

Ynet-News, May 05, 2020 – Tuesday

05.05.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in May 04 spot – Monday
Syria civil war too high cost - Iran & Russia reducing troops & vacating bases

05.05.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in May 05 spot – Tuesday
Netanyahu & Gantz deal revised to keep all Knesset committees in the coalition

05.05.20 – Tu - - -
High Court will accept Unity Deal by Thursday, or go into Fourth Election

05.05.20 – Tu - - -
Israel hit by unexpected May showers and thunderstorms from two cold fronts

05.05.20 – Tu - - - News Placed in May 06 spot – Wednesday
Israel cell phones discovered 34% of people infected; tracking extends to May 26

05.04.20 – Mo - - -
Court intervention to Netanyahu will bring the entire coalition agreement down

05.04.20 – Mo - - - News
Israel & INTERPOL hasten extradition of 2 conmen to France for vaccine fraud

05.03.20 – Su - - -
Lebanon detains 5 Sudanese job seekers, hours after Israel detained them

05.03.20 – Su - - -
Druze and Circassian leaders protest government, call for funds & building permits

05.01.20 – Fr - - -
Israeli helicopters fired rockets & strike targets southern Syria - Syrian media

05.04.20 – Mo - - - News Placed in May 03 spot – Sunday
Iranian guards tortured, drowned Afghan migrants in search of work in Iran

05.05.20 – Tu - - -
Syria civil war too high cost - Iran & Russia reducing troops & vacating bases

05.05.20 – Tu - - -
Security official: Iran begins pulling troops out of Syria

Official said Iran has become a liability for Syria, fighting a war not of its own at a cost that has become too high for the Assad regime
Agencies , Ynet| Updated: 05.05.20 , 22:30

An Israeli security official said Iran has begun pulling troops out of Syria for the first time since its involvement in the civil war.

"The Iranians are reducing their troop deployment and vacating bases," officials said Tuesday sighting the cost to Syria for Iran's presence on their soil as the reason.

"Iran is fighting its own war and has become a liability for Syria. Israel will increase its pressure to push Iran out," the source said.

The official briefed journalists 12 hours after a rocket attack on a Syrian military facility for the production of long-range missiles near Aleppo that was attributed to Israel.

According to international media reports, 14 Iranian and Iraqi fighters were killed in the raid. Tehran has not commented on the reports.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the late Monday strikes in eastern Deir el-Zour province targeted positions of Iranian and Iran-backed fighters.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Syria's state news agency reported late Monday that Israeli strikes targeted military depots in the region of Safira, south of the northern city of Aleppo. It did not mention the strikes on Deir el-Zour province, which borders Iran.

The Syrian army said in a statement that Israel hit military barracks in the city of al-Safirah in the eastern Aleppo countryside. Earlier, state television had said a research center was targeted. The army said it was now assessing the damage caused by the strikes. A regional intelligence source said Israel was stepping up raids in Syria at a time when world attention and the region, including Syria, were distracted by the coronavirus pandemic.

At least five attacks on Iranian targets in Syria have been reported in the past two-week period. Israel has not taken responsibility for the attacks.

Western intelligence sources say Iranian-backed militias have long been entrenched in Aleppo province where they have bases and a command center and installed advanced weapons, part of a growing presence across government-controlled Syria.

The Scientific Studies and Research Center is one of several facilities where Western intelligence and opposition sources suspect Syria, with the help of Iranian researchers, works on developing chemical weapons they accuse Syria of having used against civilians in rebel-held areas.

Damascus and its ally, Moscow, deny they have used chemical weapons that have killed hundreds of civilians in the course of the nine-year conflict and blame jihadist rebels for such attacks.

Israel has previously struck several military research facilities believed to have been centers for chemical and biological weapons.

Helicopters fired several rockets from the Golan Heights on targets inside southern Syria known to be a base for Lebanon's Hezbollah terror group, intelligence sources said.

The Syrian government does not say Iranian bases are targeted when it announces details of raids.

Major blasts in an ammunition depot near Homs city on the same day were also believed to be from an Israeli strike, a war monitor and intelligence sources said.

Israel has acknowledged in recent years it has conducted many raids inside Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011 where it sees Iran's presence as a strategic threat.

Regional intelligence sources say that Israel's escalating strikes on Syria are part of a shadow war sanctioned by Washington and part of the anti-Iran policy that has undermined in the last two years Iran's extensive military power without triggering a major escalation.

Defense Minister Naftali Bennett told Israeli media last week that Israel would step up its campaign against Iran in Syria.

Separately, a regional intelligence source said Israeli jets are believed to have hit Iranian-backed militias entrenched in the border town of Albukamal near the border with Iraq where Iraqi Shi'ite paramilitary groups have a strong foothold.

The U.S. military last January struck Iran-backed militia groups in areas in Iraq and Syria along that border area in what U.S. officials then said was a response to escalating provocations from Iran.

Iran's support, alongside Russia, has helped Syrian President Bashar al-Assad turn the tide against a military opposition that had seized large tracts of territory and sought to overthrow his authoritarian rule.

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Netanyahu & Gantz deal revised to keep all Knesset committees in the coalition

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

AG Mandelblit calls on High Court to not intervene in revised coalition deal

Mandelblit says court must refrain from further meddling in coalition agreement after Likud, Blue & White submit revised version which addressed pertinent changes warranted by judges

Tova Tzimuki, Yael Friedson | Published: 05.05.20 , 21:53

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit told the High Court of Justice Tuesday evening to not intervene in a revised coalition agreement signed between Likud and Blue & White after the court disapproved of the original version and demanded both parties to submit amendments to three of the document's key clauses within 24 hours.

"The attorney general believes that there is no reason to strike down the agreement or any of its clauses," Mandelblit wrote in his response. "Intervention by the honorable court in coalition agreements should be only reserved for exceptional and rare cases."

Earlier Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party and Benny Gantz's Blue & White submitted the revised coalition agreement which addressed the pertinent changes warranted by the High Court.

A clause that bars the appointment of senior officials during the unity government's first six months was shortened to 100 days.

Another clause that doesn't allow for most non-coronavirus-related legislation to be advanced for the first six months of the government was dropped, but both parties have agreed to give priority to laws aimed to fight the pandemic.

Moreover, Likud and Blue & White have decided the emergency orders meant to rein in the spread of the deadly pathogen will not be extended beyond six months.

The judges' panel implored both parties to uphold the customary practice of giving the opposition a number of Knesset committees. Likud and Blue & White refused, however, and will keep all Knesset committees in the hands of the coalition. The move is not unprecedented and has occurred in past governments, they added.

The judges' panel will deliver its ruling sometime before Thursday, just before Prime Minister Netanyahu's mandate to form a coalition is set to expire, which could plunge the country into a fourth consecutive election.

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

High Court will accept Unity Deal by Thursday, or go into Fourth Election

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Likud, Blue & White update unity deal after High Court disapproval

Israel's two major parties present revisions to the judges, who raised concerns about 3 clauses, including appointment of senior officials during government's first 6 months

Moran Azalay | Published: 05.05.20 , 15:48

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party and Benny Gantz's Blue & White on Tuesday revised their coalition agreement after Israel's top court criticized several causes of the deal and gave both parties 24 hours to make the pertinent changes.

The High Court of Justice expressed concerns about three clauses in the unity government agreement on Monday, during a petition hearing that claimed an indicted politician cannot be tasked with forming a government. On Thursday, Netanyahu's mandate to form a coalition is set to expire, which could plunge the country into another election.

A clause that bars the appointment of senior officials during the unity government's first six months was shortened to 100 days.

Another clause that doesn't allow for most non-coronavirus-related legislation to be advanced for the first six months of the government was dropped, but both parties have agreed to give priority to laws aimed to fight the pandemic. Moreover, Likud and Blue & White have decided the emergency orders meant to rein in the spread of the deadly pathogen will not be extended beyond six months. The judges' panel implored the parties to uphold the customary practice of giving the opposition a number of Knesset committees. Likud and Blue & White refused, however, saying such a move will keep all committees in the hands of the coalition. They added the move is not unprecedented and has occurred in past governments.

Netanyahu slammed the High Court on Monday evening during his address to the nation - where he introduced further leniencies to health orders.

"In a democracy, he who gets the majority, leads the people," said Netanyahu. "I was elected by a majority vote. A huge majority of people want me to lead the government that we are working to establish. It is not appropriate for any element, neither clerks nor judges in court, to interfere with this basic component of democracy.

"The agreement with Blue & White was crafted very carefully and tearing chunks of it will undermine it. Any intervention increases the likelihood of a fourth election, which would be a disaster for the State of Israel. I hope the High Court doesn't do that." Blue & White officials voiced concerns that such a move may lead Likud to back down from the agreement at the last minute and Netanyahu will try to recruit 61 lawmakers to recommend him for the position of prime minister.

The High Court judges' panel will deliver their ruling sometime before Thursday.

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Israel hit by unexpected May showers and thunderstorms from two cold fronts

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Israel hit by unexpected May showers and thunderstorms

Israelis get a whiff of winter ahead of scorching summer as a cold front brings large amount of precipitation with the majority of the rainfall expected late on Tuesday and early Wednesday; several traffic accidents reported due to heavy rain

Ahiye Raved| Published: 05.05.20 , 14:54

Israelis found themselves unexpectedly reaching for umbrellas after heavy rain and thunderstorms hit most parts of the country on Tuesday.

The weather over the past few days have been summery and hot as Israel enters the month of May, but Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning are set to give Israelis a final whiff of winter.

In southern Israel, heavy rainfall, accompanied by lightning and thunderstorms, caused several major traffic accidents in some areas of the north.

By the afternoon hours, the biggest amounts of rainfall were recorded in the Lower Galilee, and in the Arab village of Iksal in northern Israel, where 11 millimeters of rain had been reported. (0.43 inches)

Giora Frenkel from the Meteo-Tech meteorological company told Ynet that the source of sudden rain is a cold front that has been passing over Israeli territory.

"These are high but well-developed clouds, which pour a fair amount of rain, especially in the off-season, and also cause thunderstorms," he said.

According to Frankel, the majority of precipitation of this storm system is still ahead of us.

"About 200 km off the coast of Israel, there is now a major cold front approaching us, and as it approaches it's becoming thicker," he said. "A total of 30 to 15 mm is expected in northern Israel and 20 mm in the Shomron mountains."

In the northern city of Haifa, the temperatures will dip from 17 degrees celsius (62F) during the day Monday to 11 degrees (51F) at night. In Tel Aviv, the weather will be similar with a range of 17 degrees during the day and 1 degrees at night. In the southern city of Be'er Sheva, temperatures will range from 15 degrees (59F) throughout the day to just 7 degrees (44F) at night. In Jerusalem, the weather will be especially cold with temperatures reaching 11 degrees celsius (51F) during the day and falling to 6 degrees (42F) overnight.

The storm system will cool off by Wednesday afternoon, but on Friday and Saturday another cold front is set to hit the country. The rainfall, however, is forecasted to be on a much smaller scale.

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Israel cell phones discovered 34% of people infected; tracking extends to May 26

05.05.20 – Tu - - -

Israel extends coronavirus cell phone surveillance by 3 weeks

Knesset committee votes to allow Shin Bet security service to track phones of virus carriers until May 6, even though Netanyahu sought a 6-week extension while the government moves to enshrine the practice into law

Reuters| Published: 05.05.20 , 14:04

A parliamentary panel on Tuesday authorized Shin Bet security service to continue using mobile phone data to track people infected by the coronavirus until May 26, prolonging an initiative described by critics as a threat to privacy.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had sought a longer extension, of six weeks, as his government advances legislation to regulate the practice in line with the demands of the Supreme Court, which is worried about dangers to individual liberty.

Circumventing parliament in March, as the infection spread, Netanyahu's cabinet approved emergency regulations that enabled the use of the technology, customarily deployed for anti-terrorism.

Within two weeks Netanyahu's cabinet will present a draft bill to regulate the use of Shin Bet surveillance of citizens. The public will have one week to comment on the bill after which it will be submitted to parliament for approval.

Proponents of the surveillance believe it is crucial more than ever as lockdown measures are gradually being lifted.

Data presented to parliament's intelligence subcommittee on Tuesday showed that 5,516 of the 16,265 people infected (33.9%) with the virus were discovered by Shin Bet surveillance.

"Although it is aggressive and has privacy (issues), there is no other tool right now," Ayelet Shaked, a former justice minister and member of the intelligence panel said, noting the committee receives updated data each week.

Opponents believe such tracking is not needed since the number of patients continues to drop. More than 10,000 people have recovered and just 66 people remain on ventilators. The number of deaths rose by two in the past day to 237.

Committee member Eli Avidar likened the surveillance to tactics of dictatorships like North Korea.

The High Court last week ruled the government must legislate the use of mobile phone tracking, saying "a suitable alternative, compatible with the principles of privacy, must be found".

Israel is in the process of forming a ruling coalition after a third election in a year in March.

Netanyahu, under pressure to re-open the economy after more than 1 million people had filed for unemployment, on Monday said there would be a further easing of restrictions, with people allowed to visit family members while shopping malls would open later this week. Schools have resumed for grades 1-3 and other grades would resume throughout May.

"Precisely at this time because the infection potential is increasing, we need a tool that will enable rapid surgical action that will cut the infection chain and allow the population to continue with its life," said Meir Ben-Shabbat, head of the National Security Council.

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

Court intervention to Netanyahu will bring the entire coalition agreement down

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

Netanyahu lashes out at top court, threatens new elections

The court is looking into whether a politician facing criminal corruption charges, such as Netanyahu, can form a new government; and whether his coalition deal with Gantz violated the law

Associated Press| Published: 05.04.20 , 23:44

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the country's Supreme Court on Monday not to interfere in his efforts to build a coalition government, threatening that a decision against him could drag the country toward an unprecedented fourth straight election in just over a year.

Netanyahu made his comments shortly after the court heard a second day of arguments in a series of legal challenges to the coalition deal.

The court's rulings, expected by the end of the week, will dictate whether Israel breaks out of its prolonged political paralysis with Netanyahu and his former political rival Benny Gantz joining forces in government, or whether the country is plunged into another election.

The court is looking into two key questions: whether a politician facing criminal corruption charges, such as Netanyahu, can form a new government; and whether his coalition deal with Gantz violated the law.

Speaking to reporters following a briefing on coronavirus developments, Netanyahu pressed the court not to get involved in the country's political affairs lest it risks forcing new elections.

"We hope the court doesn't interfere. It doesn't need to interfere. There is the will of the people, the clear expression of the will of the people," Netanyahu said.

If a court ruling picks apart the coalition deal, it "increases the chances that we will be dragged to fourth elections, something that will be a catastrophe," he said.

An unusually large panel of 11 justices, all wearing face masks and separated by plastic barriers, heard the case against the emerging coalition. Reflecting on the case's importance, the court took the rare step of streaming the proceedings on its website and on national TV.

Since the PM was indicted on corruption charges last year, he has stepped up his attacks on the country's legal establishment and sought to portray himself as a victim.

Netanyahu and his allies have long considered the high court a liberal bastion that overreached its boundaries to meddle in political affairs, accusing it of undermining the will of the people as expressed in national elections. His opponents regard the court as the

final safeguard of Israeli democracy that has been under dangerous assault from demagogic populists.

After deadlocking in three closely contested election campaigns, Netanyahu and former military chief Gantz reached a deal last month in which they would be sworn in together for an emergency government ostensibly to battle the coronavirus and its economic fallout.

The deal calls for Netanyahu to serve first as prime minister and Gantz as the designated premier, with the two swapping posts after 18 months. The new position will enjoy all the trappings of the prime minister, including an official residence and — key for Netanyahu — an exemption from a law that requires all public officials, except the prime minister, to resign if charged with a crime.

The court will be asked to rule on this arrangement — and there is a sense of urgency as Thursday marks the deadline for presenting a new government before new elections are called.

Zeev Elkin, a Cabinet minister from Netanyahu's Likud party, warned that any court intervention could trigger a highly unpopular election.

“The coalition agreement is very complex. Moving a single brick could bring the entire structure down and force fourth elections,” Elkin told Israel's Army Radio.

Attorney Dafna Holtz-Lechner, who represents one of the petitioners, countered that oversight was required precisely because “someone charged with criminal offenses is also the person who concocted the coalition agreement with all its repercussions for himself.”

Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals in which he is accused of offering favors to media moguls in exchange for favorable press coverage. He denies the accusations and says he is the victim of a media-orchestrated witch hunt. His trial was postponed in March due to restrictions his hand-picked interim justice minister placed on the courts after the coronavirus crisis erupted. It is now scheduled to start later this month.

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

Israel & INTERPOL hasten extradition of 2 conmen to France for vaccine fraud

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

2 Israeli coronavirus conmen to be extradited to France

The Ra'anana natives, who hold French passports, are said to have duped several French companies with a false report about a successful trial for COVID-19 vaccine and defrauded several chain stores in the country with illegal sales of protective medical gear

Eli Sinyor | Published: 05.04.20 , 09:57

Two Israeli nationals, suspected of defrauding several French companies with a false promise of a coronavirus vaccine, will be extradited to France, the authorities said Monday.

The two Ra'anana natives who hold French passports, are accused of impersonating senior business executives who defrauded three companies in France of some 60,000 Euros. The pair allegedly claimed they have run successful trials for a COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition, they are alleged to also have attempted to illegally sell protective medical gear needed to fight coronavirus, to several chain stores in France. After receiving information from authorities in France, the police's special investigations' unit, Lahav 433, arrested the pair and opened an expedient investigation against them. In an unusual step, police investigators filed the international extradition order against the two before the investigation was even completed. Normally, suspects in similar circumstances are released under house arrest and only after evidence is formulated for an indictment, an extradition order is authorized, a process which sometimes takes months and even years.

In this case, Israel Police along with INTERPOL and French enforcement authorities decided to hasten the process, with the two currently under arrest in Israel, awaiting their extradition to France.

"This case is a first of its kind," said one Israel Police official. "This is part of the continued effort to fight international criminals, who are trying to hide [within the country] after committing their crimes outside [Israel's] borders."

05.03.20 – Su - - -

Lebanon detains 5 Sudanese job seekers, hours after Israel detained them

05.03.20 – Su - - -

Lebanon detains 5 Sudanese along the border with Israel

The IDF says the five were detained on the suspicion they were trying to infiltrate Israel, it was later said the five were job seekers who were returned to Lebanon in coordination with the United Nations

Associated Press| Updated: 05.03.20 , 20:01

The Lebanese military said it detained five Sudanese citizens Sunday near the border with Israel and was questioning them.

The announcement came hours after the Israeli military said it detained the five on suspicion they were trying to infiltrate the heavily-guarded border. Israeli media said the

five were job seekers who were returned to Lebanon in coordination with the United Nations.

A spokesman for the U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon said they are looking into the case with the parties without elaborating.

The incident comes as the **Lebanon-Israel border** has witnessed **tensions** in recent weeks between Israel and the militant Hezbollah group.

Last month, foreign media reports claimed an Israeli drone fired two missiles near an SUV carrying Hezbollah members in Syria, close to the border with Lebanon. No one was hurt in the attack.

Two days after the drone attack, Israel accused Hezbollah of “provocative” activity, including multiple attempts to breach the border along the Lebanese-Israeli frontier, and said it would complain to the U.N. Security Council.

Israel and Hezbollah fought a bruising, 34-day war in 2006 that ended in a stalemate. Despite their deep hostility, they have largely refrained from direct fighting for the past 14 years.

05.03.20 – Su - - -

Druze and Circassian leaders protest government, call for funds & building permits

05.03.20 – Su - - -

Druze and Circassian leaders protest government, call for funds

After the **Nation-State bill was passed** the **minority communities claimed** they had been **made second-class citizens** increasing **tensions** with the **Netanyahu** government

Daniel Salami| Updated: **05.03.20** , 17:21

Druze and Circassian local leaders **demonstrated outside the Prime Minister's office** Sunday at the start of what they have called one month of rage protesting lack of funding from the government.

The month of rage includes a general strike in Druze and Circassian communities in the north of the country with schools and businesses to remain closed.

The government under Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu had pledged** to allocate NIS 200 million for 16 regional and local councils and to facilitate **zoning and construction of housing** badly needed in those communities.

The government **decision from 2015** laid out a **budget** that had **expired in December** of **2019** and never renewed.

"You have **betrayed us**," called out Jaber Hamoud, head of the **Forum of Druze** and Circassian Regional Councils, "we are no less Israelis than the Jewish community," he said.

Hamoud also told the prime minister that the Druze do not have to prove their loyalty to the country, "you must **prove your loyalty to us,**" he said.

After the Knesset passed the Nation-State Law in 2018, **tensions** between the Druze and Circassian communities and the government **were high**. The bill declared Israel and the national state of the Jews and left the minorities feeling they were second class citizens.

Blue & White leader Benny Gantz during his election campaigns had promised to amend the Nation-State bill to honor the contribution of these minority communities. Both the Druze and Circassian men serve in the IDF unlike most of the Israeli Arab communities. The demonstrators said they would keep their schools closed until the government releases funds because **they are unable to prepare schools to operate** under Health Ministry **guidelines issued** to fight coronavirus.

"We **cannot afford to disinfect our classrooms** or **monitor the temperature** of our students," Hamoud said adding that the **regional councils will advance housing projects** without government planning permits as well if those remain unforthcoming.

05.01.20 – Fr - - -

Israeli helicopters fired rockets & strike targets southern Syria - Syrian media

05.01.20 – Fr - - -

Israeli helicopters strike targets southern Syria - near Damascus

Israel was stepping up its raids on pro-Iranian targets in Syria at a time when world attention and the region, including Syria, was **distracted with** tackling coronavirus, a regional intelligence source said; Israel regards Iran as its biggest threat
Reuters| Updated: 05.01.20 , 09:51

Israeli helicopters fired several rockets from the **Golan Heights** on targets **inside southern Syria**, Syrian state media reported on **Friday**, the latest in what intelligence sources say is an increase of strikes against Iranian-backed militias.

Opposition sources in the area said several militia posts near Quneitra were targeted in the attack, which reports said caused only material damage.

Syrian air defenses respond to an alleged **Israeli airstrike near Damascus** earlier in the week

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli army.

Bases and convoys run by Lebanon's Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia, which has a strong presence in the Syrian Golan Heights, have been hit by Israel in recent years.

Israel was stepping up its raids in Syria at a time when world attention and the region, including Syria, was distracted with tackling coronavirus, a regional intelligence source said.

Two weeks ago, an Israeli drone attack targeted a car carrying forces from Hezbollah in southern Syria along the border with Lebanon without causing casualties.

Aftermath of an alleged Israeli drone attack on Hezbollah targets in Syria in April
A few days later, Israel struck central Syria near the ancient city of Palmyra, in what regional intelligence sources said were Iranian-backed outposts and a command center. Israel has acknowledged in recent years it had conducted many raids inside Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011.

After Syria announced last Monday it had intercepted airstrikes by Israel near the capital Damascus, Israeli defense minister Naftali Bennett told Israeli media that Israel would step up its campaign against Iran in Syria.

Bennett appeared to confirm Israel was behind that airstrike on what Western intelligence sources said were Iranian bases.

“We have moved from blocking Iran’s entrenchment in Syria to forcing it out of there, and we will not stop,” Bennett said in a statement.

“We will not allow more strategic threats to grow just across our borders without taking action, We will continue to take the fight to the enemy’s territory,” Bennett said.

The Syrian army later said Monday’s strike killed three Syrian civilians and injured several others from shrapnel that hit their homes. Israel says Iran’s military presence in Syria, where its militias are fighting alongside Syrian President Bashar al Assad’s forces, is a strategic threat and claims Tehran seeks a permanent presence along its northern borders.

The threat of direct confrontation between **arch-enemies Israel and Iran** has long **simmered in Syria**, with Israel regarding Iran as its biggest threat.

Assad has said Iranian forces are welcome to stay in Syria after years of military victories in which Iran and Russian have played a key role in bringing back most of the country under his control.

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

Iranian guards tortured, drowned Afghan migrants in search of work in Iran

05.04.20 – Mo - - -

Iranian guards tortured, drowned migrants in the river, Afghanistan claims

Authorities in **Afghan province of Herat, which shares a border with the Islamic Republic**, say they have **retrieved 12 bodies from the Harirud river, at least 8 others still missing**; **Iran says incident happened on 'Afghan soil'**

Reuters| Published: **05.04.20** , 11:16

Afghan officials were hunting on Sunday for **Afghan migrants in a river bordering Iran** after reports that **Iranian border guards tortured dozens and threw them into the water to keep them out of Iran.**

Authorities in western Herat province said they retrieved 12 bodies from the Harirud river and at least eight other people were missing.

The incident could trigger a diplomatic crisis between Iran and Afghanistan at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has seen an exodus of Afghan migrants from Iran, with many testing positive. Up to 2,000 Afghans cross the border from Iran, a coronavirus hotspot, into Herat each day.

Afghanistan's foreign ministry said on Saturday an inquiry had been launched. A senior official in the presidential palace in Kabul said initial assessments suggested at least 70 Afghans trying to enter Iran from Herat were beaten and pushed into the Harirud river on Saturday.

Abbas Mousavi, a spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, said the "incident" took place on Afghan soil.

"Border guards of the Islamic Republic of Iran denied the occurrence of any events related to this on the soil of our country," he said in a statement on Sunday.

Abdul Ghani Noori, governor of Herat's Gulran district, said dozens of Afghan migrant workers were thrown into the river by members of the Iranian army.

"Iranian army men used shovels and gunshots to injure Afghan workers and threw them in water," Noori told Reuters, adding that some of the injured workers were being treated in a hospital.

Doctors at Herat District Hospital said they had received the bodies of Afghan migrants. "So far, five bodies have been transferred to the hospital. Of these bodies, it's clear that four died due to drowning," said Aref Jalali, head of the hospital. He added that two injured men were brought to the hospital on Sunday evening.

The Taliban militant group, fighting to oust the Afghan government, said Iran should launch an investigation into the killings and "strictly punish the perpetrators".

"We have learned that 57 Afghans on their way to the Islamic Republic of Iran for work were initially tortured by Iranian border guards and 23 of them later brutally martyred," the Taliban said in a statement.

Noor Mohammad said he was one of the Afghans caught by Iranian border guards as they were trying to cross into Iran in search of work.

"After being tortured, the Iranian soldiers threw all of us in the Harirud river,"

Mohammad told Reuters.

Shir Agha, who said he also survived the violence, said at least 23 people thrown into the river were dead.

Afghan officials that it was not the first time that Afghans had been killed by Iranian police guarding the 920-km (520-mile) border.

As of Sunday, at least 541 coronavirus-infected people in Afghanistan were from Herat province, which recorded 13 deaths, with the majority of cases Afghan returnees from Iran, said Rafiq Shirzad, a health ministry spokesman in Herat.