

YnetNews March 27, 2020

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Gantz defends his decision to Join Netanyahu

Claiming leaders must take responsibility and join in the fight against the coronavirus and for the future of Israel's economy Gantz says his door remains open for his former partners to join as well

Moran Azulay, Yuval Karni|

Published: 03.27.20 , 22:53

Benny Gantz said he does not regret his decision to join what he called an emergency government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In a Facebook post, the current Knesset Speaker said he had done what is needed in this time of emergency with a deadly virus taking the lives of Israelis and economic ruin looming.

י"ר הכנסת הנכנס בני גנץ

Benny Gantz (Photo: Knesset PR)

"It is up to leaders to choose the right thing to do and set personal considerations aside," Gantz said.

"We arrived at a crossroads and some of my partners thought it was best to opt for yet another election cycle rather than reach a compromise [with Netanyahu] but Gabi [former military chief Gabi Ashkenazi] and I along with many others decided that new elections at the time of such a prolonged emergency would be wrong."

Gantz said he had hoped to maintain the political partnership with the people whose values he shared but they refused. "They decided to break up the party," he said, "my door remains open."

"I will not refuse to share in the burden of dealing with the crisis," Gantz wrote, "We will pull the country out of the economic trauma and attempt to heal the rift caused by hatred that has been tearing us up from within."

מחאת דגל שחור מול ביתו של בני גנץ

Protesters demonstrate outside the home of Benny Gantz (Photo: Yair Sagi)

One member of Gantz's Knesset faction and a member of the Druze minority in Israel, Gadeer Mreeh has come out against Gantz announcing she will not serve under the corrupt leader.

"I had entered politics to replace this corrupt leadership," she said

Gantz's former ally Yair Lapid leader of Yesh Atid, on Thursday, condemned the move. "We ran together because Benny Gantz looked me in the eye and said he would never sit in this bad government. I believed him," Lapid said at a joint press conference with fellow Blue & White leader Moshe Ya'alon.

"Together with us, over a million Blue & White voters marched from street to street and from bridge to bridge... They feel betrayed today, and justifiably so. Their votes were stolen and given as a gift to Netanyahu," Lapid said.

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"What's being formed today isn't a unity government or an emergency government. It's another Netanyahu government. Benny Gantz surrendered without a fight and crawled into Netanyahu's government."

Gantz supporters angry as he moves towards deal with Netanyahu on Israeli leadership

The shock move splintered Gantz's centrist Blue and White party which came into existence as a coalition of Netanyahu opponents intent on bringing down the leader who is under indictment for bribery, fraud and breach of trust

Reuters|

Updated: 03.27.20 , 14:04

Israel appeared headed for a unity government on Friday after opposition leader Benny Gantz moved towards an agreement with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, disappointing voters who had hoped to bring down the right-wing premier.

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Gantz was elected parliamentary speaker on Thursday with support from Netanyahu's Likud and allied parties, leaving many of his own partners furious over the possibility he could form an alliance with a leader under criminal indictment.

י"ר הכנסת הנכנס בני גנץ

Benny Gantz assumes the role of Knesset Speaker (Photo: Knesset TV)

He cited the coronavirus epidemic as the reason for his decision.

The shock move splintered Gantz's centrist Blue and White party just 13 months after it came into existence as a coalition of Netanyahu opponents intent on bringing down the 70-year-old, who is Israel's longest-serving prime minister and is under indictment for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

It also drew an angry response from some among the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who turned out to support Gantz's coalition in three elections in the past year. Some commentators accused the former general of caving-in to Netanyahu.

"It makes me feel terrible. It's exactly what I did not want to happen, to see Gantz actually partner with Netanyahu," said Tami Golan, 46, who voted for Gantz in all three elections.

"I understand the coronavirus makes for a special situation, but I can't help but feel disappointed - we might not be done with Netanyahu," Golan said.

Many Blue and White voters felt betrayed, commentator Nahum Barnea wrote in the Yedioth Ahronoth daily.

מחאת דגל שחור מול ביתו של בני גנץ

Protesters outside the home of Benny Gantz (Photo: Yair Sagi)

"The only reason that led them to vote for this half-baked party was the desire to see Netanyahu outside of Balfour Street," he said, referring to the prime minister's official Jerusalem residence.

In accepting the speaker's gavel late on Thursday, Gantz said the coronavirus epidemic required what he called a "national emergency government".

"Israel should not be dragged into a fourth election in such a challenging time when the country is dealing with the coronavirus crisis and all its implications," Gantz said on Twitter.

Israel is under partial lockdown due to the virus, which has killed 10 people and infected more than 3,000.

During the election campaign, Gantz had ruled out serving with Netanyahu, citing the prime minister's looming trial on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, which he denies.

But Gantz lacked enough support on the center and left to form a coalition after being asked by President Reuven Rivlin to try to form a government following a March 2 election.

Netanyahu has proposed a unity government to tackle the coronavirus, promising to step down as prime minister within an agreed period and with Gantz then taking over.

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Gantz's move Thursday opened up the possibility of such a "rotation" deal, but there has been no formal announcement that such an agreement had been reached.

The number of fatalities from coronavirus climbs to 12

Israelis were instructed Thursday to remain at home with emergency measures in place for a period of seven days but officials warn a complete lock-down will be imposed if there is no decline in the number of new cases

Ynet|

Published: 03.27.20 , 17:06

Two more Israelis died on Friday as a result of the coronavirus bringing the number of fatalities to 12

An 80-year-old patient who was in critical condition who was suffering from underlying conditions has passed away in the Wolfson Hospital near Tel Aviv, and a 73-year-old man passed away earlier at the Rambam Hospital in Haifa. He too had underlying health conditions. His 71-year-old wife is also hospitalized and is described to be in moderate condition. The couple had recently returned from a vacation in Tenerife.

הלווייתו של אברהם ארושם בן ה-93 אשר נפטר מנגיף הקורונה

A victim of the coronavirus being laid to rest(Photo:: Herzl Yossef)

The Health Ministry said A total of 3,035 people have been confirmed to have the virus in Israel.

There are currently approximately 462 people in hospital in Israel, 1,509 people being treated at home, 410 in a specially designated hotel and the rest awaiting a decision on how they will be treated.

Israelis were instructed Thursday to remain at home with emergency measures in place for a period of seven days.

Officials warn that a complete lock-down will be imposed if there is no indication of a decline in the number of new cases reported.

Health Ministry No. 2 Prof. Itamar Grotto told Ynet on Friday that the numbers of fatalities and of seriously ill patients were "not as bad as we feared."

שמירה על הנהיית משרד הבריאות בסופר בתל אביב

Fever being checked upon entering a supermarket in Tel Aviv (Photo: Moti Kimchi)

Grotto, who has been advocating for a complete lockdown on the population, said that the more measures imposed by the government are observed the better of Israel will be.

Meanwhile, a newly appointed Knesset oversight committee has reported a concerning shortage in ventilators.

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The death toll from the virus continues to rise around the globe. In Italy, some 8,200 have died; 4,100 have succumbed to the virus in Spain and 1,700 in France, including a 16-year-old; the U.S. had about 1,200 deaths, including about 400 in New York State.

Gantz becomes Knesset speaker in shock alliance with Netanyahu

Former IDF chief leaves his own Blue & White party in tatters as erstwhile political partner Yair Lapid orders his Yesh Atid MKs to abstain from voting, saying there is no way to understand why Gantz dismantled union 'to crawl into Bibi's government'

Moran Azulay|

Published: 03.26.20 , 18:40

Benny Gantz became the new speaker of the Knesset on Thursday with the support of political rival Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing bloc after the announcement of his shock 11th hour candidacy left his own Blue & White alliance in tatters.

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Of the 120 Knesset members, 74 voted in favor, 18 voted against and the rest abstained.

עמיר פרץ עם יו"ר הכנסת הנכנס בני גנץ

Labor leader Amir Peretz hands Benny Gantz the Knesset speaker's gavel after his election (Photo: The Knesset)

Yair Lapid and Moshe Ya'alon, who split with Gantz after he announced his candidacy, were to issue a joint statement at 8:30pm.

Gantz's election as speaker apparently comes amid talks for his Israel Resilience party to join a government initially led by Benjamin Netanyahu.

"These are not normal days and they call for special decisions. Therefore, as I've said, I intend to examine and advance, in any possible way, the creation of a national emergency government," Gantz told the Knesset, accepting the speaker's gavel.

Gantz was last week tapped by President Reuven Rivlin to form the next government after securing the support of more than half of the Knesset, some of whom were quick to express their opposition to Thursday's surprise developments.

The new speaker had long insisted that he would not join a government led by a prime minister under criminal indictment. Netanyahu is due to go on trial in May for bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

The election of the new Knesset speaker came after the High Court ordered a vote, which led then-speaker Yuli Edelstein to resign. Edelstein is apparently tapped to resume the role when Gantz joins the government.

Lapid instructed members of his Yesh Atid party to abstain in the vote.

He later wrote to his MKs that, "Benny decided to dismantle Blue & White to crawl into Bibi's [Netanyahu] government. There is no way to understand it."

Yesh Atid will remain in a political partnership with Moshe Ya'alon's Telem party. The two parties will work as one faction - and have already submitted the request to dissolve Blue & White to the relevant Knesset committee.

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ISRAEL TOURS WITH AIRFARE INCLUDED

Yesh Atid and Telem will continue to call their union Blue & White as they will be the largest faction after the split, with 18 MKs to Gantz's 15.

Israel in lockdown: Quarantined Eilat, deserted Tel Aviv

Country's southernmost city says it is determined to preserve its reputation as tourism hot spot; police patrol center of country, using loudspeakers to send regulation violators home; Petah Tikva mulls use of drone to enforce new directives
Meir Ohayon, Itay Blumenthal, Roy Rubinstein, Hassan Shaalan, Raanan Ben Tzur |
Published: 03.26.20 , 14:00

Israel's normally bustling city streets were near deserted on Thursday, less than a day after new strict restrictions on movement took effect as part of the efforts to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

The new emergency regulations, which went into effect at 5pm Wednesday ban people from moving more than 100m from their homes except to go to work, buy food and medicine or receive medical assistance.

The southernmost city Eilat has banned entry as part of the battle against coronavirus. Police roadblocks have been erected at the two entrances to the city via Route 12 and Route 90 to examine people wishing to enter.

The normally bustling Tel Aviv promenade is almost empty

The normally bustling Tel Aviv promenade is almost empty (Photo: EPA)

The city council has also banned entry to caravans and anyone planning to stay on its beaches now that its hotels have been closed.

Eilat Mayor Meir Yitzhak Halevi made it clear that the city will not allow the entry for coronavirus patients, who he said could "jeopardize the city's residents and its status as an international tourism destination and resort capital of Israel."

Halevi said that Defense Minister Naftali Bennett reassured him that there was no such intention.

קרוואנים באילת במקום הסתגרות בבית בעקבות הקורונה | המשטרה פועלת נגד הנופשים

Eilat has banned the entrance of caravans to the city and its hotels are all closed (Photo: Meir Ohayon)

In Tel Aviv, the promenade seemed emptier than ever. Few people were seen in the area, and those not on their way to work or to the supermarket were approached by police and told to return home immediately.

Police patrol cars were operating throughout the city, using loudspeakers to remind passersby of Health Ministry directives to remain at home.

On the beachfront, the lack of people was clearly evident on a strip normally packed with tourists and locals alike.

"There are fewer people here, they are afraid to go out," says . Every day people are running, doing fitness, exercising - and nowadays there is nothing," Shiran Badui, the manager of a boardwalk gas station, told Ynet.

Nonetheless, there were still quite a few people jogging or walking their dogs on Rothschild Boulevard in the center of the city, although the new guidelines only permit recreational activity up to 100 meters from home.

And despite regulations prohibiting it, cafes were continuing to sell takeaways to customers. Police also set up impromptu checkpoints at several locations, including

Yarkon Park and the Ramat Gan Stock Exchange complex, where they randomly checked drivers.

As well as ensuring that no one was violating their quarantine, police also warned passersby to return home if they did not have any vital reason for being outside.

While the streets of nearby Bnei Brak were not busy, there were quite a few people walking around, as opposed to the other cities in the center of the country.

הטיילת בתל אביב

A police officer grills a person on Tel Aviv beachfront (Photo: Moti Kimchi)

Police and inspectors were also in action in Rishon Lezion on from Thursday morning, placing roadblocks in most neighborhoods in the city. In the morning hours at least, most residents who did not go to work remained in their homes and the streets appeared empty.

Authorities were also enforcing regulations in the Arab communities. At the entrance to Baka-Jatt, police officers stopped drivers to verify that they were on their way to work and anyone who was not was told to return to home.

Petah Tikva municipality meanwhile was exploring the possibility of enforcing the regulations from the air.

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As part of municipal action to prevent crowds from gathering, Mayor Rami Greenberg directed the city's defense department to move ahead with the purchase of a drone. The drone will enter a test phase, the drone will access various points throughout the city in the coming days and warn crowds to disperse.

Streets empty as police begin enforcing new movement limitations

Police close off main entrances to ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem; officers call on visitors at Tel Aviv's Yarkon Park to return to their homes

Ynet|

Published: 03.25.20 , 22:59

The government's new regulations meant to stave off the spread of coronavirus went into effect on Wednesday evening with police forces deployed all over the country in order to

ensure the public complies with the new regulations which have effectively halted everyday life in Israel.

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In Jerusalem, police officers blocked all entrances to the ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim (hundred Gates) neighborhood, while ordering owners of non-vital businesses to close their stores.

רחובות ריקים ב ירושלים

An empty street in Jerusalem (Photo: Reuters)

“When we see the police and the special patrol unit, it makes us want to go out even more,” said an infuriated local with the increased police presence at the neighborhood. In Ashdod, city inspectors began enforcing the new regulations as well, while in Tel Aviv, the Carmel and Tikvah markets were shut down completely on Tuesday, while police officers were seen telling visitors to the city’s parks to, “go home immediately.”

While the streets of Tel Aviv were still relatively busy even after the new restrictions went into effect at 5 pm Wednesday, police forces soon spread throughout the streets and asked all those still outside to return to their homes.

By 6:30 pm the streets of Tel Aviv were all but empty except for police patrols.

“I came to do stretches in the park because they said you can leave your house for up to 100 meters,” said one visitor in Tel Aviv’s Yarkon Park who was asked to return home. “The instructions are unclear and there is complete chaos, if we’re not allowed to leave our homes at all, just say so.”

אכיפה בשדרות רוטשילד תל אביב לאחר פרסום הנחיות חדשות של משרד הבריאות

An empty street in Tel Aviv (Photo: Shmulik Davidpour)

In the mostly ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak, there were long lines outside of the city’s supermarkets before the regulations came into effect, now though, the usually busy streets of the city have been emptied completely.

“From now on, we pray together in the building,” said a Bnei Brak resident who returned from prayer at a synagogue before the regulations came into effect. “The synagogues are closed, we need to pray and listen to the rabbis’ instructions.”

בני ברק לאחר פרסום הנחיות חדשות של משרד הבריאות

Bnei Brak devoid of people

In Netanya, the city’s market was buzzing with people shortly before the new regulations came into effect, while the market itself remained open on Wednesday evening despite the government instructing to shutter all markets on Tuesday.

According to the chairman of the market’s traders’ union, there is no breach of the Health Ministry’s regulations as the market’s stands are closed and only the stores remain open. Soon after, police forces arrived and shut down the market completely.

אכיפה בשכונת הדר בחיפה לאחר פרסום הנחיות חדשות של משרד הבריאות

The streets of Haifa

“Upon receiving reports of activity at the market in Netanya, the police arrived and the market was closed shortly after,” read a police statement.

In the city of Haifa, the streets were devoid of people almost completely, with only a few authorized businesses staying open.

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“It is best that people remain home and take care of themselves,” said an employee at one of Haifa’s only operating pharmacies. “The big question is when will it end.”

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Palestinians leave jobs in Israel, citing coronavirus risk

Special arrangements made for tens of thousands of Palestinians; situation could effectively shut down Israel's construction industry, which is heavily reliant on Palestinian labor

Reuters|

Published: 03.25.20 , 23:09

The Palestinian government has ordered home Palestinian laborers in Israel and in settlements in the West Bank, saying their jobs exposed them to the risk of the coronavirus.

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The edict, announced late on Tuesday by Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, could effectively shut down Israel's construction industry, heavily reliant on Palestinian labor.

פועלים פלסטינים מחברון

Palestinian workers from the city of Hebron (Photo: AFP)

Israel had made special arrangements for many of the about 100,000 Palestinians who typically cross daily from the West Bank to instead stay overnight in Israeli cities before shutting the border on Sunday to curb the spread of the virus.

But while most workers found temporary housing in empty hotels and apartments, several thousand others have had to sleep in buildings still under construction - often the sites where they work, according to industry groups and activists.

Cautioning that improper living conditions could lead to the spread of the coronavirus, Shtayyeh said all Palestinian workers must return home "to protect them and preserve their safety".

Palestinian workers earn more for equivalent work in Israel than in Palestinian cities. But officials have voiced concerns in recent weeks that they could contract and spread the disease when they return home.

Muslims praying outside the shuttered gates of the Al-Aqsa Mosque

Muslims praying outside the shuttered gates of the Al-Aqsa Mosque (Photo: AP)

"We didn't see this coming. But we understand that it's about health and safety. We'll respect (the Palestinians') decision," said Shay Pauzner, an official with the Israeli Builders' Association.

More than 2,000 cases of infection and five deaths have been reported in Israel, and around 60 cases in the West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority (PA) has limited self-rule.

Early on Wednesday, some 500 Palestinian laborers waited to have their temperature taken by medical authorities at the entrance to the West Bank town of Jericho after returning from an industrial park in a settlement near Jerusalem.

"To maintain our safety, we abided by the instructions ... We are now heading home, and will stay in quarantine for 14 days," said Amin Al-Asali, 55, who had been staying overnight at the Mishor Adumim industrial park.

Palestinian municipality employees spray disinfectant in the West Bank town of Hebron, 24 March 2020

Palestinian municipality employees spray disinfectant in the West Bank town of Hebron, 24 March 2020 (Photo: EPA)

The repatriation decision followed a public outcry among Palestinians over the alleged mistreatment of a Palestinian laborer whom Israeli authorities sent back to the West Bank this week.

Videos posted to social media showed the visibly ill Palestinian sitting on the roadside at an IDF checkpoint on the West Bank border.

Palestinian officials said he was dumped there by Israeli authorities after checking into an Israeli hospital with a fever. A Palestinian ambulance picked him up at the checkpoint.

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Police said he been working without a permit and had shown no sign of coronavirus infection before being sent home.

Train traffic brought to halt following new movement restrictions
Transportation Minister Smotrich says hiatus will be used to expedite infrastructure projects; buses will continue operating in reduced capacity until replacement found for vital workers, weaker populations
Asaf Zagrizak|
Published: 03.25.20 , 19:30

Transportation Minister Bezael Smotrich announced on Wednesday that following the government's decision to restrict public transportation as part of the measures to fight the spread of the coronavirus, all train traffic will be brought to a halt

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“This is a crisis unlike any other Israel has dealt with since its establishment,” said Smotrich, “Stay at home and with god’s help we will get through these times with minimal casualties.”

חיטוי וניקוי בתחנות ורכבות ישראל למניעת התפשטות נגיף הקורונה

Health workers disinfecting a train wagon (Photo: Israel Railways)

Smotrich also said Israel Railways will use this hiatus in order to invest hundreds of millions in expediting various infrastructure projects.

“This will be the best possible use for the hiatus,” said Smotrich. “Israel Railways said that while passenger trains will cease their work, cargo trains will keep operating as usual in order to expedite infrastructure projects.”

The government decided on Wednesday to radically limit public transportation, but not completely in order to provide transportation to workers in vital positions, even though the number of passengers has decreased dramatically over the past two weeks.

train station

According to the new government orders, public transportation will work at a 25% capacity and companies will see that overcrowded bus lines will be reinforced.

“I’m glad common sense has prevailed, as long as some parts of the economy are still working, it is critical that public transportation keeps functioning,” said Smotrich. “Public transport will be reduced to the bare minimum, I call on the public to refrain from using it unless absolutely necessary.”

“In case the economy shuts down further, public transport will only be shut down after a suitable replacement has been provided for both vital workers and weaker populations to stock up on food and provisions.”

The Jerusalem light rail will continue to operate as usual, while the Carmelit underground train in Haifa has already ceased all its activities on Tuesday.

חיטוי תחנת רכבת משה דיין בראשון לציון

Health workers disinfecting a bus stop (Photo: Avi Mualem)

The National Public Transport Authority called on all public transport operators to prepare for the coming changes and to adhere to the guidelines that instruct drivers to equip personal disinfectants including alcohol.

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The public is requested to adhere to the instructions as well, and use public transport only if necessary while maintaining as much distance as possible from other passengers.

Synagogues and hotels are Israel's coronavirus hot spots

New data examining locations that led to most infections shows 29 percent caught the virus while in place of worship or yeshiva, with restaurants, supermarkets and stores also accounting for significant percentages

Sivan Hilaie|

Published: 03.25.20 , 10:04

Data released by the National Coronavirus Information and Knowledge Center indicates that 29 percent of Israel's confirmed coronavirus patients contracted the pathogen in synagogues and yeshivas.

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In one instance, no less than 17 members of the same synagogue contracted the virus after praying alongside a person who was infected.

The next most common location for contracting the virus were hotels, which account for 15 percent of the confirmed cases.

בדיקות נגיף קורונה מבחנה מעבדה בית חולים איכילוב תל אביב

Researching the coronavirus in Ichilov Hospital (Photo: AFP)

According to the newly released data, approximately 47% of the confirmed cases whose had undergone epidemiological investigation were infected during a stay overseas, 35% were infected after coming into contact with a confirmed coronavirus patient and 5% contracted the virus while in their homes.

The origin of infection in 13% of patients is unknown, which means they may have been infected during a direct or indirect random encounter with a verified patient.

מתחם "היבדק וסע" בתל אביב

Medics test for coronavirus at a 'drive-through' location in Tel Aviv (Photo: Moti Kimchi)

Out of the overall number of patients, 48% developed fever and respiratory problems, 25% developed respiratory problems without any fever, 19% developed a fever without additional symptoms and the remainder showed no symptoms of the virus whatsoever.

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Israel on Wednesday morning confirmed that it now has 2,030 cases of the coronavirus, with five fatalities. Thirty-seven people are in serious condition while another 58 have made a full recovery.

No outdoor sport, no walks as Israel set to impose tighter coronavirus lockdown
Israelis would be banned from moving more than 100 meters away from their homes;
new restrictions would also be in effect for take aways but not deliveries; public
transportation also to be drastically scaled back, leaving single-occupant only cabs
Itamar Eichner|

Published: 03.24.20 , 20:29

The government was to convene at 8:30 pm Tuesday to approve a series of new, tighter measures in the fight to stop the spread of coronavirus in Israel.

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According to a rough draft of the new guidelines, essential workplaces would continue to operate, but all people entering each workplace would have their temperature taken to show that it was no higher than 38 degrees Celsius.

שוק מחנה יהודה בירושלים ריק בעקבות הקורונה

Mahne Yehuda Market in Jerusalem completely empty due to the new coronavirus guidelines (Photo: TPS)

All public transportation would cease, excluding taxi cabs that are allowed to carry just one passenger. Special transport arrangements would be made for employees in essential jobs.

People would only be allowed to leave their homes to a radius of 100 meters (which was extended from the initial 50-meter radius). Restaurants would only be able sell food via delivery, and self-collection service for take aways would no longer be permitted.

Penalties for violating the new directives were set to include six-month jail sentence and NIS 5,000 fines. The rough draft was given to Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit for inspection.

Behind the scenes, a tense battle was waged over the scale of the new directives.

Health Ministry Director General Moshe Bar Siman-Tov had pushed for a full lockdown of all non-essential workplaces, banks and public transportation.

The Finance Ministry vehemently opposed such a move and tried to keep the economy in its current state, even with new lockdown guidelines.

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Israel on Tuesday recorded its second and third coronavirus-related deaths - a 67-year-old woman from Bat Yam and an 82-year-old resident of the same Jerusalem nursing home as the 88-year-old Holocaust survivor who succumbed to the disease on Friday.

Italy passes China's coronavirus death toll, prepares to extend lockdown

Some 3,405 deaths registered in European country since outbreak surfaced on Feb. 21, with virus seen hitting its elderly population; Italian troops deployed to move coffins from overwhelmed town

Reuters|

Published: 03.19.20 , 20:52

Italy's death toll from coronavirus on Thursday overtook that of China, where the virus first emerged, as hospitals said they were being overwhelmed and the government prepared to prolong emergency lockdown measures.

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A total 427 deaths were registered in Italy over the past 24 hours, bringing the total nationwide tally to 3,405 since the outbreak surfaced on Feb. 21. China has recorded 3,245 deaths since early January.

נגיף קורונה נאפוּלי איטליה

A cyclist rides with a face mask in the Italian city of Naples (Photo: EPA)

However, Italy has far fewer confirmed cases - 41,035 as of Thursday against 80,907 in China.

Officials and experts believe the total number of infections here is significantly higher, with testing largely limited to those arriving for hospital care. The country's large, elderly population, who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, is also seen as factor for the high number of fatalities.

"We're working in a state of very high stress and tension," said Daniela Confalonieri, a nurse at a hospital in Milan, the capital of the wealthy northern region of Lombardy, which has been the epicenter of the epidemic.

A jogger wearing a face mask runs past a shuttered business in Milan

A jogger wearing a face mask runs past a shuttered business in Milan (Photo: AP)

"Unfortunately we can't contain the situation in Lombardy. There's a high level of contagion and we're not even counting the dead any more," she said.

Underscoring the scale of the drama, soldiers transported bodies overnight from the northern town of Bergamo, northeast of Milan, whose cemetery has been overwhelmed. An army spokesman said 15 trucks and 50 soldiers had been deployed to move coffins to neighboring provinces. Earlier local authorities had appealed for help with cremations as their own crematorium could not cope with the huge workload.

"Look at the news that's coming out of Italy and take note of what the situation really is like. It's unimaginable," said the Milan nurse, Confalonieri.

נגיף קורונה נאפולי איטליה

An Italian soldier stands on a deserted street in Milan (Photo: MCT)

Police checks

Italy went into virtual lockdown before other countries in Europe but, with cases still rising, the government is considering even tougher measures that would further restrict the limited amount of outdoor movement currently permitted.

Luca Zaia, governor of the Veneto region neighboring Lombardy, demanded stronger curbs from Rome, including closing all shops on Sunday, and said if they were not passed, he would consider passing a regional decree.

"I hope there will soon be measures to restrict people jogging or going out for walks. I'm sorry about that, but the alternative is intensive care, hospitalization and contagion," he said.

At the other end of the country, in Sicily, the regional governor said the army would now help police make spot checks to ensure only people with legitimate reasons were out.

Police across Italy have stopped more than 1.2 million people over the past week and booked some 51,000 for violating the rules, the interior ministry said Thursday.

נגיף קורונה נאפולי איטליה

Spraying against coronavirus in Naples (Photo: EPA)

Corriere della Sera newspaper quoted Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte as saying the government would extend the deadline on emergency rules closing schools and many businesses.

The measures currently order most shops to stay shut until at least March 25 and schools till April 3. He did not say how long schools would have to remain closed.

Education Minister Lucia Azzolina told SkyTG24 television that schools would reopen only when there was "certainty of absolute safety", adding that the end of the school year would depend on how well online lessons went in coming weeks.

The contagion is also badly damaging Italy's economy, which had already been on the brink of recession before the virus struck last month and the government imposed a nationwide clampdown, causing many businesses to grind to a halt.

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The Treasury has announced a 25 billion euro (\$26.84 billion) package of measures to support companies and workers and sources said it was considering extending guarantees on bank loans to help firms hit by a collapse in orders.

Half-million infected worldwide as economic toll rises

Around the globe, the death toll rose to about 8,200 in Italy, 4,100 in Spain and 1,700 in France, including a 16-year-old; the U.S. had about 1,200 deaths, about 400 of them in New York State

Associated Press|

Published: 03.27.20 , 08:33

As the number of cases worldwide reached a half-million and deaths climbed past 23,000, the damage to people's livelihoods and their well-being from the effort to flatten the rising curve started to come into focus.

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The human and economic toll of the lockdowns against the coronavirus mounted Thursday as India struggled to feed the multitudes, Italy shut down most of its industry, and a record-shattering 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits in a single week. The U.S. surpassed the official Chinese government numbers to become the country with most reported infections.

ארה"ב בית חולים קווינס ניו יורק תור לבדיקת קורונה

People line up to be tested for coronavirus in N.Y. (Photo: AP)

In India, where the country's 1.3 billion people were under orders to stay home, legions of poor were suddenly thrown out of work, and many families were left struggling for something to eat.

"Our first concern is food, not the virus," said Suresh Kumar, 60, a bicycle rickshaw rider in New Delhi whose family of six relies on his daily earnings of 300 rupees, or \$4. "I don't know how I will manage."

India has the world's second-highest number of people living in extreme poverty.

Rickshaw drivers, produce peddlers, maids, day laborers, and other low-wage workers form the backbone of the economy, and many live day to day on their pay and have no savings to fall back on.

The Indian government announced a 1.7 trillion rupee (\$22 billion) economic stimulus package that will deliver monthly rations of grain and lentils to a staggering 800 million people.

קורונה בהודו

Coronavirus in India (Photo: EPA)

Around the globe, the death toll rose to about 8,200 in Italy, 4,100 in Spain and 1,700 in France, including a 16-year-old. The U.S. had about 1,200 deaths, about 400 of them in New York State, the worst hotspot in the nation. Most of those victims were in New York City, where hospitals are getting swamped.

On Thursday, a running count kept by Johns Hopkins University showed the United States now had the most reported cases of any country, with more than 82,000. Italy and China, the latter of which was the origin of the outbreak late last year, both had more than 80,000.

Louisiana was quickly becoming another smoldering hotspot. The number of new cases there jumped by more than 500 Thursday, for a total of over 2,300, with 86 deaths, including a 17-year-old, the health department said. The higher infection numbers reflected an increase in testing. New Orleans was gearing up for a possible overflow at hospitals, with plans to treat as many as 3,000 patients at the city's convention center. From New York's Fifth Avenue and London's Piccadilly Circus to the boulevards of Paris and the streets of Rome and Madrid, restaurants, hotels, airlines, giant chains and small shops are all shuttered, and factories across both continents have ground to a halt, as cities, states and entire countries have ordered the closing of nonessential businesses and instructed people to stay home.

Companies in Europe are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers. And the U.S. is bleeding jobs as well: The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits last week was nearly five times the old record, set in 1982.

Dann Dykas, 37, of Portland, Oregon, was laid off from his job helping design and set up displays for trade shows.

"Everything is so surreal," he said. "I can't even get an interview for another job, and we now have to worry more about being careful and taking care of ourselves."

In Georgia, 33-year-old Ian Smith was let go from his job at a wine bar and is working "side hustles" and relying on the generosity of friends.

"On my worst days, it's hopelessness, and on some of my better days, it's what possibility can I create in all of this?" he said. "I can't pretend that I always feel that, though."

In a rare positive sign, stocks rallied on Wall Street for the third straight day after an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help businesses, hospitals and

ordinary Americans pull through the crisis won passage in the Senate. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped more than 1,350 points or over 6%.

The rescue plan, which is expected to be voted on in the House on Friday, would dispense checks of \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child.

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, announced that federal officials are developing guidelines to rate counties by the risk of virus spread, as he aims to ease the restrictions meant to slow the outbreak.

ארה"ב ניו יורק חולה נגיף קורונה

A coronavirus patient in N.Y. (צילום: רויטרס)

Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, said the task force is concerned about certain counties in the Midwest that appear to be seeing a rapid increase in cases. She listed two: Wayne County in Michigan and Cook County in Illinois.

Montana joined the growing list of U.S. states ordering residents to stay home to fight the virus' spread.

Italy, the eurozone's third-biggest economy and a major exporter of machinery, textiles and other goods, became perhaps the first Western developed nation to idle most of its industry, extending a shutdown on smaller, nonessential businesses to heavy manufacturers.

Among the companies in Italy that have shut down or rolled back production: Fiat Chrysler, Ferrari, Pirelli tires and Luxottica eyewear, maker of Ray-Bans and Oakleys. The industrial lobby Confindustria estimates a cost of 70 billion to 100 billion euros (\$77 billion-\$110 billion) of national wealth a month if 70% of companies are closed, as anticipated.

"We are entering a war economy," said Confindustria President Vincenzo Boccia.

(Photo: EPA)

Elsewhere around the world, South Africa, with the most industrialized economy in Africa, headed into a three-week lockdown starting Friday. The country is already in recession, with an unemployment rate of 29%.

And Britain unveiled another relief effort, this time aimed at the gig economy, many of whose workers are facing financial ruin. The government will give the self-employed grants equal to 80% of their average monthly profits, up to 2,500 pounds (\$2,975) per month.

In other developments:

In New York, the state's death toll jumped by 100 in one day, pushing the number to 385, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. He added that experts expect the number to increase as critically ill patients who have been on ventilators for several days succumb to the virus. "That is a situation where people just deteriorate over time," □ Cuomo said.

China said it is temporarily barring most foreigners from entering as it tries to curb imported cases. Reports of new infections from inside the country have stopped.

In the Mideast, Saudi Arabia announced a total lockdown on the capital, Riyadh, and Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, in addition to a nationwide curfew. In the United Arab Emirates, authorities announced an overnight weekend lockdown and used drones to tell people to stay home.

The leaders of the Group of 20 major industrialized nations held a video summit for safety reasons and vowed to work together to confront the crisis but made no specific commitments.

In Brazil, the country's governors are defying President Jair Bolsonaro over his call to reopen schools and businesses, dismissing his argument that the "cure" of widespread shutdowns is worse than the disease. As of Thursday, the country had more than 2,500 cases and 59 deaths.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Egypt declares two-week curfew to counter coronavirus

Public services and government offices will close their doors to the public during the period and a measure to limit the number of government employees at work will be prolonged until mid-April

Reuters|

Published: 03.24.20 , 15:08

Egypt has declared a curfew from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. for two weeks starting on Wednesday to counter the spread of coronavirus and those who violate the measure will be penalized under the country's emergency laws, the prime minister said.

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A closure of schools and universities, which were shut on March 14 for two weeks, will be extended for a further two weeks, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said.

Egyptian man attentive to his PM announcing measures to counter coronavirus

Egyptian man watches the prime minister announcing measures to counter coronavirus
(Photo: Reuters)

Most public services and government offices will close their doors to the public during the curfew period and a measure to limit the number of government employees going to work will be prolonged until mid-April.

The government has also allocated one billion Egyptian pounds (\$63.69 million) to the health ministry to help it provide supplies, a statement from the cabinet office said.

Disinfection underway in Egypt

Disinfection underway in Egypt (Photo: Reuters)

Egypt has confirmed 366 cases of coronavirus, including 19 deaths.

It has taken a series of measures to prevent the spread of the illness, including ordering all cafes, shopping malls, sports clubs, and nightclubs to shut from 7 p.m. until 6 a.m. since March 19.

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It has also grounded commercial flights and shut mosques and churches.