

Ynet-News, May 13, 2020 – Sunday

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Israel approves medical cannabis exports a year after law approval

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Israel approves medical cannabis exports

Economy Minister Cohen praises 'significant step' for exporters and Israeli industry'; order will take effect in 30 days, allowing exporters to apply for license from Health Ministry

Reuters| Published: 05.13.20 , 22:57

Israel gave approval on Wednesday for exports of medical cannabis, paving the way for sales abroad that the government expects to produce hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

"This is a significant step for exporters and the Israeli industry, which will enable both the expansion of export opportunities as well as rising employment... in the field," said Economy Minister Eli Cohen.

Cohen gave final approval for the exports more than a year after the cabinet backed a new law to permit them. Cohen's order takes effect in 30 days, allowing exporters to apply for a license from the Health Ministry.

There are already more than 10 farms and five factories in Israel that meet Health Ministry standards, and some companies have already reached an agreement to sell cannabis to Europe or Canada once the licenses become available.

Within Israel, medical use of cannabis is permitted; recreational use is illegal but largely decriminalized. The Economy Ministry says about 60,000 Israelis use medical cannabis, consuming an estimated 25 tonnes per year.

Many European countries and U.S. states permit medical use. In 2018 Canada became the first G7 country to legalize it for recreational use countrywide.

Israeli farms, benefiting from a favorable climate and expertise in medical and agricultural technologies - are among the world's biggest producers of medical cannabis.

"There are many investments that we are expected to see happening now because investors were waiting for this approval," said Hagit Weinstock, co-founder of the Weinstock-Zehavi & Co law firm and a pioneer of cannabis regulation in Israel.

05.13.20 – We - - -

Netanyahu offers education MK chairman, Bennett coveted health - no agreement

05.13.20

Netanyahu and Bennett hold last ditch talks, no agreement

After refusing offer - which reportedly includes education, J'lem affairs portfolio, deputy ministerial position, and chairing Knesset committee - Yamina leader tweets 'decision is Netanyahu's'

Ynet| Published: 05.13.20 , 19:10

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yamina leader Naftali Bennett spoke on the phone Wednesday and failed to reach an agreement on the religious Zionist party's entry to the coalition ahead of the new government's inauguration on Thursday.

Netanyahu offered Bennett the education and Jerusalem and heritage portfolios, as well as a deputy minister post overseeing issues vis-a-vis the religious-Zionist community, and chairing a Knesset committee.

“The decision is Netanyahu’s,” Bennett wrote on Twitter. “As I have said from the beginning, we are only interested in entering a government where we would have influence, and influence comes from the issues for which we would be responsible. If the prime minister wants us in positions of influence, we would be happy to enter; but if he wants us weak and on the fringes, we would rather be in the opposition.”

Likud responded that Netanyahu had improved his offer to Bennett, but Bennett only cared about cabinet posts rather than ideology. Yamina denied receiving an improved offer.

Tensions between the two escalated further after Netanyahu on Tuesday gave the health portfolio, which Bennett coveted, to Likud MK Yuli Edelstein.

“Netanyahu slammed the door on our entry to the government,” a Yamina source was quoted as saying in a party statement. “He looked for the perfect way to humiliate Yamina and its voters and succeeded in this.”

05.13.20 – We - - -

Over 300 Orthodox arrested in Mt. Meron tomb from clashes by 30 to 40 extremists

05.13.20

More than 300 ultra-Orthodox men arrested in Mt. Meron riots

Despite coronavirus regulations in place during Lag BaOmer, hundreds of Haredi worshippers try to break into northern Israel holy tomb, smashing down doors and hurling stones at police

Ahiya Raved,Kobi Nachshoni,AP| Published: 05.13.20 , 08:46

Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox men broke into the sacred compound at Mount Meron in northern Israel on Tuesday evening, defying police orders limiting entry to the site due to coronavirus and prompting clashes with security forces, which resulted in more than 300 being arrested.

During Lag BaOmer, ultra-Orthodox Jews customarily gather at the tomb of prominent 2nd century sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

Altercations between Police and ultra-Orthodox worshippers at Mount Meron

Ultra-Orthodox worshippers rioting at Mount Meron

Celebrations are typically marked with enormous crowds, dancing and the lighting of bonfires.

The government **this year** put **strict limitations on the number of people** who could visit the site for the holiday, which began Monday night and ended Tuesday evening. The festivities on Monday night were highly subdued, with attendance **limited to 150** people.

Footage from the site showed **numerous men breaking down the door** to the compound and **forcing their way** into the gravesite of Bar Yochai, **shortly after police took down many of its checkpoints** as the holiday neared its end.

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According to a police spokesman, the **incident was carried out by "30 to 40 extremists"** and **police** soon arrived **to remove them from the site.**

The spokesman said that some of the ultra-Orthodox worshippers threw water bottles and stones at the police, and additional video footage from the site showed scuffles and physical confrontations between riot police and worshippers at the site, including calling officers "Nazis."

Thousands of ultra-Orthodox Israelis marked the holiday in Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh with large assemblies despite bans on public gatherings of more than 20 people due to the pandemic.

The ultra-Orthodox community has been hit especially hard by the coronavirus outbreak. Interior Minister Aryeh Deri said earlier this week that around 70% of the country's more than 16,500 confirmed cases were ultra-Orthodox, who make up around 12% of Israel's population.

Israel **started easing restrictions on movement and gathering earlier this month.** Israel has reported 260 deaths from COVID-19. Some **two thirds of those infected** in Israel **have** already **recovered.**

05.11.20 – Mo - - -

France pushes EU to bar West Bank annex, Israel citing land of bible history

05.11.20

France pushes tough EU response if Israel applies sovereignty over West Bank lands
European diplomats mull punitive measures which could block Israeli cooperation with
continent's nations; EU foreign minister warns annexation 'cannot pass unchallenged'
Reuters| Published: **05.11.20** , 21:20

France urged its European **Union partners** on **Monday** to **consider threatening Israel** with a tough response **if it will extend its sovereignty over** parts of the **West Bank**, three EU diplomats said.

Belgium, Ireland, and Luxembourg also want to discuss the possibility of punitive economic measures during a foreign ministers' meeting on Friday, the diplomats told Reuters, though all member states would have to agree to any collective action.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said cabinet discussions will start in July over the extension of Israeli sovereignty to Jewish communities in the West Bank and Jordan Valley.

A Middle East peace plan announced by U.S. President Donald Trump in January gave U.S. recognition of the settlements and Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley while envisaging a demilitarized Palestinian state.

But Palestinians have expressed outrage at Israel's plans to cement its hold further on land, the territory they are seeking for a state.

The EU diplomats did not give details on what punitive measures EU member states might consider to try to dissuade Israel from making the move.

In terms of procedure, EU governments would need to ask the Commission and the EU foreign policy division, the EEAS, to draw up a list of options.

All 27 EU nations would need to agree to any EU response and Israel's closest allies such as Hungary and the Czech Republic could still block even preparatory work.

An EU spokesman on Monday declined to comment on internal discussions but said that, "annexation is contrary to international law and if annexation goes ahead, the EU will act accordingly".

Trade, research at risk

Israel has long been a part of the EU's research and innovation program Horizon 2020, which was worth nearly 80 billion euros between 2014 and 2020, according to the European Commission.

The EU is also Israel's top trading partner and Israel benefits from trade preferences with the world's largest trading bloc.

EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell said in February Trump's plan departed from "internationally agreed parameters". Borrell said that steps to annex Palestinian territory, "if implemented, could not pass unchallenged."

That is a view taken by France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Ireland, according to EU diplomats.

"There is clearly a need to look at what annexation means in the context of international law and we do need to know our options," said one senior EU diplomat involved in discussions.

"We also need to say what exactly the consequences of annexation would be, ideally as a way to stop any such move," the diplomat said.

The Palestinians and many countries regard the West Bank settlements as 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.

05.11.20 – Mo - - -

2 earthquakes magnitude 3.2 & 2.7 shook 33 miles north of Israel coast
Monday morning

05.11.20

2 earthquakes shake Israel's north within hour

Geophysical Institute of Israel says the epicenter was in the Mediterranean Sea, north of Beit She'an and Nahariya; the tremblors measured 3.2 and 2.7 in magnitude respectively; a month ago an earthquake shook the city of Eilat

Ynet| Published: 05.11.20 , 09:07

Two earthquakes shook northern Israel in the space of one hour, the Geophysical Institute of Israel reported on Monday morning.

The epicenter of the tremblors was said to be in the Mediterranean Sea, west of southern Lebanon.

The Geophysical Institute said the first earthquake, which occurred at 5:38am, measured 3.2 in magnitude and its epicenter was some 14 km (8.6 miles) north of Beit She'an in the north.

Beit She'an has a unique geographical setting due to being located at the junction of the Jordan River Valley and the Jezreel Valley.

The second tremblor took place around 6:53 am and measured 2.7 in magnitude. Its exact epicenter is said to have been some 54km (33 miles) north of Nahariya the northernmost coastal city in Israel.

Over a month ago, a 4.3 magnitude earthquake struck the southernmost city of Eilat. The Geophysical Institute said the earthquake's epicenter was some 100 km (62 miles) south of the city, in the Gulf of Eilat along the Syrian-African rift system, known as the Great Rift Valley.

According to seismic experts, Israel experiences a massive quake approximately every 100 years, and the last major temblor was on July 11, 1927 (a devastating event that caused innumerable damage and killed hundreds across the Jordan Valley), meaning that a major earthquake is expected to rip through the country in the near future.

05.10.20 – Su - - -

Yamina alliance of small parties will oppose & prepare for after Netanyahu

05.10.20

Yamina: We won't join Netanyahu's left-wing government

Right-wing party accuses PM of selling out voters to secure his legal fate, vows to be 'pugnacious but responsible opposition' that will still support government in claiming sovereignty over West Bank settlements; Likud says move down to anger over ministry allocation

Moran Azulay | Published: 05.10.20 , 13:15

The right-wing Yamina Party said Sunday it would not join the "left-wing" unity government being put together by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Knesset Speaker Benny Gantz and would instead join the opposition.

"In light of the government's emerging composition and its policy as a left-wing government led by Netanyahu, and in light of the prime minister's blatant contempt for Yamina and its voters, we've decided to serve the public from the opposition in the upcoming term and fight for the nationalist camp," said the party in a statement Sunday.

Yamina, an alliance of three smaller parties, is headed by Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, whose portfolio will in the next government go to Gantz, the Blue & White leader who served under Netanyahu as IDF chief of staff.

The party had been a resolute part of Netanyahu's right-wing bloc as he tried to form a government without Gantz throughout the repeated election cycles of the past 13 months. But now, Yamina said Sunday, the party would now be preparing for "the day after Netanyahu," and would focus on producing "a true right-wing option that will not sell out the justice system for its personal survival while being unprepared to take on Hamas and [Palestinian President Mahmoud] Abbas."

The statement was referring to Netanyahu's criminal indictments, which will see him go on trial for fraud, bribery and breach of trust later this month. Since his deal with former political rival Blue & White came to light, Yamina has repeatedly accused the prime minister of sacrificing the right-wing to guarantee his personal legal fate.

Netanyahu was tapped by President Reuven Rivlin on Thursday to form the next government, after the prime minister secured the support of 72 of the country's 120 parliamentarians.

The Knesset members from Yamina did not sign the letter of support.

The party said, however, that it would be "a pugnacious but responsible opposition, which will give external support to positive government decisions like applying sovereignty [over the West Bank settlements and Jordan Valley], provided it does not explicitly or implicitly lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Netanyahu's Likud party hit back at the decision Sunday, accusing Yamina of quitting the coalition over a lack of ministerial positions.

"If Yamina had another ministry, would this be a right-wing government to them? This is the first government in the history of the country to apply sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, and unfortunately it will not be a part of it merely due to internal struggles over the distribution of ministries," Likud said.

"We hope that Yamina reconsiders, discovers its national responsibility, and joins a government that will lead an historic path in the history of Zionism."

05.13.20 – We - - -

Pompeo 1st foreign official of 2020, exempt from 2-wk quarantine for arrivals

05.13.20

Despite virus, Pompeo lands in Israel for talks on Iran, annexation
Secretary of State set to meet Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, including Gantz, ahead of the scheduled swearing in of the new government; U.S. officials did not say whether there were plans to discuss Israel's annexation of strategic parts of the West Bank

AFP ,AP| Published: 05.13.20 , 08:33

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo landed in Israel early Wednesday, ahead of talks on regional security as well as the spread of coronavirus. There was no mention from the U.S. delegation whether Pompeo plans to discuss the Jewish state's controversial plans to annex parts of the West Bank.

Pompeo landed in Tel Aviv early in the morning and proceeded directly to Jerusalem, receiving an exemption from Israel's mandatory two-week quarantine for arrivals due to the coronavirus outbreak.

His visit is the first to Israel by any foreign official since January, before the country largely shut its borders to halt the spread of the pandemic.

"Glad to be in Israel to coordinate with @IsraeliPM @Netanyahu and @Gantzbe on countering two critical threats: COVID-19 and Iran," Pompeo said in a tweet upon arrival. "Israel and the United States will take on these challenges side-by-side."

Pompeo planned to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and incoming defense minister and Blue & White leader Benny Gantz, a day before a unity government agreed between the two men is scheduled to be sworn in.

Glad to be in Israel to coordinate with @IsraeliPM @Netanyahu and @Gantzbe on countering two critical threats: COVID-19 and Iran. Israel and the United States will take on these challenges side-by-side.

Netanyahu and Gantz faced off in three inconclusive elections in less than a year before agreeing to a three-year power-sharing administration.

Netanyahu, a right-winger in power since 2009, will serve as premier for 18 months with Gantz, a former army chief, as his alternate, after the latter resigned as parliamentary speaker on Tuesday in preparation for his new role. The two will swap roles midway through the deal.

Their coalition agreement says the Israeli government can from July 1 begin considering implementing the West Bank annexations detailed in President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan.

Unveiled in January, the controversial plan gives a green light from Washington for Israel to annex Jewish settlements and other strategic West Bank territory.

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The Palestinians have rejected Trump's plan and cut ties with the Trump administration in 2017 over its pro-Israel stance.

Their chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said Pompeo's team had not reached out ahead of the visit.

"The Trump administration is collaborating with Israel in its annexation plan in what is both an attempt at burying the rights of the Palestinian people as well as a blatant attack on a rules-based international system," he said.

Israel has controlled the West Bank since seizing it in the Six-Day War of 1967.

Nearly three million Palestinian residents live there alongside more than 400,000 Israelis residing in settlements that are considered illegal under international law.

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For the Palestinians and much of the international community, Israeli annexations would sink any hope of a two-state solution to the conflict.

In an interview ahead of his visit with the newspaper Israel Hayom, Pompeo was quoted as saying that whether and how to go ahead with annexation was "a decision Israel will make".

"I want to understand what the new government thinks about it," Pompeo reportedly said, noting Trump's initiative was unveiled several months before the Netanyahu-Gantz deal.

The U.S. plan recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital, defying Palestinian aspirations that the eastern part of the city will serve as their future capital.

Pompeo said he will also discuss Iran's alleged nuclear weapons ambitions with Israeli leaders.

Former U.S. president Barack Obama's ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro, said that he believes Pompeo was being "disingenuous" in claiming annexation decisions would be left to Israel.

"I think the Trump administration very much wants this annexation to happen," said Shapiro, a visiting fellow at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies. "It is probably less concerned about the specific boundaries, but it wants to have an achievement in Israeli annexation that it can tout to President Trump's evangelical supporters (and) right-wing Jewish supporters to excite them and energise them," ahead of US elections in November, Shapiro said.

Netanyahu may be tempted to move quickly in order to help Trump in that vote and to ensure annexation is a done deal before a possible unfavourable change at the helm of the White House, Shapiro noted.

But that would create substantial risks internationally and could cause deep division within Netanyahu's coalition, the former ambassador added.

Netanyahu's previous coalition had hardline pro-annexation right-wingers in key posts, notably outgoing defence minister Naftali Bennett.

Gantz has praised the Trump plan but warned against moves that threaten regional stability.

Experts have said Jordan might back away from its historic 1994 peace deal with the Jewish state if Israel annexes the Jordan Valley, a strategically crucial border region that accounts for roughly 30 percent of the West Bank.

Shapiro noted that before moving forward, Israel will need to weigh regional "diplomatic consequences" as well as presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's view that unilateral annexations are "unwise".

In a reminder of ever-present tensions in the West Bank, an Israeli soldier was killed in a village near Jenin on Tuesday by a large rock thrown by a Palestinian.

The soldier's unit had been rounding up suspects in the area, the Israeli army said.

05.11.20 – Mo - - -

Putin reopens industrial plants & construction sites, some restrictions will remain

05.11.20

Putin reopens Russian economy while virus cases on the rise

After seven weeks, Russian President announces new easing of restrictions as fresh spike in coronavirus cases makes country third in the world in confirmed infections

Agencies| Published: 05.11.20 , 20:18

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday has declared an end to a nationwide partial economic shutdown but noted that some restrictions will remain, as new confirmed cases within the country continued to surge.

Putin, speaking in a televised address to the nation, said that it will be up to regional governors in the far-flung Russian Federation to determine what industrial plants could reopen starting Tuesday. He emphasized that it's essential to preserve jobs and keep the economy running provided that workers strictly observe sanitary norms.

Putin ordered the economic shutdown in late March, although key industrial plants and some other sectors have been allowed to continue operating. Most Russians have been ordered to stay home, except for restocking on supplies and medicine and receiving medical treatment.

Moscow will allow all of its industrial plants and construction sites to resume work starting Tuesday, and Putin said other regions may follow their example. Non-food stores,

hairdressers, car dealers, and most other enterprises in the services sector will remain shuttered.

Putin emphasized that the restrictions must be lifted gradually to avoid triggering a new wave of contagion.

A new surge in coronavirus cases took Russia's tally past those of Italy and Britain, making it the third-highest in the world.

The number of new cases of the novel coronavirus rose by a record 11,656 diagnoses in 24 hours, taking the total sick tally to 221,344. Only Spain and the United States have recorded more cases than the world's biggest country.

More than half of all cases and deaths are in Moscow, the epicenter of Russia's outbreak.

The Russian capital on Monday reported an overnight increase of 6,169 new cases.

Russia's coronavirus response center also reported 94 new deaths. Since the onset of the pandemic in the country, 2,009 Russians have succumbed to COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by coronavirus.

The official death toll remains far lower than in many countries, something Kremlin critics have queried.

Official data published on Sunday showed Moscow reported 18% more deaths in April this year than the same month in 2019, raising the possibility that the official death toll from COVID-19, seriously understates the spread of the virus.

Government officials attribute the lower death toll and the rising number of cases to a vast testing program, under which they say 5.6 million tests have been conducted.

That, they say, has allowed doctors to quickly identify people who need medical care and make sure they receive it in time.

05.11.20 – Mo - - -

Iran missile strikes own support ship, too close putting targets in the water

05.11.20

Iran missile strikes own ship, kills 19 sailors, hurts 15 others

Iran's navy says the friendly fire incident occurred during training exercise in the Gulf of Oman, where the Iranians often train, due to the area's proximity to the strategic Strait of Hormuz

Associated Press| Published: 05.11.20 , 09:39

An Iranian missile fired during a training exercise in the Gulf of Oman struck a support vessel near its target, killing at least 19 sailors and wounding 15 others, Iran's navy confirmed in a statement.

The friendly fire incident happened Sunday near the port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometers (790 miles) southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman, state TV reported Monday.

The missile struck the Konarak, a Hendijan-class support ship, taking part in the exercise. State television described the missile strike as an accident, saying the Konarak had remained too close to the target. The Konarak had been putting targets out in the water for other ships to fire upon, it said.

Iranian media said the Konarak had been overhauled in 2018 and was able to launch sea missiles. The Dutch-made, 47-meter (155-foot) vessel was in service since 1988 and had capacity of 40 tons. It usually carries a crew of 20 sailors.

Iran regularly holds exercises in the region, which is closed to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil passes. The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, which monitors the region, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Iranian media rarely report on mishaps during its exercises, signaling the severity of the incident. This incident also comes amid months of heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018 and imposed crushing sanctions on the country.