly known as the Dovrat Committee) also recommended that this cooperation cease.

The report also said that "the regional education authority and the Ministry of Education should be responsible for preventing appointments or dismissing teachers, administrators

and other officials - both Jews and Arabs - who do not meet the objectives of state education system."

Ultimately the position was canceled, but it appears from the head of the ministry's diary that the cooperation continues.

Even so, it noteworthy that Abuav is viewed as a respected and esteemed educationalist among Arab society. In the past year he has held numerous meetings regarding national service by young members of the Arabs community.

Furthermore, the diary of Education Minister Rafi Peretz, which was first published last month by Ynet, revealed that he has not visited any Arab schools since taking office.

Abuav's diary reveals a completely different picture. He makes sure to regularly tour Arab schools, in the past year visiting institutions in Nazareth, Jatt, Jaljulia, Tira, Baqa al-Gharbiya, Hura and more. He also met with Knesset members from the Joint List as well as former MK Issawi Freij of Meretz.

Unlike Peretz, who has attended one session related to Arab education, Abuav's diary indicates that he attended dozens of meetings focusing on Arab, Bedouin and Druze education as well as at least six meetings on schooling in East Jerusalem.

02.13.20 – Th -

PA officials phones hacked by Gaza spyware, monitoring files, calls & location

02.13.20

PA officials hacked by advanced spyware originating in Gaza

Israeli cybersecurity company that revealed the series of cyber attacks, says if the spyware wasn't installed by Hamas, it was someone with extremely advanced technology, which is available only in Russia, China, U.S., and Israel

Tal Shahaf | Published: 02.13.20 , 15:06

A series of cyber attacks, apparently originating in the Gaza Strip and targeting senior officials of the Palestinian Authority, was revealed Thursday by an Israeli cybersecurity company.

According to Cybereason, spyware was inserted into phones in order to surveil the official's movements, retrieve sensitive files from the smartphones and monitor conversations.

The attack deployed an advanced tool known as "Pierogi," which was embedded into the phones through simple methods such as fishing or posts on social media.

The hackers enticed their victims to click on social media posts with content relevant to the region: U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan, coverage of the assassination of

Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the inter-Palestinian conflict between Hamas and Fatah as well as the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

The company's Nocturnus Research Team found clear evidence implicating a group of Gaza based hackers called MoleRATs and also known as "The Gaza Cybergang," which has been active since 2012. The group is affiliated with Hamas and supported by Iranian cyber units.

Although similar methods were used in cyber attacks on PA officials before, the latest effort reveals use more elaborate and sophisticated offensive capabilities and improved malware. For instance, the attack targeted phones where Arabic was the primary language, and if the same malware was to be installed in English or Hebrew speaking devices, it would not work.

The PA had in the past hacked the phones of the Hamas leadership both in Gaza and abroad, and both Palestinian factions have released embarrassing recordings and information meant to harm their adversaries.

Still, it is not inconceivable that there were more advanced cyber elements behind the attack, who wanted to understand the situation within the Palestinian leadership and were simply hiding behind a Hamas-affiliated cover.

Such advanced capabilities could be found at the disposal of state actors such as Russia, China, the U.S. and Israel.

Cybereason did not attempt to name anyone behind the attack and simply indicated that the methods used characterize the manner in which Gaza's "cybergang" operates.

"We specifically emphasized that there are many groups that are active in the Mideast and this attack could have come from Iranians or Egyptians," said a Cybereason official, "the data supports the idea that the Gaza based group or someone who is very good at impersonating it, is behind the attack."

The official added that Cybereason was concerned similar attacks could also target Israeli leadership. "We keep the National Cyber Security Authority aware of our findings."

Last May, an Israeli Air Force strike destroyed a building described as Hamas's "offensive cyberinfrastructure" meant to target Israel. Defense sources claimed the terror group's cyber capabilities were fatally compromised in that attack.

One official claimed Hamas was unsuccessful in establishing its cyber capabilities in the Strip. "All of the Hamas attempted offenses against Israeli cyberspace were detected and foiled before being carried out."

02.12.20 – We -

Netanyahu seeks deal with Jewish Power party Ben-Gvir for a Knesset majority

02.12.20

Netanyahu seeks deal to put extremist Ben-Gvir in Knesset

PM's close advisers suggest pushing Otzma Yehudit across parliamentary threshold by securing ultra-Orthodox votes for formerly fringe party from voters who cast ballots as instructed by their religious leaders

Amihai Attali | Updated: 02.12.20, 22:01

Confidants of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have recently been holding talks with the head of the extreme-right Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party, Itamar Ben-Gvir, in order to safeguard a Knesset majority of 61 MKs for the right-wing bloc in the upcoming March 2 election, a third national ballot in less than one year.

In the run-up to the September 2019 elections, Netanyahu announced an all-out war against Otzma Yehudit, to sway right-wing voters away from the party. He said a vote for Ben-Gvir would effectively be a loss of votes for the right-wing bloc because of its negligent chances of passing the electoral threshold of 3.25%, which means those votes would ultimately not count for anything.

Despite these efforts, Otzma Yehudit won 84,000 votes, although quite far from entering Knesset, it was nonetheless a sizeable achievement.

Ben-Gvir, a follower of the racist rabbi Meir Kahane, who was banned from the Knesset before his murder in New York in 1990, was lifted from the unsavory political fringe by Netanyahu in his efforts to secure votes even from that constituency.

As the next ballot approaches, Netanyahu's inner circle has realized there is no chance of convincing Ben-Gvir to relinquish his bid for Knesset.

Therefore, several of Netanyahu's advisers have been in touch with the Otzma Yehudit leader, trying to formulate a plan to help his party over the electoral threshold.

Among some options discussed was a request by Ben-Gvir that the prime minister appeal to senior rabbis within the religious-Zionist movement to legitimize his party and express public support for its success in the elections.

Another possibility was for Netanyahu to turn to the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party and request it secure the vote of one of their own communities for Otzma Yehudit. Ultra-Orthodox voters are believed to cast their votes according to the instructions of their rabbis.

Netanyahu's camp have asked in return that if Otzma Yehudit's requests are met, the party forfeits a run in a potential fourth election unless they succeed in entering the Knesset in March.

02.12.20 – We -

UN to issue instructions to Israel companies in West Bank to end work immediately

02.12.20

Israel hits back at UN for settlement 'black list', freezes ties with human rights chief
Netanyahu vows to fight step 'with all of our might', while Rivlin warns that boycotting
Israeli firms is not conducive to peace, building trust; Palestinian FM hails 'victory for
international law'

Ynet,News Agencies| Published: 02.12.20 , 20:55

Israel hit back furiously Wednesday at the United Nations publication of a list of
companies operating in its West Bank settlements, accusing the international body of bias
and surrendering to anti-Israel elements and freezing ties with its human rights chief.

After repeated delays, the United Nations Human Rights Council released a list of more
than 100 companies it says are operating in the settlements — a first-ever attempt to
name and shame businesses that has drawn fierce criticism from Israel and the U.S.

In its report, the office said the companies' activities "raised particular human rights
concerns."

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Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

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organizations that want to hurt Israel.

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the building of trust.

"We call on our friends to oppose this shameful initiative," the president said, "I will
stand by these businesses that are now under threat."

After the publication of U.S. President Donald Trump's plan for Mideast peace last month,
Netanyahu vowed to annex Israel's more than 100 settlements in the West Bank, but
under American pressure, he has put the plan on hold until after March 2 elections.

The rights council, which is made up of 47 governments, had never before requested such
a list scrutinizing corporate activities.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki hailed the release of the report.

"The publication of the list of companies and parties operating in settlements is a victory for international law," said a statement issued by al-Maliki's office.

He urged UN member states and the UN Human Rights Council to "issue recommendations and instructions to these companies to end their work immediately with the settlements."

The Yesha Council, an umbrella organization of West Bank settlements in response accused the UN of anti-Israel bias.

"The UN has once again proved it is not a neutral body and is operating against the State of Israel," the Yesha Council said.

02.12.20 – We -
Japan cruise ship coronavirus cases climb to 175

02.12.20
Japan cruise ship coronavirus cases climb to 175

39 new cases confirmed on quarantined liner holding 3,700 passengers and crew, including 15 Israelis; officer conducting health checks among the newly infected
Reuters, Ynet| Published: 02.12.20 , 10:40

TOKYO - Another 39 people have tested positive for the coronavirus on the cruise ship Diamond Princess quarantined in Japan, with one quarantine officer also infected, bringing the total to 175, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

The Diamond Princess was placed in quarantine for two weeks upon arriving in Yokohama, south of Tokyo, on Feb. 3, after a man who disembarked in Hong Kong was diagnosed with the virus.

Among 3,700 passengers and crew on the ship are 15 Israelis whose families on Tuesday called for them to be allowed to return home.

"We are not prepared to take part in this experiment," wrote the 152 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of 13 of the Israeli passengers in a joint open letter. The epidemic originated in mainland China, where more than 1,100 people have now died of the virus.

The British-flagged Diamond Princess is managed by Princess Cruise Lines, one of the world's largest cruise lines and a unit of Carnival Corp.

Kyodo news agency, citing the health ministry, said that of the 39 cases, 10 were crew and 29 were passengers.

Ten were Japanese nationals and the others were from 11 countries, including the United States and China. Four were in serious condition, Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said. People who test positive for the virus are taken off the ship to a hospital.

The quarantine officer who was infected had been handing out questionnaires checking the health of passengers and crew since Feb. 3, and had been following rules that require the wearing of a mask and gloves but not a full protective suit, according to the Nikkei business daily, quoting the health ministry.

"It's terrible about the quarantine officer," one passenger on the ship, who declined to be identified, told Reuters.

"The ones who came to our room to do the initial screening had gloves and surgical masks, while the ones who came to do the actual virus test also had full gowns and full face masks."

'High risk'

A Health Ministry official had no immediate comment, but Nikkei said the ministry was checking the officer's contacts with colleagues and family members.

Mark Kortepeter, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, said that although it was hard to reach conclusions based on limited information, the ship infections pointed to an "agent that is highly transmissible," at least in enclosed environments.

"The infected quarantine officer probably indicates the high risk, even for individuals who are trying to protect themselves, because the virus is unforgiving and there is no room for error in use of personal protective equipment and hand hygiene," he said. "A small number of virus particles is likely needed to infect, making it an efficient spreader." The government was considering allowing elderly and those with chronic illnesses to disembark before the Feb. 19 target date for the end of quarantine, some media reported, but added it would take time to determine where they could be sent.

The quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship docked in a Japanese port (Photo: Reuters)

About 80% of the passengers were aged 60 or over, with 215 in their 80s and 11 in the 90s, the English-language Japan Times newspaper reported.

An improvement in life for people on the boat came several days ago with the announcement they can receive packages sent to the address of the pier - a service that Rob Thomson, a New Zealander living in northern Japan, whose parents are on the boat, made prompt use of.

"The one thing that they were missing were hot drinks during the day - they were getting coffee or tea at breakfast, but then during the day it was cold water or Coca-Cola or soft drinks ... and Dad was saying he'd like fresh fruit other than apples or oranges," he said, adding that he placed an order Tuesday night.

"So I tried sending some grapes and strawberries and stuff. And apparently the fresh things have already been delivered to somebody on the dock."

The foreign ministry released a notice on Wednesday urging its nationals to consider delaying trips to China and for Japanese in China to return home.

Japan has sent four chartered flights to China's Hubei province, the epicenter of the outbreak, for its citizens there to return, and plans a fifth. The people who returned on the first flight will be released on Wednesday if they test negative for the virus, media said.

02.12.20 – We -

Qatari, Egypt, Jordan and possibly Morocco set to sign non-aggression pact with Israel

02.12.20

Ex-Qatari PM: Israel, Gulf states set to sign non-aggression pact

Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim says he is 'not against' such an agreement, believes unanimous decision taken by Arab League last week to reject the U.S. peace plan was not in best interests of the Middle East

i24NEWS, News Agencies | Published: 02.12.20 , 09:13

Israel and the Gulf states and Israel will soon sign a non-aggression pact that could also include Morocco, the former prime minister of Qatar says.

In a statement in Arabic on Twitter, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim said: "On December 14 last year, I posted a tweet in which I spoke about the deal of the century [the new U.S. peace plan] and said that it would announce the beginning of this year.

"Now it will be followed by a non-aggression agreement between Israel and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council in addition to Egypt, Jordan and possibly Morocco."

The former politician noted that he was "not against" such an agreement with Israel, and believed the unanimous decision taken by the Arab League last week to reject the U.S. deal was not in the best interest of the region.

"Although there are Arab countries that promised the American side that they would take a positive position on the deal, but they did not, and they justified this by saying that they could not because of the media," said Jassim.

He added "the Arab side follows a policy based on short-term tactics, while the Israeli side places its policies on long-term strategic foundations."

Trump's plan, announced at the White House on Jan. 28 with a smiling Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flanking the president, sides with Israel on virtually all of the most contentious issues of the decades-old conflict.

It would allow Israel to annex large parts of the West Bank, including Jewish settlements that are home to hundreds of thousands of people and are considered illegal by most of the international community.

The Palestinians, who cut off ties with the U.S. after Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, have adamantly rejected the plan.

Addressing the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reiterated his rejection of the plan, calling it a "gift" to Israel.

Waving a copy of a map that the U.S. plan envisions for a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, Abbas said the state carved out for Palestinians looks like a fragmented "Swiss cheese."

02.11.20 – Tu -

Abbas, Olmert grandstand at UN to denounce peace plan in rare joint address

02.11.20

Abbas, Olmert denounce Trump's peace plan in rare joint address

The two leaders who held peace talks back in 2008 say the U.S. Mideast initiative ruins the possibility of a 2-state solution; 'You're a man of peace,' Olmert tells Abbas
Ynet, i24NEWS| Published: 02.11.20 , 21:44

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert held a joint press conference in New York on Tuesday where they denounced U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan, viewed by Palestinians as largely favoring the Israeli side.

The televised address came just hours after Abbas said the U.S. initiative strengthens "the apartheid regime" during a fiery speech at the United Nations Security Council. Olmert and Abbas held negotiations during the former's term as prime minister. Olmert was forced to resign a decade ago ahead of a corruption indictment that later sent him to prison for 16 months.

"The only partner in the Palestinian community that represents the Palestinian people and has manifested that he's prepared to negotiate," Olmert said at the onset of his speech. "Unfortunately, we didn't reach an agreement," he added, referring to the 2008 talks that ended abruptly after corruption charges against the former prime minister surfaced. "He [Abbas] is a man of peace, he is opposed to terror and therefore he is the only partner that we can build [peace] with."

Olmert added that during his tenure he had met with Abbas more times than any Israeli leader with the entire Palestinian leadership combined. "It is important to listen not only to the negative side of the Palestinian president but also to the positive side."

Abbas kicked off his address by saying he would "love" to resume the peace talks with Israel "where we left it with you, Mister Olmert, under the umbrella of the international quartet and not on the basis of the plan of annexation, legalizing settlements and destroying the two-state solution."

The president also doubled down on his earlier statements at the UN, saying the Palestinians oppose violence and stand against terrorism.

UN Ambassador Danny Danon slammed Olmert for the Tuesday presser, saying he thinks "it's unfortunate ... and shameful that he will be standing with President Abbas, especially this week when we saw attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers" and a

resolution "trying to condemn the U.S., our strongest ally. And I think from a former prime minister we should expect more."

Last week, Kushner, the architect of the U.S. plan, called Olmert's expected appearance with Abbas "almost pathetic," accusing him of "trying to grab a headline when you're irrelevant."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu labeled the press conference as "a low point in Israel's history."

02.11.20 – Tu -

Gaza leader Sinwar fearing Israel assassination halts balloon bomb attacks

02.11.20

Report: Hamas halts balloon bomb attacks as part of Gaza agreement
Al-Quds newspaper, which is affiliated with the Fatah movement, says message sent Tuesday morning to all cells carrying out balloon attacks, following meeting in Gaza between Hamas leadership and Egyptian mediators trying to negotiate long-term ceasefire deal with Israel

Elior Levy | Updated: 02.11.20, 16:14

The Hamas terror group, which runs the Gaza Strip, has decided to halt the use of explosive laden balloons to attack Israel in return for relief for the residents of the besieged coastal enclave, a Palestinian newspaper reported Tuesday.

According to Al-Quds newspaper, which is affiliated with the Fatah movement, a message was sent Tuesday morning to all cells carrying out balloon attacks, following a meeting in Gaza between the Hamas leadership and Egyptian mediators trying to negotiate a long-term ceasefire arrangement between the terror group and Israel.

Despite the report, a balloon carrying a small explosive landed Tuesday morning outside a kindergarten at Kibbutz Sa'ad in the Negev.

A police sapper neutralized the small explosive charge and there were no injuries or damage.

The balloon was spotted by parents taking their children to kindergarten, which opened as usual.

The Egyptian delegation arrived in Gaza on Monday morning and met with Hamas leaders then.

They gave Hamas a message from Israel that if there were not quiet in Gaza, Israel would deliver a tough blow to the organization, something that Egypt is warning would have both American and international support.

Hamas, for its part, made clear to members of the delegation that it was not interested an escalation but that there would not be quiet on the border so long as there were delays in reaching an understanding and implementing relief measures for the Gazan population.

Hamas also warned Israel that an assassination or another rash military step would lead to a major and extensive round of fighting.

The group's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, skipped the Monday meeting with the Egyptian delegation due to growing fears within the terror group that Israel was planning to assassinate him.

The terror group has recently beefed-up security around Sinwar during all of his public appearances, which have now halted almost entirely.

Before entering Gaza, members of the Egyptian delegation held meetings with Israeli officials, including the National Security Council, the Shin Bet security service and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories.

The meetings were believed to be less focused on a long-term arrangement and more on trying to avoid another cross-border flare up in the wake of the recent tensions between the two sides.

Hamas apparently has also asked the Egyptian officials, who were set to tour the border between Egypt and Gaza, for logistical assistance in protecting the border fence.

The border has become somewhat volatile in recent months due to infiltration attempts made by Islamic State-affiliated groups from the Sinai Peninsula into Gaza.

02.11.20 – Tu -

Burn-off blast of rolling thunder at Leviathan rig triggered by a power cut incident

02.11.20

Massive blast awakens local residents as Leviathan rig burns gas Platform some 10km off coast emits fireball at around 4am; action aimed at preventing emission of pollutants into atmosphere following power cut on rig; government says no blast at site, investigating cause of incident

Ahiya Raved, Ilana Curie | Published: 02.11.20, 12:10

Israelis living near the Leviathan gas rig were awakened in the early hours of Tuesday by an explosion that "shook their homes" as the platform's flare boom burned off gas to prevent its emission into the atmosphere.

The rig, which is located some 10km off the coast of northern Israel and around 20km south of the city of Haifa, came online on December 31, 2019.

The incident was triggered by a power cut on the rig during the night. Gas production was also halted until "the integrity of all systems was checked," said Noble Energy, which operates the rig.

"A malfunction required us to empty all the natural gas from the rig by burning it," said the Energy Ministry on Tuesday morning.

"This is similar to what is done whenever the rig is emptied, when the flare burns the natural gas so that it does not escape into the air," the ministry said.

"It should be emphasized that there was no explosion on the rig. The ministry will investigate the incident with Noble Energy and update the public on its findings."

The Environmental Protection Ministry said it was investigating the circumstances of the incident, adding that Noble Energy had announced the suspension of operations on the rig due to a malfunction.

The ministry stressed that the monitoring stations around the rig had not recorded any abnormal emissions.

"The issue is under investigation and the ministry will update the public with its results and with any data from the monitoring stations that indicates abnormalities."

The Homeland Guard environmental NGO said Tuesday that the explosion sh residents of the Carmel Coast arose from a loud explosion that shook their homes.

A local resident said: "I was awakened by very loud rolling thunder, which did not sound natural. At first I thought it might be the Air Force, but then there was a major explosion that made me immediately realize that it was the rig.

"I leaned out of the window where we can see the rig from our house and I saw a really huge flame out at sea that lit up the entire sky and the water. It looked really bad and out of control. Since the rig became operational, there have been constant glitches."

The explosion occurred at 3:40 am, she said.

Tal Gonen of the Homeland Guards said: "Noble Energy's standards and its dubious record are cause for real concern for everyone.

"The operating period of the rig, which was only supposed to last 45 days and actually should have ended immediately after the gas started to flow, has been extended and extended without explanation, and serves as a convenient alibi for the unbridled emission of pollutants.

"The operation of the rig has been riddled with faults. According to the Environmental Protection Ministry guidelines, any malfunction that requires the flare boom to be operated has to carry out an investigation and present a detailed report.

02.11.20 – Tu -

Fearing Israeli assassination, Hamas head Sinwar skipped a meeting with Egypt

02.11.20

Fearing Israeli assassination, Hamas head skips Egypt meet

Egyptian delegation mediating agreement for calm along Gaza border warns terror group that Israel would deliver tough blow if attacks on population continue, and would have

U.S. and international support; Hamas says not interested in escalation but deal must be reached soon

Elior Levy | Published: 02.11.20 , 09:40

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar skipped a meeting with members of an Egyptian delegation in Gaza on Monday, due to growing fears within the terror group that Israel is planning to assassinate him.

The Egyptian delegation arrived in Gaza on Monday morning in order to mediate a long-term ceasefire arrangement between Hamas and Israel.

It gave Hamas a message from Israel that if there was not quiet in Gaza, Israel would deliver a tough blow to the organization, something that Egypt is warning would have both American and international support.

Hamas, for its part, made clear to members of the delegation that it was not interested in escalation but that there would not be quiet on the border so long as there were delays in reaching an understanding and implementing relief measures for the Gazan population. Hamas also warned Israel that an assassination or another rash military step would lead to a major and extensive round of fighting.

The terror group has recently beefed-up security around Sinwar during all of his public appearances, which have now halted almost entirely.

On Sunday, both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Naftali Bennett issued a thinly-veiled threat to Hamas, saying Israel might have to once again resort to targeted assassinations if the terror group continued to launch attacks on communities bordering the Gaza Strip.

After a long hiatus, Israel has renewed its policy of targeted killings last November when the army killed a top commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Baha Abu Al Atta, in a nighttime raid.

Before entering Gaza, members of the Egyptian delegation held meetings with Israeli officials, including the National Security Council, the Shin Bet security service and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories.

The meetings were believed to be less focused on a long-term arrangement and more on trying to avoid another cross-border flare up in the wake of the recent tensions between the two sides.

Hamas apparently has also asked the Egyptian officials, who were set to tour the border between Egypt and Gaza, for logistical assistance in protecting the border fence.

The border has become somewhat volatile in recent months due to infiltration attempts made by Islamic State-affiliated groups from the Sinai Peninsula into Gaza.

02.10.20 – Mo -

Police shut down Tel Aviv's last three strip clubs for criminal offense of exploitation

02.10.20

Police shut down Tel Aviv's last three strip clubs

Move carried out due to prostitution-related offenses, prohibitions against lap-dances; new law set to come to effect mid-2020 will toughen existing anti-prostitution policies
Eli Sinyor, Gilad Morag, Amir Alon | Published: 02.10.20 , 21:45

Police closed down three strip clubs in Tel Aviv on Monday, enforcing prostitution laws under which lap dances can be considered illegal, under certain circumstances.

With the issuing of administrative closure orders to the Baby dolls, Shendu, and Gogo Girls clubs, Tel Aviv no longer has any operating strip joints.

The orders were issued due to prostitution-related offenses and prohibitions against lap-dances, which have been deemed a criminal offense in some cases, police said in a statement.

The move was carried out in cooperation with the Tel Aviv District Prosecution, the National Insurance Agency, the Health Ministry, and tax authorities.

Attorney Nitzan Kahane, director of Task Force on Human Trafficking and Prostitution, welcomed the development.

“This is a necessary step, after years in which brave women spoke of the tremendous damage caused to them as a result of exploitation in strip clubs,” Kahane told the Ynet website said.

Kahane urged authorities to bring the club owners to trial for crimes of prostitution. The police statement did not clarify if criminal charges will be lodged against any of the club operators.

Last year, then-State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan published a directive enforcing prostitution laws under which lap dances are considered form prostitution if there is intimate contact between the dancer and the client.

Current Israeli law doesn't explicitly forbid the exchange of sex services for money - however - soliciting prostitution, sex trafficking, and operating a brothel are punishable offenses.

A 2018 bill that was passed into law by Knesset criminalizes procuring the services of a prostitute, as well as being present at a location chiefly used for prostitution, such as a brothel.

The law is set to come into effect in mid-2020 to give the state time to form rehabilitation mechanisms for sex workers and allow them to find alternative livelihoods.

02.10.20 – Mo -

Palestinians withdraw UN vote on peace plan for wide divergences in positions

02.10.20

Palestinians withdraw UN vote on Trump plan

Diplomatic sources say Palestinian Authority withdraws request due to proposal lacking 'sufficient support'; Abbas to appear before Security Council Tuesday as scheduled
AFP| Published: 02.10.20 , 20:27

The Palestinians have abandoned their request for a vote at the UN Security Council Tuesday on rejecting the U.S. Mideast plan, over a lack of international support, diplomats said.

After the resolution was introduced by Indonesia and Tunisia, fears had risen that it would fail to muster nine out of 15 votes in its favor, the minimum required, provided there is no veto by a permanent member, the diplomats told AFP.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas is set to take part Tuesday in a session on U.S. President Donald Trump's peace outline, which paves the way for Israeli annexation of much of the West Bank but also allows for a demilitarized Palestinian state.

The sudden Palestinian withdrawal of their request came after the United States - which enjoys veto power as a permanent member - proposed a series of amendments that could come for a vote at the session attended by Abbas.

In proposals seen by AFP, the United States would significantly alter the text to remove references to 1967 lines being the basis of peace.

It would also cut out a line stating that West Bank settlements are illegal, a position taken by virtually every country except the U.S. and Israel.

The United States is also seeking to eliminate language that equated East Jerusalem with the West Bank.

The Trump plan calls for recognition of the holy city as Israel's undivided capital while establishing a Palestinian capital on its eastern outskirts.

While recognizing that the Trump plan "departs from the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters," the U.S. wants the resolution to state that the Security Council "welcomes discussion on this proposal to advance the cause of peace."

"Discussions are continuing on the text," a diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Other diplomats cast doubt on whether a vote could take place at a later date, considering the wide divergences in positions.

02.10.20 – Mo -

Phone app leaks personal information of 6.5 million Israelis to hackers

02.10.20

Likud app leaks millions of voters' data

Apparent cyberattack on ruling party's 'Elector' app leaks personal information of millions of Israeli voters; Likud says it 'thwarted an attempt' to damage digital platform
Associated Press| Updated: 02.10.20 , 17:16

A security breach in an app used by the Likud party has exposed the personal information of nearly 6.5 million Israelis to hackers, a cybersecurity expert said Monday.

The application is used for campaign management by the party, headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

News of the data breach comes just weeks before Israelis go to the polls for the third time in under a year, on March 2.

The Likud party acknowledged that it had "thwarted an attempt" to damage a digital platform used to recruit party supporters on election day. The party did not respond to inquiries about the data breach.

The discovery is particularly embarrassing for the Likud party after it waged a smear campaign last year against Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz, claiming the former army chief's phone had been hacked by Iranian intelligence.

The information included the names, addresses, ID numbers, and polling stations of eligible Israeli voters - and in some cases their phone number, gender and whether they were potential Likud voters.

The voter roll data was exposed due to faulty security on an application the Likud Party used called Elector, which was designed by the Israeli software company Feedback.

Noam Rotem, an Israeli security researcher who first revealed the data breach on his podcast "Cyber Cyber," said he received an anonymous tip from a hacker, which he later confirmed independently.

Rotem said that while it remained uncertain whether Israelis' personal data had been exploited, "it is very likely to assume that we are not the only ones with access to this information."

"It was very easy to get the data. Anyone with a regular web browser could have done it," he told The Associated Press.

Israeli political parties receive the personal data of voters from the Central Elections Committee ahead of elections for internal campaign purposes on condition that the data remains private.

02.14.20 – Fr -

Lebanon new prime minister Diab showing signs of economy collapse & facing poverty

02.14.20

Hezbollah's popularity seen waning as Lebanese protests continue

Analysis: As new Beirut government's biggest supporter, Iran-backed group is facing possibility of losing its legitimacy as resistance movement; according to one expert, with so much poverty, few in Lebanon mention 'resistance' to Israel

The Media Line| Updated: 02.14.20 , 18:33

Anti-government protesters continued to take to the streets of Beirut last week, declaring their **lack of confidence in new prime minister Hassan Diab** and his cabinet.

Meanwhile, the new government's **biggest backer, the Iran-backed Hezbollah** movement is **seeing its popularity wane** as it faces the possibility of losing its legitimacy as a resistance movement.

“The government **failed before it even started**,” said Ali Amin, a Lebanese analyst and journalist who writes for the London-based Al-Arab newspaper said.

He said that people were revolting against an entire political system but were given a new government with the same platform and same political powers.

“Hezbollah is a key party in forming this new government and is perhaps its primary backer, as **[the government] could never have been formed without Hezbollah's support** for its leader and members,” he said.

“The ongoing battle here is between the new government and the street, which rejects it and is expressing this through protests.”

The protests have been taking place since mid-October when people rose up against a new tax on the use of internet-based communications programs like WhatsApp. The protests widened to express deep **dissatisfaction with economic mismanagement, corruption, and sectarianism**.

Under relentless pressure, Prime Minister Saad al-**Hariri resigned on October 29**. But since the beginning, demonstrators have vowed not to leave the streets until there is a government of experts rather than politicians who merely represent the country's many ethnic and religious groups.

Raneem al-Ahmar, a Lebanese political activist who is a regular participant in the anti-government demonstrations, said that Hezbollah has lost popular support.

“**We don't trust Hezbollah, as it's a partner of the current political game**,” Ahmar said. “They manipulated us.”

Asad Bishara, who served as an adviser to former justice minister Ashraf Rifi, said that Diab's government represents the same system that brought the country to collapse, adding that this is hurting Hezbollah.

“Hezbollah sponsors the majority of the new government. Its image as a resistance movement [against Israel and Western powers] has suffered,” he said, adding, however, that the Shi'ite group also sponsored the previous cabinet.

“The formation of the new government is a **sign of failure and further collapse**,” Bishara said.

“The ministerial platform is broad and doesn't include a clear economic plan, a plan to stop corruption or work on Lebanon's regional and international relations. It is the same old approach, just with a new government.”

He said that the interests of the country's diverse political forces conflict with the interests of Lebanon itself.

“Obviously, Hezbollah is working to thwart the revolution to protect a corrupt system,” he said.

Charles Jabour, a journalist and head of media and communications for the Lebanese Forces, a Christian party and Hezbollah foe, said that such talk would change only if the new government managed to rescue the country from its deep foreign debt.

"It can hardly achieve this," he said. "It's not supported by the Lebanese street.

"It faces political opposition in the country and has no support from Arab countries, which means no aid money. In addition, the international community won't offer any help without a cohesive plan [for economic recovery]."

Regarding Hezbollah, a group that has long found support due to its resistance against Israel, Lebanon's neighbor to the south, Jabour said that **nobody talks much about resistance nowadays.**

"People," he said, "are **busy facing poverty.**"

02.13.20 – Th -

Senate moves to limit ability to wage war against Iran, Trump promised a veto

02.13.20

U.S. warship in Arabian Sea seizes suspected Iranian weapons

USS Normandy boarded dhow on Sunday, seizing anti-tank guided missiles, surface-to-air missiles; Senate moves to limit Trump's ability to wage war against Iran;

Revolutionary Guard chief says ready to strike U.S., Israel if they give cause

Reuters| Published: 02.13.20 , 22:03

A U.S. Navy warship seized weapons believed to be of Iranian "design and manufacture," including more than **150 anti-tank guided missiles** and **three Iranian surface-to-air missiles**, the U.S. military said on Thursday.

In a statement, the U.S. military said the USS Normandy boarded a dhow **in the Arabian Sea on Sunday.**

"The weapons seized include 150 'Dehlavieh' anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM), which are Iranian-manufactured copies of Russian Kornet ATGMs," the statement said.

"Other weapons components seized aboard the dhow were of Iranian design and manufacture and included three Iranian surface-to-air missiles, Iranian thermal imaging weapon scopes, and Iranian components for unmanned aerial and surface vessels" it added.

It did not say what kind of surface-to-air missiles were seized.

Limited war powers

The announcement came as the **U.S. Senate backed legislation to limit President** Donald Trump's **ability to wage war against Iran**, rebuking him after a strike against an Iranian military commander and Tehran's retaliation last month raised fears of broader regional conflict.

Eight of Trump's fellow Republicans joined Democrats to pass the war powers resolution by 55-45.

The measure would require Trump to remove U.S. troops engaged in hostilities against Iran unless Congress declares war or passes a specific authorization for the use of military force.

Trump has promised a veto and there is not expected to be enough support in the Senate to muster the two-thirds majority to override. Republicans in the chamber hold 53 of the 100 seats and rarely vote against the president.

Opponents said the resolution's passage would send the wrong message to Tehran.

"We need to send a message of firmness, and not weakness," said Senator Jim Risch, the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Democratic Senator Tim Kaine, a lead sponsor of the resolution, disputed that. He said the vote showed strength and reflected the importance of Congress weighing in on the decision to deploy U.S. troops.

"If we're to order our young men and women in uniform to risk their lives and health in war, it should be on the basis of careful deliberation," he said.

'We will hit both of you'

Meanwhile, the head of the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps said in a live broadcast on state television Thursday that Iran is ready to strike the United States and Israel if they give it any reason to do so.

"If you make the slightest error, we will hit both of you," Major General Hossein Salami said in a speech at a ceremony marking the 40th day since the death of top commander Qassem Soleimani.

Soleimani, who was head of the Quds Force, a branch of the IRGC responsible for operations outside Iran, was killed by a U.S. drone in Baghdad on Jan. 3 along with Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The killing of Soleimani will lead to the liberation of Jerusalem, the spokesman for the Revolutionary Guards said earlier, according to the Tasnim news agency.

"The cowardly and craven assassination of commander Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis by the Americans will lead to the liberation of Jerusalem, by the grace of God," Ramezan Sharif said.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said last week that Iran would support Palestinian armed groups as much as it could and urged Palestinians to confront a new U.S. plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Trump's plan would set up a Palestinian state with strict conditions but allow Israel to take over its long-contested settlements in the West Bank.

Palestinian leaders reject it as biased towards Israel.

Separately, Soleimani urged Iranians to support Khamenei and said political factions should put aside their differences.

02.11.20 – Tu -

Lebanon government risk of collapse needs critical imports of food, fuel & medicine

02.11.20

Lebanon government wins confidence vote as protests rock Beirut

Country's new Hezbollah-backed cabinet hopes financial rescue plan, forming basis of its confidence vote in parliament, can help pull country from deep financial crisis; hundreds hurt in unrest

Reuters| Published: 02.11.20 , 21:02

Lebanon's new government won a vote of confidence from parliament on Tuesday as protesters trying to block the session clashed with security forces, leaving hundreds injured.

Smoke wafted through the city as riot police fired tear gas at the protesters, who were seeking to keep MPs from reaching the heavily barricaded parliament. The Lebanese Red Cross said it treated 373 people for injuries, with 45 taken to hospital.

Lebanon's new cabinet, formed last month with the backing of the powerful Hezbollah group, is hoping a financial rescue plan that formed the basis of its confidence vote in parliament can help pull the country from a deep financial crisis.

Protesters have been demonstrating since October over the worsening economy and a political class they say is deeply corrupt and the new cabinet is part of the elite they want to oust.

"People are suffering and the government is not listening," said 34-year-old Lama Tabbara, an unemployed protester. "It takes a long time to uproot an old rotten tree and that's what the government represents."

One of the world's most heavily indebted states, Lebanon must quickly decide how it will deal with maturities including a \$1.2 billion Eurobond due in March, part of \$2.5 billion owed this year.

Speaking just before the vote, Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab described his government's task as a "suicide mission" that involves trying to put out a quickly approaching "fireball."

"We must be honest and acknowledge that the risk of collapsing is unfortunately not imaginary," Diab said.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri was quoted saying Lebanon should seek technical help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to draw up an emergency plan but should not "surrender" to the IMF because the nation could not bear its conditions.

In comments reported by the an-Nahar Lebanese newspaper and confirmed to Reuters by a government source, Berri also said Lebanon should decide whether to pay the foreign debt maturing next month based on IMF advice.

Diab said the state's priority would be to preserve scarce foreign currency reserves for critical imports like food, fuel, and medicine. He said that "all possibilities" were being studied for how to deal with Eurobonds maturing this year.

EGGS AND PAINT

Lebanon's crisis came to a head last year as slowing capital inflows from abroad led to a hard currency crunch and protests erupted against the ruling elite.

Eggs and paint were hurled at the cars of MPs and ministers arriving near parliament, but the session went ahead despite the scuffles. At the start, Berri said an MP had received stitches after being hit in the face and head by stones.

Protesters rejecting the new government have called for a new one, independent of any political parties, as well as for tougher measures against corruption, along with judicial reform and early parliamentary elections.

"If this government keeps thinking this way and doesn't listen to protesters, then we're staying out here to say 'We don't want you'," said 24-year-old Tasnim Kobani. "They've been here for 30 years and they don't understand that we don't want them anymore."

Men and women, with their faces wrapped in scarves, lobbed rocks at security forces deployed at several locations. Police fired water cannon.

Some MPs skirted the clashes, reaching parliament on the back of motorcycles. Crowds chanted revolution, waved Lebanese flags and held signs that said "no confidence."

A branch of one of Lebanon's biggest banks, BLOM, was set ablaze. Flames engulfed the bank as protesters smashed the facade and furniture.

Banks have severely curbed savers' access to their money and blocked transfers abroad.

The Lebanese pound, pegged at the same level since 1997, has lost more than a third of its value.

CREDIBILITY

At Tuesday's session, **Diab** read out the government's policy statement, which urges some "painful steps" to address the crisis. It calls for moves including **cutting interest rates** and **seeking foreign aid**.

His government was formed with backing from the powerful, Iran-backed Shi'ite Hezbollah, Berri's Amal Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) founded by President Michel Aoun.

It won the **confidence vote** with **63 in favor and 20 against**, with some parties either voting against or boycotting the vote, such as former prime minister Saad al-Hariri's Future Movement, the major Christian parties Lebanese Forces and Kataeb, and the Progressive Socialist Party.

Senior FPM lawmaker Alain Aoun told Reuters his party was expected to adopt the position that the country needs IMF technical assistance and should draw on IMF advice in its decision on whether to pay the Eurobond.

02.11.20 – Tu -

Iranians rally on 40 yr anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini 1979 Islam Revolution

02.11.20

Iranians rally on anniversary of 1979 Islamic Revolution

State media shows footage of rallies with protesters holding signs reading 'Death to America' and 'Death to Israel'; rallies come days before parliamentary elections expected to test popularity of Rouhani and his so-called moderate, pro-reform camp
News Agencies| Published: 02.11.20 , 12:48

Iranians were taking to the streets of Tehran and other cities and towns across the country on Tuesday for rallies and nationwide celebrations marking the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

State media said the rallies would take place in more than 5,000 cities, towns and districts all around Iran. In the capital, Tehran, Iranians set off from 12 different neighborhoods toward the central Tehran Freedom Square, where Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was due to address the crowds.

This year's anniversary celebrations come amid unprecedented bitterness between Tehran and Washington. Tensions have spiked since President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in May 2018.

A series of attacks across the Mideast culminated with the U.S. launching a drone strike that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in January in Baghdad. Iran retaliated for the U.S. airstrike with a ballistic missile attack targeting U.S. forces in Iraq, wounding more than 100 U.S. troops.

However, public anger is also rising among this nation of 80 million people, especially after Iranian forces accidentally shot down a Ukrainian jetliner after takeoff from Tehran last month, killing all 176 people on board.

The Iranian government denied for days that a missile strike downed the plane before admitting to it amid Western pressure.

A man dressed as an effigy of U.S. President Trump next to a picture of Qassem Soleimani

A man dressed as U.S. President Trump with a noose around his neck stands near to an image of slain Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani

The anniversary comes some 10 days before parliamentary elections in Iran that are expected to gauge the popularity of Rouhani and his camp, a mixture of moderate and pro-reform factions, over their hard-line rivals.

Missiles were put on display as part of the anniversary celebrations, according to the Tasnim news agency. Iran's state TV showed archival footage of missile launches and underground missile storage facilities as part of its anniversary coverage.

The missile program is not intended for attacks on neighboring countries, Rouhani said on Monday.

Two armed men during demonstrations, behind of them is written: 'Long live anti-Imperialism and Democratic forces'

The Islamic revolution in Iran began with widespread unrest over the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Shah, who died terminally from cancer, fled Iran in January 1979.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini then returned from exile and the government fell on February 11, 1979 after days of mass demonstrations and clashes between demonstrators and security forces.

Iran would later vote for an Islamic republic, a Shiite theocracy with Khomeini as the first supreme leader who has the final say on all state affairs.

The anger over America that enabled the Shah to receive cancer treatment in New York later triggered the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran by student militants and the subsequent hostage crisis that triggered decades of hostility.

02.14.20 – Fr -

1,716 China health workers had confirmed virus, WHO team arrives this week

02.14.20

INFECTIOUS DISEASE

More Than 1,700 Health Workers In China Have Been Infected With New Coronavirus

February 14, 2020 2:51 PM ET

Colin Dwyer 2018 square

A Chinese train attendant and medical worker gesture to each other, as the train prepares to depart for the city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

AFP via Getty Images Updated at 3:15 p.m. ET

More than 1,700 health workers in China have been infected with the new coronavirus, according to Chinese officials. Zeng Yixin, vice minister of the country's National Health Commission, announced Friday that at least 1,716 health workers had confirmed cases — and that six have died from the disease now known as COVID-19.

"At present, the duties of medical workers at the front are indeed extremely heavy," Zeng told a news conference, according to Reuters. "Their working and resting circumstances are limited, the psychological pressures are great, and the risk of infection is high."

Those cases are among tens of thousands already reported in mainland China, which has been hardest hit by the fast-spreading strain. Chinese authorities announced that confirmed coronavirus cases rose by just over 5,000 on Friday — the second spike in as many days, after a change in reporting methods drove the number higher Thursday.

Worldwide, there were at least 64,000 confirmed cases as of Friday afternoon, and more than 1,300 deaths — the vast bulk in mainland China, and particularly in Hubei province, the center of the outbreak.

The World Health Organization announced Friday that a team of 12 international investigators is expected to touch down this weekend in China and begin working with a team of Chinese experts.

"The goal of the joint mission is to rapidly inform the next steps in the COVID-19 response and preparedness activities in China and globally," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom said during a briefing. "Particular attention will be paid to understanding the transmission of the virus, the severity of disease and the impact of ongoing response measures."

The Chinese ambassador to the U.S., Cui Tiankai, would not explain to NPR why the top Communist Party officials in Hubei were recently relieved of their duties.

Kisha Ravi/NPR

"With the benefit of hindsight, everybody knew that Dr. Li was right"

When Dr. Li Wenliang posted warnings on Chinese social media about cases of a novel coronavirus in late December, government officials took a dim view. The ophthalmologist working in Wuhan, where the virus emerged, was reprimanded by local police. They demanded that he retract his "falsehood."

Now, more than a week after Li himself died of the disease — the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., Cui Tiankai, acknowledges that Li's posts were accurate.

"Of course," Cui tells NPR's Morning Edition, "with the benefit of hindsight, everybody knew that Dr. Li was right."

But he stops short of acknowledging any particular mistakes made by Chinese officials or offering a direct apology to Li's family. Cui also would not explain why the top Communist Party officials in Hubei were recently relieved of their duties.

"Naturally, under such special circumstances, people who can do the job better should be given the responsibility to do it," he said. "And this is a very heavy responsibility."

Worries about the Tokyo Olympics

Questions have begun to swirl around the Summer Olympics, which are slated to begin just over five months from now in Tokyo.

Japan has reported more than two dozen confirmed cases of the coronavirus and one death from COVID-19. The Diamond Princess cruise liner has sat quarantined for days in the port of Yokohama, near Tokyo. Nearly 220 people out of some 3,700 passengers and crew have been infected with the virus. The number of cases and the country's proximity to the outbreak in China have raised concerns about holding such a massive sporting event.

'It's Not Easy For Anyone': Coronavirus Disrupts Life And Work In Hong Kong

The chief executive of the Tokyo organizing committee, Toshiro Muto, expressed some of these concerns himself, saying he was "seriously worried" that the spread of coronavirus "could throw cold water on the momentum toward the Games."

But officials with the WHO and the International Olympic Committee are sending a different message. Michael Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies program, said that the organization is "very much engaged" with the Olympics planning — but that there has been no specific discussion yet regarding the event.

"Certainly the advice we're received externally from the WHO is that there's no case for any contingency plans or canceling the games or moving the games," said John Coates, the head of an IOC inspection team.

A bus departs from the dock where the Diamond Princess cruise ship sits under quarantine with its thousands of passengers and crew. Japanese authorities said Friday that some older passengers who tested negative for the coronavirus were allowed to disembark.

The Japanese health ministry says 11 particularly vulnerable passengers have disembarked the Diamond Princess after a long quarantine period offshore. The ministry says that to do so, they had to meet at least these criteria: They had to be over 80 years old and test negative for the disease.

Thousands of passengers and crew remain under quarantine — and likely will continue to do so until it is expected to lift next week.

Meanwhile, the nearly 1,500 passengers aboard the MS Westerdam, another cruise liner, were finally allowed to disembark in Cambodia on Friday after being turned away by a string of other countries.

Cruise Ship Passengers Disembark After Being Stranded At Sea Over Virus Fears
"I wish to thank Cambodia, especially the prime minister [Hun Sen], for demonstrating to the world the meaning of solidarity," said Tedros, the director-general of the WHO. "I hope that other countries will follow Cambodia's lead."

That number remains at 15, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released more detailed information Friday: Of the 443 people under investigation in the U.S., 347 have tested negative and 81 others were awaiting their results.

HEALTH

HHS Secretary Leads U.S. Effort To Stop Coronavirus From Spreading

"But we need to remember it's a rapidly changing situation, and so we have to prepare in the event that this spreads more fully," Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar tells NPR's Morning Edition.

"One of the steps that we announced yesterday is we're working with our flu surveillance network," he adds. "And in Seattle, San Francisco, LA, New York and Chicago, when individuals present with flu-like symptoms, they will also be tested for the China coronavirus as part of our multilayer surveillance system."