

Ynet-News, May 07, 2020 – Thursday

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05.07.20

High Court dismisses petitions against Netanyahu-led government

The 11 judges unanimously dismiss petition that argued an indicted politician cannot form government; chief justice says unity deal still problematic but will be examined at a later date; PM, Gantz agree new government to be sworn in May 13

Ynet, Reuters, AP | Updated: 05.07.20 , 00:01

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's indictment on corruption charges does not disqualify him from forming a government, Israel's top court ruled unanimously on Wednesday, paving the way for the veteran leader to remain in power.

In its ruling against opposition petitioners, the High Court of Justice also found that Netanyahu's unity government deal with his election rival Benny Gantz does not violate the law, dismissing arguments that it unlawfully shields him in a corruption trial.

The ruling came after two days of televised courtroom debates by the panel of 11 judges, after a number of petitioners questioned the legality of the unity agreement between Netanyahu's Likud and Gantz's Blue & White.

Had the court ruled against Netanyahu, it would have plunged the country into its fourth consecutive election in just over a year as the nation battles the coronavirus epidemic.

"We did not find any legal reason to prevent Netanyahu from forming a government," the court said. "The legal conclusion we reached does not diminish the severity of the pending charges against Netanyahu for violations of moral integrity and the difficulty derived from the tenure of a prime minister accused of criminal activity," it added.

The judges ruled that while the coalition deal presents significant legal difficulties, the court would not interfere in its contents following changes submitted by Netanyahu and Gantz.

"This is an unusual coalition agreement, with some clauses raising serious legal concerns," said Chief Justice Esther Hayut.

"For example, if the agreements on Norwegian Law are executed, they will constitute a retroactive change to the rules of the game ... and will result the decline of the status of the opposition in Israel," she added, referring to the controversial law that allows ministers and deputy ministers to resign from the Knesset and enable the next candidate on their party's list to enter, but they still have the right to return if the Knesset dissolves. The Movement for Quality Government in Israel, one of the main petitioners, said they respect the decision but will nevertheless take to the streets in protest.

"We respect the High Court's ruling," said the statement. "However, from a moral standpoint, we are unable to come to terms with this situation of a criminally indicted prime minister. The Movement for Quality Government in Israel will hold a large demonstration Saturday evening under the banner of 'Israel is ashamed,'" it added.

"The Netanyahu-Gantz government is the exact definition of the expression 'it's kosher but it's stinks.'"

Only minutes before the ruling had been made, Netanyahu and Benny Gantz agreed the unity government, if approved by the Knesset, will be sworn in next Wednesday, May 13.

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 Amir Ohana placed on the courts after the coronavirus crisis erupted. It is now scheduled to start later this month.

05.06.20 – We ---

Israel bans traditional Lag BaOmer bonfires May 7-13 due to virus outbreak

05.06.20

Israel bans all Lag BaOmer bonfires due to coronavirus outbreak

Traditional bonfires banned in private areas as well due to fears of mass virus contagion and multitude of house fires; pilgrims not allowed to visit tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Mount Meron

Itamar Eichner| Published: 05.06.20 , 21:20

The government on Wednesday approved unanimously a ban all traditional bonfires for the holiday of Lag BaOmer, which is set to start on the evening of May 11 and end on May 12, in order to prevent gatherings that may lead to mass coronavirus infections.

In a phone meeting, the ministers decided to adopt the position of the Health Ministry, the National Security Council (NSC), and the Fire and Rescue Service to ban bonfire lighting at private residences too, as it may cause neighbors to gather together and lead to a multitude of house fires that could overwhelm fire fighting services.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit said he would approve the prohibition despite claiming earlier that such a move could encounter some major legal hurdles.

The government will also prevent pilgrims from visiting the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a leading 2nd-century sage, in the northern town of Meron for the anniversary of his death which takes place on the same date.

Mount Meron and the surrounding area will be closed off except for residents or people whose workplaces are found in the area.

The new restrictions will come into effect on Thursday, May 7, and expire next Wednesday, May 13.

The (NSC) advised the government on Monday to impose a nationwide lockdown during Lag BaOmer, but the proposal ran into vociferous opposition from Minister Aryeh Deri and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan.

On the same day, police officials presented complexity and the looming dangers in allowing pilgrims to visit Mount Meron during Lag Baomer, as the event attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers each year.

The event requires extensive nationwide preparations throughout the year, infrastructure work on the outskirts of the mountain that are impossible under current coronavirus restrictions.

05.06.20 – We - - -

Court petitioned to transfer tax-revenues directly to PA government families

05.06.20

Former terrorist asks High Court to cut funds to Palestinian Authority

Mohammad Massad, who spent 7 years in Israeli prison for carrying out attacks against Israelis during First Intifada, files petition demanding the funds meant for Abbas's government be directly transferred to Palestinian workers and needy families

Elisha Ben Kimon Published: 05.06.20 , 19:29

A former Palestinian terrorist has filed a petition with the High Court of Justice over the lack of oversight in the transfer of funds to the Palestinian Authority. The former Fatah member alleged the money is being used to fund terror activity and corruption within Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's government.

Mohammad Aref Massad, who currently lives in Haifa, made his demand in an urgent petition he filed last week against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon and the Knesset Finance Committee.

Last week, the government voted to turn a NIS 500 million loan to the PA into a grant the Palestinians would not have to pay back, and Massad in his petition demanded the funds be directly transferred to Palestinian workers and needy families.

Massad was born in a small village near Jenin and by the age of 13 had joined the ruling Fatah faction. At one point, he even became a member of Fatah's armed group called "Black Panther," whose gunmen carried out numerous attacks against Israelis during the First Intifada. He was arrested by the IDF and spent more than seven years in prison. In his petition, filed through lawyer Michael Litvak, Massad asked the court to order the Israeli government to explain why it won't halt the transfer of tax-revenue funds - collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinians - to the government in Ramallah. One of the people who assisted Massad in filing the petition was Chairman of the Shomron Regional Council Yossi Dagan.

Dagan on Wednesday urged Netanyahu, Kahlon and Defense Minister Naftali Bennett to examine Massad's petition.

"Beyond the daily struggle families have to cope with under the Palestinian Authority's regime, the blatant corruption described in the petition shows that the PA is using funds to support terrorism," said Dagan. "I call upon the Prime Minister to examine these serious allegations."

"They [PA government] steal the money from the mouths of their people and take it to fund terrorists in prisons and buy Mercedes for themselves."

05.06.20 – We - - -

Opposing Group surveyed 1,000 people who support two-state, not annexation

05.06.20

Majority of Israel's Jews oppose West Bank annexation, survey says

According to Commanders for Israel's Security movement's poll, only quarter of all respondents support the move, while only third of Likud voters in favor of the initiative; 40% prefer a permanent two-state solution with the Palestinians

Itamar Eichner| Published: 05.06.20 , 18:39

The majority of Israel's Jews do not support the annexation of disputed territories in the West Bank, says a new survey published on Wednesday.

The survey, conducted by the Commanders for Israel's Security movement (comprised of senior security officials who oppose the extension of Israeli sovereignty to Palestinian-held lands), examined a sample of 1,000 people from the Jewish public alone.

According to the poll, only a quarter of the respondents (26%) said they support the potential annexation, while 40% prefer a permanent two-state solution, 22% favor unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians, while only 13% are content with the current situation.

Although the pledge to annex the strategic parts of the West Bank was one of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's major election campaign points, only a third (36%) of his Likud party's supporters said they back the initiative.

Some 21% of Likud voters said they preferred a permanent two-state solution, while 25% favor unilateral pullout, and 18% are content with the current situation.

The survey also shows that most Jewish citizens, including most Likud voters, do not support the annexation of the Jordan Valley if the move would put a strain on relations with Jordan.

Only 28% said they were willing to risk the peace agreement with the Hashemite Kingdom. Among Blue & White voters, only 10% are willing to risk the peace agreement and 41% of Likud voters said they would agree to the move.

"The data shows that a significant majority in the public opposes annexation, and prefers solutions based on separation from the Palestinians," said Chairman of Commanders for Israel's Security and former Deputy Chief of Staff Matan Vilnai.

"Unilateral annexation, without proper preparation and without consulting professionals, could lead to a disaster for Israel and create a violent chain reaction. We, former senior security officials, urge the Israeli government to refrain from a unilateral annexation and not approve such a significant and risky move without conducting a referendum first."

05.06.20 – We - - -

Cabinet plans 7,000 homes in West Bank & Jordan Valley to approved July 1

05.06.20

Israel plans thousands of new settler homes ahead of Pompeo visit

Defense Minister Bennett authorizes some 7,000 housing projects in settlement of Efrat; U.S. Secretary of State's visit may sign Trump Administration weighing in on territorial dispute

Reuters| Published: 05.06.20 , 16:03

The cabinet announced a plan for thousands of new settlement homes in the West Bank on Wednesday as Washington voiced readiness to back de facto Israeli annexations in the contested territory.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo plans to visit Israel next week, a source said, a sign that Pompeo is weighing in on a territorial issue that has been a centerpiece of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition-building efforts.

Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his intention to bring the question of extending Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and the Jordan Valley to the Cabinet on July 1 as agreed in his coalition deal with his rival-turned-allied Blue & White party leader Benny Gantz.

Fresh construction for the settlement of Efrat was approved on land that could accommodate "around 7,000 housing units", Defense Minister Naftali Bennett's office said in a statement.

"The building momentum in the country must not be stopped, even for a second," tweeted Bennett.

The United States has offered to recognize Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank as part of a proposed peace plan unveiled in February, cited by its initiator - U.S. President Donald Trump - as "The Deal of the Century", which includes a call for negotiations on a Palestinian state in up to 70% of the territory.

"Sovereignty in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] and the [Jordan] Valley is an Israeli decision. We are ready," U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman was quoted as saying.

Friedman reiterated a call for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking in a separate comment. "The expectation is that the prime minister will agree to negotiate and, if the Palestinians show up, he will negotiate in good faith based on this (Trump) plan," said Friedman. The Palestinians claim that the plan is biased against them, and have boycotted Washington's mediation efforts since it recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in late 2017.

"The Trump Administration's annexation plan endorses everything that the illegal Israeli colonial-settlement enterprise is about: A racist narrative, violations of international law and the perpetuation of the denial of Palestinian rights," Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said.

Israel and the United States do not use "annexation" for Israel's planned moves, arguing that the term applies to land taken from a sovereign country, whereas the West Bank was controlled by Jordan but not generally recognized as part of its sovereign territory before the 1967 Six-Day War.

05.06.20 – We - - -

Hamas to exchange remains of two Israeli soldiers for prisoners in Israel

05.06.20

Gaza militants fire rocket at Israel, IDF responds hitting Hamas posts

The rocket launch comes after over a month of relative calm on the border, rocket landed in open field and caused no damage or casualties according to the IDF

Yoav Zitun, Matan Zuri| Published: 05.06.20 , 08:16

A rocket was fired late Tuesday from the Gaza Strip at Israeli border communities the IDF said adding that the rocket landed in an open field and caused no injuries or damage.

Israel responded with tank fire at three military posts of the Hamas terror group.

The rocket fire came after relative calm on the border since late March when Gaza militants fired a rocket into Israel.

Negotiations are reported to be taking place for the release of the remains of two Israeli soldiers believed dead and two other civilians believed to be held by Hamas in exchange for prisoners held in Israeli jails.

According to the German Die Zeit news site report Wednesday, German and Swiss negotiators are trying to broker the deal between Israel, Egypt and the Hamas rulers of the strip.

05.04.20

Iran: German ban of Hezbollah - an 'historic debt to Zionists'

Israel's international espionage agency Mossad provided German security services with intelligence on Hezbollah operations inside the country, Israel channel 12 reports

i24NEWS| Published: 05.04.20 , 18:23

Germany is paying its "historic debt" to the Jews after labeling Hezbollah a terrorist organization and banning all its activities on German soil, Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Monday.

"We have a feeling that the Germans seem to have a historic debt to the Zionists, that they are paying it off, they do not realize that the whole world and the Muslims could react," said Iranian foreign spokesman Abbas Moussavi at a press conference in Tehran.

Germany announced Thursday that it had "banned the activity of the terrorist organization Hezbollah" on its territory, indicating that it was responding to a long-standing request from the United States and Israel. Hezbollah is "a powerful and legitimate party represented in the Lebanese government and parliament," said Moussavi, adding the German decision "will only create problems."

Earlier this week, Israel's international espionage agency Mossad provided German security services with intelligence on Hezbollah operations inside the country, leading Berlin to issue a ban against the terrorist group, Hebrew-language broadcaster Channel 12 reported Saturday.

The terrorist designation coincided with police raids carried out across the country on individuals thought to be Hezbollah members.

According to Channel 12, Israeli intelligence worked in Germany in a highly sensitive operation for months to expose Hezbollah's terrorism network. The information gathered was then handed over to Germany's security services.

The operation is said to have disrupted Hezbollah's cash network, worth millions of dollars, and helped locate ammunition depots.

05.03.20 – Su - - -

Trump tasked US spies to find more about origin of virus from Wuhan China

05.03.20

U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo says 'enormous evidence' virus came from Wuhan lab
Pompeo says early Chinese efforts to downplay virus amounted to 'classic Communist disinformation effort that created enormous risk'; declines to say whether he thinks virus released intentionally

AFP| Published: 05.03.20 , 21:05

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday that there was "enormous evidence" that the coronavirus pandemic originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

"There is enormous evidence that this is where it began," he said on ABC's "This Week."

But while highly critical of China's handling of the matter, Pompeo declined to say whether he thought the virus had been intentionally released.

U.S. President Donald Trump has been increasingly critical of China's role in the pandemic, which has infected nearly 3.5 million people and killed more than 240,000 around the world.

Trump has insisted that Beijing recklessly concealed important information about the outbreak and demanded that Beijing be held "accountable."

News reports say Trump has tasked U.S. spies to find out more about the origins of the virus, at first blamed on a Wuhan market selling exotic animals like bats, but now thought possibly to be from a virus research laboratory nearby.

Pompeo, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told ABC that he agreed with a statement Thursday from the U.S. intelligence community in which it concurred "with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified."

But he went further than Trump, in citing "significant" and "enormous" evidence that the virus originated in a Wuhan laboratory.

"I think the whole world can see now, remember, China has a history of infecting the world and running substandard laboratories," Pompeo said.

He said early Chinese efforts to downplay the coronavirus amounted to "a classic Communist disinformation effort. That created enormous risk."

"President Trump is very clear: we'll hold those responsible accountable."