

Ynet-News, June 09, 2020 – Tuesday

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Businesses face new costs, pandemic 299 deaths, and economy 7.1% first quarter

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Palestinians not informed of second UAE aid flight after rejecting the first

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Gantz to visit Jordan on annexation tensions or Abdullah will recall ambassador

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Germany will head EU Council in July & not allow sanctions on Israel annexation

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130 schools closed; 17,605 staff & students in quarantine for virus, fatalities 298

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West Bank annex may wait for wider support or an ease in US protests

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06.09.20
Tel Aviv has spring in its step again, but businesses face new costs
While most shops, restaurants and cafes have reopened, many company owners are chafing under the new public health orders and the economic fallout from the months-long coronavirus lockdown
Reuters| Published: 06.09.20 , 17:11

Israel's main coastal city has returned to work - and play - but the coronavirus pandemic has brought new challenges that will weigh heavily on Tel Aviv's restaurants, bars and other businesses emerging from lockdown.

Although Israel has escaped the pandemic relatively lightly so far, with 299 deaths and 18,000 cases, its tourist-reliant economy took a big hit after going into lockdown in mid-March, contracting an annual 7.1% in the first quarter.

More than 300,000 people have returned to work since Israel began lifting restrictions last month, but airports are still closed to foreign visitors. And Tel Aviv - Israel's commercial and entertainment capital - is experiencing the kind of problems that businesses the world over are having to deal with.

Some sectors have not yet re-emerged from lockdown and others are adapting to new rules and red tape, including insisting face masks be worn, providing hand sanitizer and thermometers and spacing tables further apart in restaurants.

"Regular business flow is still not back to normal because there are still people who are scared," said Ben Rachmani, of the Four Sixteen vegan restaurant/bar.

Evening trade was "very solid" but lunchtime "messed up" because many former customers are still working from home. Rachmani said he had to re-open because he would only have been able to survive a few months of delivering takeaways and not paying rent.

"If it had gone on until September or October, I would have been done," he said. Some said that the May 27 re-opening had come too soon. On Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the country would stop easing restrictions after a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases. He urged the public to keep social distancing and wear face masks - guidelines that some Israelis, including in Tel Aviv, had been ignoring as they sought to return to normality.

Others have remained cautious.

In the Dizengoff Street shopping area, Avi Amir said his hairdressing store lost 40% of its business because older clients were staying home, and fewer customers can be in the store at once.

In the last week, Amir said, he received four fines totaling \$1,100 from municipal inspectors who said staff were not wearing plastic face shields.

However, for one woman entrepreneur, the coronavirus crisis has forced her to try something new. After losing her hotel job, Victoria Janitsky took advantage of lower rents in a prime location to open a nail salon.

06.09.20 – Tu - - -

Palestinians not informed of second UAE aid flight after rejecting the first

06.09.20

Palestinians 'not informed' of latest UAE aid flight via Israel

PM Shtayyeh says Palestinian Authority is not against receiving help from any 'Arab, European or international' country as long as 'it's fully coordinated with us'; Abu Dhabi earlier said it was to operate second flight via Israel, carrying medical aid
Reuters| Published: 06.09.20 , 16:59

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh on Tuesday said he was unaware that a plane from the United Arab Emirates was to fly to Israel carrying medical aid for the Palestinians.

His remark cast doubt over whether the Palestinians, long at odds with Israel over land they seek for a state, would accept the supplies after they rejected a similar shipment last month, saying it had not been coordinated with them.

"If any country, whether Arab or European or international country wants to help us, we welcome that. We don't say no - as long as it is not conditional and as long as it is fully coordinated with us," Shtayyeh told reporters in Ramallah.

His Palestinian Authority views with sensitivity any attempts to direct aid or assistance to areas under its limited self-rule in the West Bank without its expressed knowledge and coordination.

Etihaad Airways earlier said it would operate a rare, second flight to Israel carrying the medical aid on a cargo-only service from Abu Dhabi. The UAE foreign ministry did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

State-owned Etihaad on May 19 operated the first known flight by a UAE airline to Israel. It transported supplies to help the Palestinians combat the new coronavirus after the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) coordinated a 16-tonne shipment from the UAE.

Israel does not have diplomatic relations with the UAE or any of the other five Gulf Arab countries, and there are no commercial flights between them. However, shared concerns over Iran's influence in the region have led to a discreet thaw in ties between Israel and the Arab Gulf in recent years.

The Palestinians have warned against Arab normalisation with Israel, which has pledged to annex the West Bank's Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley.

06.09.20 – Tu - - -

Gantz to visit Jordan on annexation tensions or Abdullah will recall ambassador

06.09.20

Report: Gantz to visit Jordan over annexation tensions

Arab media says defense minister could make the trip to Amman to address future of treaties with the Hashemite Kingdom if Jerusalem makes unilateral moves in West Bank

i24NEWS| Published: 06.09.20 , 10:26

Defense Minister Benny Gantz could visit Jordan in a bid to defuse the tensions over Israel's plans to apply sovereignty to West Bank areas, Channel 12 reported.

The broadcaster cites a report in the London-based Rai al-Youm newspaper, which suggests Amman could be one of the stops during the possible trip.

If confirmed, the move will be Gantz's first official foreign trip as defense minister. Israel and Jordan have long enjoyed thriving cooperation in a number of areas, including security, but the ties between the two countries have soured since 2019.

Israel's proclaimed plan to apply sovereignty to a number of West Bank areas has emerged as the key point of contention over the past few months, with top Jordanian officials warning against this move.

Jordan's King Abdullah II warned earlier that Israel's peace treaty with Amman could be on the line, while also stressing he did not want to stir up tensions as the move was yet to materialize.

According to a report by Channel 13 on Saturday, if Israel was to go ahead with annexing West Bank areas as outlined in U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan, Jordan would first recall its ambassador to the Jewish state.

It noted, however, that Amman was not willing to take any drastic steps before the annexation becomes official.

06.08.20 – Mo - - -

Germany will head EU Council in July & not allow sanctions on Israel annexation

06.08.20

Germany won't support sanctions on Israel over W.Bank annexation, official says
Berlin also will not recognize Palestinian independence, despite stressing move would put strain on relations, source says ahead of upcoming visit by German Foreign Minister Maas

Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.08.20 , 18:27

Germany will not support sanctions over Israel's planned unilateral annexation of parts of the West Bank or recognize Palestinian independence, a diplomatic official in Jerusalem said Monday.

However, the official stressed that annexation would likely put a strain on the relations between Jerusalem and Berlin, and Germany's willingness to support Israel on the international scene.

Germany is set in July to take the presidency of two key institutions, the Council of the European Union for six months, as well as the UN Security Council for a month, meaning Berlin will head two major international forums just as they will need to

respond to Israeli actions, should Jerusalem move forward with its intention to apply sovereignty onto the contested territory.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas is expected to arrive in Israel Wednesday, likely to warn the government of the move's consequences.

Maas will meet with Netanyahu, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi as well as with Palestinian and Jordanian officials.

Diplomatic sources said that Maas, speaking in the name of a number of European foreign ministers, will try to convince Israel to avoid taking any unilateral actions, chiefly annexation.

The European Union has already conducted several hearings on possible sanctions to try and deter the Jewish State from the notion. Some of the sanctions, mainly financial ones, do not require a majority among the 27-member body.

If Israel does go through with annexing parts of the West Bank, at least eight European nations are mulling officially recognizing a Palestinian state.

Some of the nations believed to go through with such an initiative include France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Ireland, and Spain.

06.08.20 – Mo - - -

Emergency regulations limit use of mobile phone GPS history tracking of patients.

06.08.20

Government freezes Shin Bet coronavirus tracing bill

Ministers halt legislation after Shin Bet chief says security agency uncomfortable using such methods to trace and monitor civilians; Argaman supports development of independent civilian alternative

Tova Zimuky, Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.08.20, 18:08

The government decided on Monday to freeze parliamentary work on a law that would allow the Shin Bet security agency to use civilians' cellphone location data to trace potential contacts with confirmed coronavirus patients.

Shin Bet chief Nadav Argaman said at the meeting that the Shin Bet is not feeling comfortable using such methods to trace and monitor patients. However, he also pointed out that in case of a fresh outbreak, the law could be passed quickly, and the security agency will be prepared to act accordingly.

Argaman also said that his organization would support the development of an independent civilian app for the same purpose, as it did with the Health Ministry's HaMagen app that cross-checks a user's mobile phone GPS history with historical geographic data of patients from the Health Ministry.

The government started promoting the law after the High Court of Justice ruled it will not allow continuing surveillance on an ad hoc basis without a law in place.

This use of the Shin Bet's capabilities has sparked protests, especially from human rights organizations.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit eventually approved the move as part of the coronavirus emergency regulations but instructed to increase supervision over the tracing of civilians.

Mandelblit demanded that only a small team would operate the tool and the data collected will not be used for any other purpose. The Knesset Secret Services Subcommittee and Mandelblit himself also supervised all activities.

At the end of the meeting, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also said that the government decided to leave in place some economic restrictions meant to rein in the spread of coronavirus after cases have seen a resurgence in recent days.

"Experts showed us that there's a sharp increase in the number of cases," said Netanyahu.

"We've decided to slow down a bit. We decided to keep in place all the restrictions that were supposed to be lifted in the coming days and we will reexamine them next week.

The only exception to this would be event halls - we will enable them to operate in accordance with Health Ministry guidelines."

The Ministry of Culture and Sports announced that theaters, cinemas, and other cultural institutions, that were set to open on Sunday, will remain shuttered until June 21.

06.08.20 – Mo - - -

Rise in virus cases, delay railway, crowd buses, add traffic jams & restrict events

06.08.20

No trains or theaters: Israel set to freeze reopening of economy

Netanyahu says it's time to 'put the brakes on' due to the rise in new coronavirus cases, likely postponing the reopening of culture centers and railway traffic; weddings of up to 250 people will likely be permitted; 1,000 railway workers on unpaid leave since March decree decision

Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.08.20, 13:59

The ministerial committee handling the coronavirus outbreak was set to vote Monday to freeze any further reopening of the economy as Israel saw a resurgence of the disease across the country.

The Health Ministry said over the past week at least 800 people tested positive for COVID-19 with 100 daily diagnoses reported on average, the biggest increase since the peak of the epidemic in mid-April.

"It's time to put the brakes on in light of the rising infection rate," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during the meeting of ministers.

The decision means that all theatres, cinemas, event halls and live shows venues that were set to reopen on June 14 will not resume operations until further notice. Weddings of up to 250 people, however, will likely be permitted from now on, in accordance with health guidelines.

Planned resumption of train services is now also likely to be on hold, having been delayed four times already.

Chairwoman of Israel Railways Workers Committee Gila Edri urged the prime minister to allow trains to resume operating in order to bring back over 1,000 employees who've been on unpaid leave for over 70 days.

“We regret the decision not to reopen train services,” she said. “We have the ability to maintain public and employee health. The company's management and staff have prepared a comprehensive plan to be able to comply with all the Health Ministry's guidelines.”

Health Minister Yuli Edelstein during the same meeting insisted the economy and railway traffic should reopen as planned despite the increase in the number of new cases. “Minimum danger, maximum protection,” he said at the start of the special cabinet meeting. “The police must go back to strong enforcement [of health orders] in malls, buses, trains, restaurants, event halls and elsewhere to make the public more disciplined.”

The delay of railway traffic has already drawn the ire from Israelis who struggle to get to work using overcrowded bus services.

In addition, the traffic on Ayalon Highway, from north to south, will be severely limited starting Wednesday due to the construction of a new route.

The project is set to create additional traffic jams, especially due to the lack of train services.

06.07.20 – Su - - -

El Al needs rescue package as all travel in and out of the country is suspended

06.07.20

State outlines framework for El Al rescue package

Breakthrough plan would also see Israel's flag carrier, which is on verge of collapse, issue \$150 million in stocks, with Treasury offering a \$250 million loan and promising to buy unpurchased shares

i24NEWS| Published: 06.07.20 , 23:55

The Finance Ministry on Sunday offered the country's beleaguered national airline El Al a combination of a government-secured loan and a major share offering to help ensure its future.

The revised government proposal - which has been sent to El Al's management team - revealed that the government is willing to offer the flag carrier a \$250 million loan.

In addition, El Al will issue shares with a value of \$150 million and the government will commit to purchasing any that are left unsold.

Talks have been ongoing for weeks, after the government shutdown of the Israeli economy due to the coronavirus, hit El Al particularly hard - with effectively all travel, both in and out of the country, suspended.

In May, there were reports of a NIS 1.4 billion (\$400 million) government loan for the airline, which was coupled with strict demands for the company's recovery plan.

Approval for the plan is far from straightforward. It will require the agreement of the airline itself, the government and the Knesset's Finance Committee.

As in previous incarnations of the plan, it is thought likely that there will be severe cost-cutting measures, with potentially as many as one-third of El Al's 6,000-strong work force being laid off.

Such a move would require the approval of El Al's workers' union.

The airline said it would evaluate the new bailout proposal.

06.07.20 – Su - - -

130 schools closed; 17,605 staff & students in quarantine for virus, fatalities 298

06.07.20

130 schools now closed; 17,605 staff, students in quarantine for virus

More new diagnoses in Tel Aviv than Jerusalem since Friday, despite more testing in capital; death toll rises as three more people succumb to COVID; 2,474 people currently infected with disease, including 111 new cases

Yaron Druckman, Adir Yanko | Published: 06.07.20 , 21:43

The Education Ministry said on Sunday that 130 schools and kindergartens have been closed due to staff and students contracting the virus in the past 10 days - 24 of them since Saturday.

Additionally, 17,605 students and staff members are now in quarantine, an increase of 1,282 since Saturday.

So far, 352 students and staff members nationwide have been diagnosed with the virus in the current wave, including 22 over the past 24 hours.

The Health Ministry also said that more people have tested positive for coronavirus in Tel Aviv than Jerusalem since Friday, with 46 new cases in the coastal city as opposed to 37 in the capital.

The ministry also reported that over the past five days, some 13,000 tests for the virus were conducted in Jerusalem, while at the same time, only about 3,600 were carried out in Tel Aviv.

According to the ministry's data, 111 new COVID-19 patients have been diagnosed, with the total number of cases rising to 17,863.

Three more patients have died from virus-related complications, bringing the total number of fatalities from the disease up to 298.

There has also been a climb in the number of people requiring respiratory assistance, with 23 patients currently using ventilators.

The number of daily recoveries has declined over the past few days, with only 26 registered on Sunday, while the number of active patients has risen by 283 to 2,474.

Health officials said Sunday that they fear a new outbreak is taking place in Jaffa, where 10 people have so far been diagnosed with the virus in recent days.

06.07.20 – Su - - -

West Bank annex may wait for wider support or an ease in US protests

06.07.20

U.S. officials signal West Bank annexation can wait

Warning received by Israeli diplomats comes several days ahead of visit by German FM, who is expected to try to persuade Jerusalem not to apply sovereignty over parts of the territory as EU threatens sanctions

Elisha Ben Kimon, Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.07.20 , 17:53

As Israel moves closer to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's planned July 1 start of the process of West Bank annexation, American officials on Sunday sent a message that the move would have to be delayed due to the mass protests in the U.S.

"The Americans are over the head with protests and coronavirus, therefore annexation is not their top priority right now," said an Israeli official.

The official also said that the U.S. administration is hoping for wider support for such a move - a consensus that is not in place at present.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas is expected to arrive in Israel Wednesday for a visit to warn the government against annexation.

Maas is expected to meet with Netanyahu, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi as well as with Palestinian and Jordanian officials.

Diplomatic sources said that Maas, speaking in the name of a number of European foreign ministers, will try to convince Israel not to take any unilateral actions, chiefly annexation.

The European Union has already conducted several hearings on possible sanctions to deter or, if needed, actually be implemented against Israel. Some of the sanctions, mainly financial ones, do not require a majority among the 27-member body.

Analysts say that the sanctions could lead to bilateral treaties between Israel and various European nations being suspended and could even lead to the EU officially recognizing Palestinian independence.

If Israel does go through with annexing parts of the West Bank, at least eight European nations are mulling official recognition of a Palestinian state.

Israel estimates that those nations include France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Ireland and Spain.

Details of the annexation map that will be submitted to the U.S. have not yet been finalized, Settlements Affairs Minister Tzipi Hotovely told Samaria Regional Council head, Yossi Dagan, on Sunday.

Dagan in turn said that he is "not willing to give up a centimeter" and that "we [the settlements] don't have to agree to the prime minister's plans."

"We are at a crossroads that could either see excellent historic results on sovereignty or the creation of a terror state in the heart of the country," he said.

"There isn't a Class A and a Class B of settlements. We aren't differentiating between those [settlements] in the blocs and those that are in isolated areas. [Annexation] would be an immediate security threat to thousands of citizens."