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04.22.20 – We - - -

Israel virus death 189 with 14,498 cases & imported swabs may be contaminated

04.22.20 – We - - -

Israel's coronavirus death toll up to 189 with 14,498 confirmed cases

Testing for COVID-19 was suspended for the most part on Wednesday after the Ministry of Health instructed health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to refrain from using swabs imported from China for fear they may be faulty and contaminated

Ynet| Published: 04.22.20 , 21:28

As of Wednesday evening, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Israel stands at 14,498, while 189 patients have succumbed to the disease, health officials confirmed.

Among the latest fatalities is a 98-year-old woman who passed away at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem.

There are 470 people hospitalized with COVID-19, 141 of them in serious condition of which 106 are on ventilators because of respiratory distress, 119 people who are considered to be in moderate condition and 210 suffering from mild symptoms. The number of Israelis who have recovered from the virus now stands at 5,215. The number of recoveries has now exceeded the number of new diagnoses for the seventh day in a row.

There are 6,300 people are fighting the virus at home while 2,178 people are currently receiving treatment in specially designated hotels and 146 are awaiting a decision on whether they will be treated.

Magen David Adom (MDA) emergency service announced on Wednesday it was suspending most coronavirus testing throughout Israel after the Ministry of Health instructed health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to refrain from using swabs imported from China for fear they may be faulty and contaminated

04.22.20 – We - - -

Israel may advance West Bank annex July 1 - Palestine would cancel agreements

04.22.20 – We - - -

Pompeo: West Bank annexation is Israeli decision to make

U.S. secretary of state welcomes new gov't, leaves move to extend Israeli sovereignty to West Bank settlements in hands of Jewish state; Abbas: accords with Israel, U.S. null if Israel goes through with annexation

Itamar Eichner,Reuters| Published: 04.22.20 , 19:52

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday it was an Israeli decision whether to annex parts of the West Bank and that the United States will offer its views on this to the new Israeli government in private.

"As for the annexation of the West Bank, the Israelis will ultimately make those decisions," Pompeo told a press conference. "That's an Israeli decision. And we will work closely with them to share with them our views of this in (a) private setting."

Pompeo also said he was happy Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and centrist rival Benny Gantz signed a deal on Monday to form a national emergency government, saying he did not think a fourth consecutive election was in Israel's interest.

The coalition agreement states that while the new government will strive for peace and regional stability, plans to extend Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements in the West Bank could be promoted.

The move would mean a de-facto annexation of territory that Israel seized in the Six-Day War in 1967 and that is presently under Israeli military control. It would have to be greenlighted by the United States, after which Netanyahu would be permitted to advance plans from July 1, the agreement says.

The Palestinians and many countries consider settlements to be illegal under the Geneva Conventions that bar settling on land captured in war. Israel disputes this, citing security needs and biblical, historical, and political connections to the land.

Last January, U.S. President Donald Trump presented a peace plan proposal, cited as "The Deal of the Century", at the White House in the presence of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue & White Chairman Benny Gantz.

Netanyahu's surroundings claimed annexation was closer than ever. However, such a move is yet to be approved by the government since, and U.S. officials have made it clear that they will oppose its execution before a new Israeli government is formed.

After the presentation of the peace plan, Netanyahu said in a government briefing that the annexation of West Bank territories will be carried out in two steps, but a few hours later, the program's architect - senior advisor to President Trump Jared Kushner - said he did not believe the move would take place anytime soon.

When asked whether the U.S. government supports the annexation plan, Kushner replied that the only agreement with Israel was on the establishment of a committee that will put together an orderly roadmap.

Pompeo also said Iran needs to be held accountable for the successful launch by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of the country's first military satellite into orbit. "I think Iran needs to be held accountable for what they've done. They have now had a military organization that the United States has designated a terrorist attempt to launch a satellite," Pompeo said.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in remarks aired on Wednesday that his administration would regard agreements with Israel and the United States "completely canceled" if Israel annexes land in the West Bank.

"We have informed the relevant international parties, including the American and the Israeli governments, that we will not stand hand-cuffed if Israel announces the annexation of any part

04.22.20 – We - - -

Magen David Adom (MDA) suspended testing when handling overheated kits

04.22.20 – We - - -

Magen David Adom suspends most coronavirus testing due to faulty component
HMOs await Health Ministry's decision on whether to re-examine individuals tested using faulty swabs shipped from China as officials unsure malfunction has affected test results

Adir Yanko | Published: 04.22.20 , 18:37

Magen David Adom (MDA) emergency service announced on Wednesday it suspended most coronavirus testing throughout Israel after the Ministry of Health instructed health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to refrain from using swabs imported from China for fear they may be faulty and contaminated.

"We were given Ali-Express-grade swabs without anyone noticing, and people realized pretty quickly what they've done. The main problem is in the substance in the test tube," a Health Ministry source told Ynet.

The problem was detected thanks to the alertness of an employee in one of the country's virology labs after she noticed the color of the test results was different than expected and indicated some kind of malfunction.

Thousands of Israelis have been tested in recent days using the Chinese swabs. Health officials believe that some 10,000 faulty swabs have been sent to HMOs in recent days, and those tested using them will most likely be called to retake the test.

HMOs are currently awaiting the Ministry of Health's decision whether to re-examine individuals who have been tested using the faulty swabs. All HMOs and MDA have alternative types of swabs produced by Biological Industries and Novomed.

"In light of the changes to some of the swab kits, we recommend using kits manufactured by Biological Industries and/or Novomed until told otherwise," read a Health Ministry statement. "Please make sure these kits are kept at a temperature not exceeding 25 degrees Celsius."

It is not yet clear whether this malfunction has affected test results, but HMOs estimate it didn't.

An HMO official said that in recent days they had been instructed by the Ministry of Health not to use a shipment of swabs they had received last week due to concerns they may be contaminated.

Lab workers recently received an update saying the reason the faulty swabs should not be used does not affect the quality of the results, but rather a technical issue in the handling of the kits. The reagent substance in the swabs was tested and found fit for purpose

04.22.20 – We - - -

West Bank, 3 Hamas arrested using internet instructions to manufacture explosives

04.22.20 – We - - -

Israel thwarts terror attack at country's biggest soccer stadium

Shin Bet domestic security services reveal that 3 Hamas operatives from the West Bank had planned last month to carry out several deadly attacks, including at Jerusalem's Teddy Stadium that has a capacity to house over 30,000 people
Yoav Zitun| Published: 04.22.20 , 14:35

Israel has thwarted several terror attacks in Jerusalem, including at the capital's biggest soccer stadium, the Shin Bet security services revealed Wednesday.

The Shin Bet operatives arrested three Hamas members last month who planned to carry out attacks against IDF soldiers in the Ramallah region as well as at Teddy Stadium in the capital that can house over 30,000 people.

The members of the terror cell are Ahmed Sajadia, 27, from Qalandiya refugee camp, Muhammad Hamad, 26, from Kafr 'Aqab near Jerusalem and Omar Eid, 24, from the village of Deir Jarir near Ramallah.

Eid also holds an Israeli identity card, which he used to attend a soccer match at Teddy Stadium in order to analyze the level of security at the location.

According to the Shin Bet investigation, the three became friends during their studies at Birzeit University near Ramallah, where Hamas runs its main student cell. The student cell's high-profile official provided funds for the terror activity and also served as the contact between the three and senior Hamas operatives.

Shin Bet said the man, named Rahman Hamdan, conducted the terror activity while in administrative detention in Israel.

The investigation also revealed they planned to use improvised explosive devices to attack IDF vehicles and checkpoints in the West Bank.

The three had tried to manufacture explosives using instructions from the internet but were arrested before they could complete the process.

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

Haredi hardliners attack IDF troops distributing food in Jerusalem neighborhood

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

Haredi hardliners attack IDF troops distributing food in Jerusalem neighborhood

Police officers evacuate the soldiers from incident in Mea Shearim, condemned by army chief as 'violent, criminal act'; public security minister orders internal probe into previous clash in area that left young girl wounded by stun grenade

Gilad Cohen| Published: 04.21.20 , 22:36

Members of an extreme Haredi sect threw rocks at a group of IDF soldiers distributing food in the ultra-Orthodox Mea She'arim neighborhood of Jerusalem on Tuesday evening.

No troops were injured, though damage was caused to their car. The military said the police were investigating the incident.

In a statement, IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi denounced the attack on the troops.

"This was a violent, criminal act, which deserves total condemnation," he said.

"The fact that IDF soldiers who were assisting the local government and citizens to distribute food were violently attacked by residents of Mea Shearim is very serious and demands denunciation, thorough handling and soul-searching," Kochavi said.

"The IDF will continue to assist in the national effort as much as is asked," he said.

Last Thursday night, hardline residents of the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood also hurled objects at police forces, who responded by throwing stun grenades, one of which wounded a nine-year-old girl passing by.

Approximately 100 people demonstrated against the ban on communal prayers and restrictions on mikveh ritual baths amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Police said in a statement that 12 people were arrested and that officers "did not notice the presence of the mother and child in the eye of the storm," while dispersing the rioters. Three officers were injured during the riots, police said, with one requiring hospital treatment.

Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan on Tuesday ordered the police officers involved to be investigated by the force's Internal Investigations Department.

Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, who heads the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, condemned the attacks on police as "contrary to the law and to Halachah," but also spoke out against the police actions.

"We must prevent wild police behavior, excessive use of force and throwing stun grenades in densely populated neighborhoods full of small children," he said.

Such actions, he said, "endanger human lives, create hate and contribute to the erosion of public order."

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

Holocaust Remembrance ceremony held outside to maintain social distancing

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

PM at Holocaust memorial: Unlike Nazi genocide, we spotted coronavirus danger in time

In digital message to mark state's day of remembrance, Netanyahu says some see pandemic as 'humanity's greatest challenge since World War II,' but says 'it cannot compare in any way to the systematic, diabolical annihilation' of six million Jews

Amir Alon, Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.21.20 , 00:03

The Jewish world might not have been able to recognize the threat of Nazi genocide before it was too late, but the Jewish state was able to take timely action against the coronavirus epidemic, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday as Israel marked Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"Unlike the Holocaust - this time we saw the danger in time," Netanyahu said at the annual ceremony hosted by Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, this year held digitally due to the virus outbreak.

"I heard [late Israeli writer Yehiel De-Nur] and other Holocaust survivors say, 'You will never understand what we went through.' They were right - we can never understand, because there is nothing like the Holocaust," he said.

"The same is true of the global coronavirus crisis, which some consider to be humanity's greatest challenge since World War II," Netanyahu said.

"During these times the hardships are many, but it cannot compare in any way to the systematic, diabolical annihilation of six million people.

"Today we are dealing with one deadly epidemic, in the ghettos they dealt with an innumerable number of epidemics, due to pushing tens of thousands of Jews in small spaces, causing countless to die from dysentery."

Netanyahu added: "Unlike during the Holocaust- we identified the danger in time, made important decisions such as closing the country's borders, while harnessing the entirety of the country's systems to the cause."

Due to the epidemic, the state ceremonies for this year's memorial were held digitally. The annual laying of wreaths at Yad Vashem was also being held without an audience and without the participation of the president, the prime minister and other elected officials.

The Yad Vashem ceremony was filmed in advance, while the annual "Everybody has a name" event in the Knesset was also to take place without an audience.

Adhering to Health Ministry's coronavirus regulations, many cities around Israel were commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day through technology or small intimate ceremonies dedicated to survivors.

In the southern city of Ashdod, local students held a ceremony outside the windows of a care facility that is home to Holocaust survivors due to the need to maintain social distancing.

In Givatayim, hundreds of high school students were giving out gifts to more than 800 Holocaust survivors living in the city.

In Tel Aviv as well, the city's youths were distributing flowers to the city's 10,500 Holocaust survivors.

The Holocaust Remembrance Day opening ceremony, which is normally hosted by Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, also took place virtually, with the participation of President Reuven Rivlin and a handful of Holocaust survivors and their families.

The ceremony is normally attended by survivors, members of youth groups, IDF soldiers, members of the security forces and thousands of people from around the country.

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Netanyahu & Gantz unified, plan annex July 1 & Gantz interim PM in Sept 2021
Monday

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Netanyahu and Gantz sign deal for unity government

Agreement leaves Netanyahu in PM's chair for next 18 months when he will be replaced by Gantz, who will serve as defense minister in interim; Blue & White gets 16 ministries in 32-member government, the largest in Israel's history

Moran Azulay, AP | Published: 04.20.20 , 19:33

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his chief rival Benny Gantz said on Monday that they have forged a deal to form an "emergency" unity government.

The deal between Netanyahu's ruling Likud Party and Gantz' Blue and White ends months of political paralysis and averts what would have been a fourth consecutive election since April 2019.

Under the agreement, the two party leaders will rotate the prime minister's post for the three-year term of the government, with Netanyahu remaining in office for the first year and a half.

Former IDF chief Gantz will serve in the interim as defense minister and as locum prime minister should the need arise.

The government is expected to include 32 ministers and more than a dozen deputy ministers, making it the largest in Israel's history.

Blue and White will receive 16 ministries, including defense, foreign affairs for half of the term; justice, immigration and absorption, culture and sports, economics and welfare (which have been earmarked for Labor's Amir Peretz and Itzik Shmuli), communications, agriculture, strategic issues, tourism, social equality, and diaspora affairs.

Gantz's political partner Gabi Ashkenazi will serve as foreign minister during the first 18 months.

Likud will receive the foreign affairs portfolio for half of the term, public security, transportation, housing, education, environmental protection, energy, Jerusalem affairs, and other less key posts.

The agreement also gives Netanyahu veto power over the appointment of the attorney general and state prosecutor - the two senior officials who oversaw the prime minister's indictment for bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

During the period of an "emergency government," which is set to last six months, there will be no appointments requiring government approval. This means that acting state prosecutor Dan Eldad, who was appointed by the justice minister and Netanyahu ally Amir Ohana, will remain in post.

The two sides also decided that if the High Court of Justice rules before the new government is sworn in that Netanyahu cannot form a coalition due to the indictments against him, the agreement becomes void and the Knesset will dissolve.

The committee for judicial nominations will include two MKs from Likud as well as Derekh Eretz MK Zvi Hauser as "the representative from the opposition."

Gantz on the campaign trail promised not to sit in a government led by a prime minister facing criminal charges, but he recently backtracked, saying the enormity of the coronavirus crisis necessitated an emergency unity government.

"We have prevented a fourth election. We will protect democracy. We will fight coronavirus and care for all of Israel's citizens," Gantz said on Twitter after signing the deal.

Netanyahu tweeted a picture of Israel's blue and white flag, followed by a statement that read: "I promised the State of Israel a national emergency government that will work to save the lives and livelihoods of the citizens of Israel."

The deal states that Likud will take over the leadership of the Knesset's coronavirus committee.

After the deal was signed, Netanyahu called Education Minister Rafi Peretz and Defense Minister Naftali Bennett to inform them that an agreement had been reached. Netanyahu is expected to offer Bennett's Yamina party two ministerial posts although it had been angling for three.

Yamina said in response that, "Netanyahu has shown us the door."

The unity agreement includes a clause that states that Israel will assume sovereignty over the West Bank on July 1, a move that has drawn massive international criticism when it was announced as part of U.S. President Donald Trump's plan for Middle East peace.

Blue & White said: "The Trump plan will be moved forward responsibly, with protection of the strategic assets of the State of Israel and of regional stability."

'Slap in the face of Israeli majority'

Joint List leader Ayman Odeh slammed the agreement, calling it a "slap in the face" for the majority of Israelis.

"Gantz and Netanyahu's government of surrender is a slap in the face of the civilian majority who goes to the polls time and time again to oust Netanyahu," said Odeh, who backed Gantz to form the government in the wake of the March 2 elections.

"Gantz was not courageous enough to triumph and chose to legitimize annexation, racism, and corruption," Odeh said.

The announcement also drew fire from Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman, who has long been a backer of a unity government to end the political stalemate. He dismissed it as "another government of [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu and his religious-messianic bloc."

"I welcome the establishment of the government, although it is not a unity government," Liberman said.

"This is another government of Netanyahu and the Haredi-messianic bloc with a fig leaf from two senior [IDF officers]," he said, referring to Gantz and Ashkenazi, both former army chiefs.

Liberman added that his party would be part of the "substantive opposition."

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Israel easing restrictions to 19 provided public wear facial masks

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Israel gov. weighs easing restrictions on Haredi areas

Daily infection rates in Bnei Brak and parts of Jerusalem had reached a 20% rise daily but in the past 24 hours, were seen to drop to 2% only and residents are increasingly willing to evacuate to dedicated hotels

Adir Yanko, Itay Blumenthal | Published: 04.20.20 , 09:03

Following a sharp drop in coronavirus infection rates in Bnei Brak and Haredi areas in Jerusalem, ministers are set to ease some restrictions imposed by official orders that will expire Monday.

Health Ministry officials said they were not only encouraged by preliminary findings indicated infection rates are down but were also pleased with the commitments of local leadership to remove at least half of the remaining residents infected by the virus to dedicated hotels for quarantine by the end of the week, removing them from their families and communities to avoid further contaminations.

The ultra-Orthodox community had been particularly affected by the coronavirus after it was late to implement many of the social distancing regulations issued by the government. Synagogues and seminaries were forced to close and worship was allowed only inside homes.

Health authorities had imposed travel restrictions on the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak and Haredi neighborhoods in Jerusalem earlier this month with police blocking the movement of residents in an attempt to slow down the spread of coronavirus in those communities and beyond with IDF troops were assigned to provide food to residents and assist them with medical and other needs.

Daily infection rates in Bnei Brak and parts of Jerusalem had reached a 20% rise daily but in the past 24 hours, they were seen to drop to 2% only.

Residents have also been increasingly willing to quarantine outside their homes in the dedicated hotels prepared to care for mild cases of COVID-19 and a shortage of rooms has now been reported. Health authorities said they are in the process of locating more hotels.

The number of tests for coronavirus has doubled in the affected areas confirming officials' estimates that the spread of the virus was now contained to a greater extent. The municipality of Bnei Brak praised residents for their cooperation.

On Sunday, cabinet ministers voted to allow public prayers to resume for groups of up to 19 people under social distancing guidelines and provided the worshipers wear facial masks.

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

Russian traditional May 9 Victory Day Parades delayed for precautionary isolation

04.21.20 – Tu - - -

Over 15,000 Russian soldiers in quarantine for coronavirus

Thousands of troops set to participate in the traditional May 9 Victory Day Parades in Moscow were called into a 'precautionary' isolation; TV footage shows no adherence to social distancing or wearing of face masks in rehearsals

Reuters| Published: 04.21.20 , 23:29

Russia's ministry of defense said on Monday it had ordered thousands of troops into a two-week quarantine after a vast Red Square military parade in Moscow they had been rehearsing for was called off because of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Up to 15,000 troops were due to parade alongside military hardware on May 9 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet Union's World War Two victory, an event the Kremlin hoped would showcase Russia's military and diplomatic clout.

But a somber President Vladimir Putin was forced to push back the commemorations last week to a later, unspecified date.

Putin said the Victory Day events, including the parade he personally oversees from a raised stand every year, were "sacred" to Russians, but that the coronavirus outbreak in Russia meant the event was too risky to hold.

TV footage of rehearsals showed thousands of troops marching in lockstep next to one another at a training ground outside Moscow earlier this month. There was no evidence of social distancing and none of them were shown wearing masks.

All of the soldiers who took part in the rehearsals in Moscow would be sent back to their permanent garrisons across the country where they would be isolated for a fortnight, the defense ministry's Zvezda TV channel said on Monday.

The ministry did not say if the quarantine was anything more than a precaution and whether any of its soldiers had fallen ill or been put under observation, but that all military vehicles, trains and aircraft used to rebase them would be disinfected.

The soldiers had been issued personal protective equipment to be rebased, it said.

Russian media reports suggest the virus has in fact spread among those who took part in rehearsals.

The head of St Petersburg's Nakhimov cadet school, who had been rehearsing for the parade, told the Fontanka media outlet on April 16 that he was in hospital with a fever and had been tested for the coronavirus, though his results had not yet come back.

Confirmed infections in Russia have risen rapidly this month, despite authorities imposing lockdown restrictions in Moscow and elsewhere.

Russia's Kommersant newspaper last week reported that, as of the end of March, three people in the military had caught the coronavirus and at least 133 people been put under observation.

Later that day, the defense ministry said the coronavirus situation was stable and entirely controllable, the RIA news agency reported. On Thursday, however, the ministry said 14 servicemen and a civilian had been diagnosed with the coronavirus at a cadet school in the Siberian region of Tyumen.

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Nova Scotia Gunman disguised himself & his car as police officer, kills at least 16

04.20.20 – Mo - - -

Gunman kills at least 16 in Canada's worst mass shooting

Shooter, 51, disguised himself as police officer while embarking on killing spree north of Halifax; police say not clear if incident linked to coronavirus crisis

Reuters| Published: 04.20.20 , 09:26

A gunman who at one point masqueraded as a policeman killed at least 16 people in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia during a 12-hour rampage, authorities said on Sunday, in what was the country's worst modern-era mass shooting.

Among the victims of the shooting spree that spread across part of the Atlantic Canadian province was RCMP officer Heidi Stevenson, a 23-year veteran of the force with two children.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said the gunman, 51-year-old Gabriel Wortman, who worked as a dentist, appeared at one stage to have been wearing part of a police uniform. He had also painstakingly disguised his car to look like a police cruiser.

Police added they had ended the threat posed by Wortman, who was dead, but would not confirm a report by the CTV network that the RCMP had shot him.

Wortman shot people in several locations in Nova Scotia, the RCMP told a briefing. RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp the police knew of at least 16 victims, besides the shooter. She added there was no indication at this time that the killings were terrorism-related.

Police said there was no apparent link between Wortman and at least some of his victims. They said they had no idea what his motivation might have been.

“Today is a devastating day for Nova Scotia, and it will remain etched in the minds for many years to come,” said Lee Bergerman, commanding officer of the RCMP in Nova Scotia.

The death toll exceeded that of a Montreal massacre in 1989 when a gunman killed 15 women.

Mass shootings are relatively rare in Canada, which has tighter gun control laws than the United States.

Nova Scotia, like the rest of Canada, is under a stay-at-home order because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Police discovered the killings late on Saturday after multiple reports of shots at a house in the small coastal town of Portapique, about 130 km (80 miles) north of the provincial capital, Halifax.

“When police arrived on the scene, members located several casualties inside and outside of the home,” said Chris Leather, the Nova Scotia RCMP’s criminal operations officer. Several buildings in the town were ablaze and police exchanged gunfire at one point with Wortman. Probes subsequently disclosed he had also killed people in several other locations.

“We’re not fully aware of what (the) total might be,” said Leather.

At one point on Saturday evening, Wortman “appears to have been wearing - if not all - then a portion of a police uniform,” Leather said. But he did not specify whether the suspect had been disguised as an officer when the killings occurred.

“The fact that this individual had a uniform and a police car at his disposal certainly speaks to it not being a random act,” Leather said.

‘We heard gunshots’

According to the websites of the Denturist Society of Nova Scotia and the province’s Better Business Bureau, Wortman operated a denture clinic in Dartmouth, close to Halifax.

In response to a question, Leather said police would look at a possible link to the coronavirus outbreak, which has forced the closure of non-essential businesses.

A local resident said she had come across two burning police vehicles while out driving on Sunday.

“There was one officer we could see on the scene and then all of a sudden, he went running toward one of the burning vehicles,” Darcy Sack told the CBC.

“We heard gunshots,” she added. Television footage from Portapique showed two burned-out vehicles on a road.

Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil decried what he called a senseless act of violence. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his government would help Nova Scotians “as they heal from this tragedy.”

The killings do not represent the largest act of murder in the country’s history, given that 268 Canadians were among the 329 people who died in 1985 when a bomb brought down an Air India jet over the Atlantic.

04.19.20 – Su - - -

Afghan girls robotics team build Ventilator from old car parts & MIT blueprint

04.19.20 – Su - - -

Ventilator from old car parts? Afghan girls pursue prototype

Afghanistan has only 400 ventilators for the entire population so Somaya Farooqi with four others defy government travel restrictions attempting to build a ventilator prototype to save lives of coronavirus patients

Associated Press| Published: 04.19.20 , 13:29

On most mornings, Somaya Farooqi and four other teenage girls pile into her dad's car and head to a mechanic's workshop. They use back roads to skirt police checkpoints set up to enforce a lockdown in their city of Herat, one of Afghanistan's hot spots of the coronavirus pandemic.

The members of Afghanistan's prize-winning girls' robotics team say they're on a live-saving mission -- to build a ventilator from used car parts and help their war-stricken country battle the virus.

"If we even save one life with our device, we will be proud," said Farooqi, 17.

Their pursuit is particularly remarkable in conservative Afghanistan. Only a generation ago, during the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban in the late 1990s, girls weren't allowed to go to school. Farooqi's mother was pulled from school in third grade.

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, girls returned to schools, but gaining equal rights remains a struggle. Farooqi is undaunted. "We are the new generation," she said in a phone interview. "We fight and work for people. Girl and boy, it does not matter anymore."

Afghanistan faces the pandemic nearly empty-handed. It has only 400 ventilators for a population of more than 36.6 million. So far, it has reported just over 900 coronavirus cases, including 30 deaths, but the actual number is suspected to be much higher since test kits are in short supply.

The Herat province in western Afghanistan is one of the nation's hot spots because of proximity to Iran, the region's epicenter of the outbreak.

This has spurred Farooqi and her team members, ages 14 to 17, to help come up with a solution.

On a typical morning, Farooqi's father collects the girls from their homes and drives them to the team's office in Herat, zigzagging through side streets to skirt checkpoints. From there, another car takes them to a mechanic's workshop on the outskirts of the city.

In Herat, residents are only permitted to leave their homes for urgent needs. The robotics team has a limited number of special permits for cars.

So far, Farooqi's father hasn't been able to get one, but the girls are in a hurry. "We are concerned about security driving out of the city but there is no other option, we have to try to save people's lives," Farooqi said.

At the workshop, the team is experimenting with two different designs, including an open-source blueprint from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The parts being used include the motor of a Toyota windshield wiper, batteries, and sets of bag valve masks, or manual oxygen pumps. A group of mechanics helps them build the frame of a ventilator.

Daniela Rus, a professor at MIT, welcomed the team's initiative to develop the prototype. "It will be excellent to see it tested and locally produced," she said.

Tech entrepreneur Roya Mahboob, who founded the team and raises funds to empower girls, said she hopes Farooqi's group will finish building a prototype by May or June. In all, the team has 15 members who work on various projects.

The ventilator model, once completed, would then be sent to the Health Ministry for testing, initially on animals, said spokesman Wahid Mayar.

Farooqi, who was just 14 years old when she participated in the first World Robot Olympiad in the U.S., in 2017, said she and her team members hope to make a contribution.

"Afghans should be helping Afghanistan in this pandemic," she said. "We should not wait for others."

04.22.20 – We - - -

Iranian launched low orbit satellite; US set to destroy anything harassing ships
Wednesday

04.22.20 – We - - -

Iranian secret space program revealed with satellite launch

The launch appeared to have happened at a previously unacknowledged Revolutionary Guard Corps base near Shahroud, Iran, some 330 kilometers (205 miles) northeast of Tehran

Associated Press| Published: 04.22.20 , 20:46

Iran's Revolutionary Guard launched its first satellite into space Wednesday, dramatically revealing what experts described as a secret military space program that

could advance its ballistic missile development amid wider tensions between the Islamic Republic and the U.S.

Using a mobile launcher at a new launch site, the Guard said it put the “Noor,” or “Light,” satellite into a low orbit circling the Earth. While the U.S., Israel, and other countries declined to immediately confirm the satellite reached orbit, their criticism suggested they believed the launch happened.

The launch comes as Iran has abandoned all the limitations of its tattered nuclear deal with world powers that President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from in 2018. Trump’s decision set off a monthslong series of escalating attacks that culminated in a U.S. drone strike in January that killed a top Iranian general in Iraq, followed by Tehran launching ballistic missiles at American soldiers in Iraq.

As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic and historically low oil prices, the missile launch may signal a new willingness to take risks by Iran. Trump himself later tweeted he told the U.S. Navy “to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea,” both raising energy prices and renewing the risk of conflict. “Now that you have the maximum pressure campaign, Iran doesn’t have that much to lose anymore,” said Fabian Hinz, a researcher at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California.

Hinz said based on state media images, the launch appeared to have happened at a previously unacknowledged Guard base near Shahroud, Iran, some 330 kilometers (205 miles) northeast of Tehran.

The base is in Semnan province, which hosts the Imam Khomeini Spaceport from which Iran’s civilian space program operates. The paramilitary force said it used a “Qased,” or “Messenger,” satellite carrier to put the device into space, a previously unheard-of system. It described the system as using both liquid and solid fuel. Such a system may allow Iran to more quickly fuel a rocket, something crucial in an offensive weapon system, Hinz said, while stressing more information was needed about the launch.

Wednesday marked the 41st anniversary of the founding of the Guard by Iran’s late leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. An image of the rocket that carried the satellite showed it bore a Quranic verse typically recited when going on a journey, as well as a drawing of the Earth with the word Allah in Farsi wrapped around it. It remained unclear what the satellite it carried does.

“Today, the world’s powerful armies do not have a comprehensive defense plan without being in space, and achieving this superior technology that takes us into space and expands the realm of our abilities is a strategic achievement,” said Gen. Hossein Salami, the head of the Guard.

The Guard, which operates its own military infrastructure parallel to Iran’s regular armed forces, is a hard-line force answerable only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. International criticism of the launch came quickly.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said: “Iran needs to be held accountable for what it’s done.”

At a Pentagon news conference Wednesday, senior officials called the satellite launch a provocation.

“We view this as further evidence of Iran’s behavior that is threatening in the region,” said David Norquist, the deputy secretary of defense.

Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the launched vehicle “went a very long way.” He said it was too early to say whether it successfully placed a satellite in orbit.

Israel’s Foreign Ministry described the launch as a “façade for Iran’s continuous development of advanced missile technology.” German Foreign Ministry spokesman Christofer Burger warned that “the Iranian rocket program has a destabilizing effect on the region and is also unacceptable in view of our European security interests.”

U.S. Army Maj. Rob Lodewick, a Pentagon spokesman, told The Associated Press that American officials continue to monitor Iran’s program.

“While Tehran does not currently have intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), its desire to have a strategic counter to the United States could drive it to develop an ICBM,” Lodewick said.

The U.S. alleges such satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution calling on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, previously maintained its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. The Guard launching its own satellite now calls that into question.

Tehran also says it hasn’t violated a U.N. resolution on its ballistic missile program as it only “called upon” Iran not to conduct such tests.

Wednesday’s launch, however, raises new questions. While Iran isn’t known to have the know-how to miniaturize a nuclear weapon for a ballistic missile, any advances toward an intercontinental ballistic missile would put Europe and potentially the U.S. in range. Iran long has said it limits its ballistic missiles’ range to 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) under Khamenei’s orders, which puts the Mideast but not the West in its reach. Iranian commentators described Wednesday’s launch as honoring Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, a Guard commander who led its missile development until his death in 2011 in a massive explosion at a facility outside of Tehran that killed 16 others. The state-run IRAN newspaper around that time quoted the slain commander’s brother as saying he worked on an ICBM program, though the brother later denied that in subsequent interviews.

Iran has suffered several failed satellite launches in recent months. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Space Center in February 2019 also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

A rocket explosion in August drew even the attention of Trump, who later tweeted what appeared to be a classified surveillance image of the launch failure. The successive failures raised suspicion of outside interference in Iran’s program, something Trump himself hinted at by tweeting at the time that the U.S. “was not involved in the catastrophic accident.”

04.22.20 – We - - -

Iran's Guard says it launched satellite amid U.S. tensions

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Iran's Guard says it launched satellite amid U.S. tensions

After several failed launches in recent months, Islamic Republic claims the 'Noor' satellite reached orbit of 425 km (264 miles) above the Earth's surface; Guard called it the first military satellite ever launched by Tehran

Associated Press| Published: 04.22.20 , 09:53

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said on Wednesday that it launched a military satellite into orbit amid wider tensions with the United States, describing it as a successful launch after months of failures.

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the launch of the satellite, which the Guard called "Noor," or light. The U.S. State Department and the Pentagon, which contend that such launches advance Iran's ballistic missile program, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On its official website, the Guard said the satellite successfully reached an orbit of 425 kilometers (264 miles) above the Earth's surface. The Guard called it the first military satellite ever launched by Tehran.

The two-stage satellite launch took off from Iran's Central Desert, the Guard said, without elaborating or saying when exactly the launch took place. The paramilitary force said it used a Ghased, or "Messenger," satellite carrier to put the device into space, a previously unheard-of system.

The launch comes amid tensions between Tehran and Washington over its collapsing nuclear deal and after a U.S. drone strike in Iraq killed Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani in January.

Iran has suffered several failed satellite launches in recent months. The latest came in February, when Iran failed to put its Zafar 1 communications satellite into orbit. That failure came after two failed launches of the Payam and Doosti satellites last year, as well as a launchpad rocket explosion in August. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Space Center in February 2019 also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

The rocket explosion in August drew even the attention of President Donald Trump, who later tweeted what appeared to be a classified surveillance image of the launch failure. The successive failures raised suspicion of outside interference in Iran's program, something Trump himself hinted at by tweeting at the time that the U.S. "was not involved in the catastrophic accident."

The U.S. alleges such satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution calling on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear

weapons. American officials, as well as European nations, worry that these launches could help Iran develop intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, previously maintained its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. The Guard launching its own satellite now calls that into question.

Tehran also says it hasn't violated a U.N. resolution on its ballistic missile program as it only "called upon" Iran not to conduct such tests. Western missile experts have also questioned the U.S. contention that Iran's program could have a dual use for nuclear weapons.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space.

The launch comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. since Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers in May 2018. Iran since has broken all the deal's limitations while still allowing U.N. inspectors to its sites.