

Ynet-News, June 12, 2020 – Friday

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Israel virus rate of infection higher than 1% with 226 new cases in 24 hours

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Syrian replaced PM a month before elections amid crisis of US sanctions

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30 years of quake shear wave data, detect structures at the core-mantle boundary

06.12.20

Israel virus rate of infection higher than 1% with 226 new cases in 24 hours

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Israel's coronavirus resurgence continues with 226 new cases in 24 hours

Number of positive tests also on the rise, with significant new diagnoses in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Bnei Brak; rate of infection also greatly increased since last week

Adir Yanko, Saar Hess | Published: 06.12.20, 20:55

The Ministry of Health announced on Friday that 226 people have been tested positive for the coronavirus over the last 24 hours.

On Thursday, for the first time since the relief in regulations - the number of newly discovered coronavirus cases has surpassed 200, and reaching 242 newly daily diagnosed cases.

Another alarming statistic is the number of positive tests in the daily tests conducted.

As in the previous four days, the percentage of positive tests was higher than 1%

The number of tests conducted daily continues to be very high. More than 18,000 tests were done on Wednesday, and on Thursday approximately 15,482 coronavirus tests were performed.

According to the most recent data, 195 people were diagnosed with the virus on Thursday.

And while the Health Ministry claims the number of patients in serious condition remains the same - the National Security Council, which publishes the updated numbers on a daily basis- says there has been surge in the number of seriously ill patients. According to the data published by the NSC - after a prolonged period of more than a week in which the number of patients in serious condition ranged from 28 to 31- on Friday the number reached 37.

According to the Health Ministry, however, the number of patients in serious condition stands at 34.

Additional data provided by the Health Ministry shows 37 new coronavirus patients have been diagnosed in Tel Aviv, 20 in Jerusalem, 18 in Bnei Berak, and 11 in Petah Tikva. According to recent data, the numbers of coronavirus patients who require a ventilator has gone up by one, and now stands at 25 - while the number of fatalities from the virus still stands at 300.

According to the Health Ministry, the number of days it takes for the number of coronavirus patients to double itself now stands at 66 days compared to 99 days only last week.

Also, the number of patients diagnosed on Friday is twice that of 67 days ago.

06.11.20

Trump sanctions International Court for fabricating outlandish charges against Israel

06.11.20

Trump OKs sanctioning ICC staff, Netanyahu applauds move

The order blocks the financial assets of court employees and bars them from entering the United States; Netanyahu accuses court of fabricating "outlandish charges" against Israel and the U.S.

Associated Press, Ynet| Updated: 06.11.20 , 23:52

In a broadside against the International Criminal Court, President Donald Trump on Thursday authorized economic and travel sanctions against court workers investigating American troops and intelligence officials and those of allied nations, including Israel, for possible war crimes in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Trump's executive order was his administration's latest attack against international organizations, treaties, and agreements that don't hew to U.S. policies. The order would block the financial assets of court employees and bar them and their immediate relatives from entering the United States.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked President Donald Trump for the move.

"I would like to thank the president for his leadership in sanctioning the corrupt and biased international court obsessed with a witch hunt against Israel and the United States," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu accused the court of fabricating "outlandish charges" against his country and praised the U.S. for standing up for what he called truth and justice.

While Israel welcomed the move, there were expressions of concern and condemnation from the United Nations, the European Union, and human rights groups.

The Hague-based court was created in 2002 to prosecute war crimes and crimes of humanity and genocide in places where perpetrators might not otherwise face justice. The court has 123 state parties that recognize its jurisdiction. The U.S. has never been an ICC member.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced the tribunal as a "kangaroo court" that has been unsuccessful and inefficient in its mandate to prosecute war crimes. He said that the U.S. would punish the ICC employees for any investigation or prosecution of Americans in Afghanistan and added that they could also be banned for prosecuting Israelis for alleged abuses against Palestinians.

"It gives us no joy to punish them," Pompeo said. "But we cannot allow ICC officials and their families to come to the United States to shop and travel and otherwise enjoy American freedoms as these same officials seek to prosecute the defender of those very freedoms."

Pompeo's comments were echoed by Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Attorney General William Barr, and national security adviser Robert O'Brien, who spoke at a State Department announcement of the new measures. Barr announced that the U.S. would investigate possible corruption within the ICC hierarchy that he said raised suspicions that Russia and other adversaries could be interfering in the investigatory process. Thursday's announcement was the latest action putting the administration at odds with allies in Europe and elsewhere. Since taking office, Trump has withdrawn from the Paris climate accord, the Iran nuclear deal, and two arms control treaties with Russia. He has pulled the U.S. out of the U.N. Human Rights Council and the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, threatened to leave the International Postal Union, and announced an end to cooperation with the World Health Organization.

Unlike those treaties and agreements, though, the U.S. has never been an ICC member. Administrations of both parties have been concerned about the potential for political prosecutions of American troops and officials for alleged war crimes and other atrocities. Senior U.N. and EU officials spoke out against the decision.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Trump's order "is a matter of serious concern" and he described EU members as "steadfast supporters" of the tribunal." Borrell said "it is a key factor in bringing justice and peace," and that "it must be respected and supported by all nations."

The United Nations has "taken note with concern" about reports of Trump's order, said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The American Civil Liberties Union suggested it might seek legal recourse and said the order was "a dangerous display of his contempt for human rights and those working to uphold them."

Human Rights Watch said it “demonstrates contempt for the global rule of law.” “This assault on the ICC is an effort to block victims of serious crimes whether in Afghanistan, Israel, or Palestine from seeing justice,” it said.

The executive order authorizes the blocking of assets within U.S. jurisdiction of court personnel who directly engage in investigating, harassing or detaining U.S. personnel. It authorizes visa bans on court officials and their family members involved in the investigations. Those restrictions go beyond what the State Department issued last year. White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said that despite repeated calls by the United States and its allies, the ICC has not embraced change. She alleged the court continues to pursue politically motivated investigations against the U.S. and its partners, including Israel.

“We are concerned that adversary nations are manipulating the International Criminal Court by encouraging these allegations against United States personnel,” she said.

“Further, we have strong reason to believe there is corruption and misconduct at the highest levels of the International Criminal Court office of the prosecutor, calling into question the integrity of its investigation into American service members.”

The U.S. has extracted pledges from most of the court’s members that they will not seek such prosecutions and risk losing U.S. military and other assistance.

But ICC prosecutors have shown a willingness to press ahead with investigations into U.S. service members and earlier this year launched one that drew swift U.S. condemnation.

Last year, Pompeo revoked the visa of the court’s chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, after she asked ICC judges to open an investigation into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. The judges initially rejected the request, she appealed and the court authorized the investigation in March.

That ruling marked the first time the court’s prosecutor has been cleared to investigate U.S. forces. The case involves allegations of war crimes committed by Afghan national security forces, Taliban and Haqqani network militants, as well as U.S. forces and intelligence officials in Afghanistan since May 2003.

Bensouda said there’s information that members of the U.S. military and intelligence agencies “committed acts of torture, cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, rape, and sexual violence.”

06.11.20

PA near collapse, unable to pay May salaries refusing 60% of the budget

06.11.20

Palestinian Authority unable to pay May salaries

PAs refusal to accept funds including taxes on imports and income tax for Palestinians working in Israel is in response to the planed annexation of parts of the West Bank

The Media Line| Updated: 06.11.20 , 18:48

The Palestinian Authority cannot pay government employees' salaries for May after refusing to accept tax monies collected for it by Israel, which comprise 60% of the Palestinian leadership's budget.

The Palestinian Finance Ministry said there is no money for government workers for May after President Mahmoud Abbas refused to accept the so-called tax-clearance funds from Israel.

Abbas said the PA was also halting security cooperation because of Israeli plans to annex some or all of its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley.

"We aren't receiving the clearance funds and at the same time, our domestic income has been reduced by 50%, so we don't have the money to pay the May salaries," said Finance Ministry spokesperson Abd al-Rahman Byatneh.

The PA had paid the March and April salaries in full.

The ministry is doing its best to obtain money from other sources "but so far, we don't have anything. The moment we have an update or change, we will announce it," Byatneh said.

For more than two decades, Israel has deducted monies beyond its 3% service fee (in accordance with the 1994 Protocol on Economic Relations, or Paris Protocol) from the funds it collects on behalf of the PA.

These funds include taxes on imports to the Palestinian territories and income tax for Palestinians working in Israel.

The Israeli government stated that additional deductions – more than \$5 million per month in some cases – pay for treatment given to Palestinians in Israeli hospitals and delinquent utility bills.

The Palestinian leadership, however, considered the moves unilateral, and financial bullying. Last year, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh called on the World Bank to create an effective mechanism to audit financial transactions from Israel to the PA, particularly to monitor Israeli deductions from Palestinian clearance funds.

The PA's finances were also hit by declining revenues from commercial activities in the West Bank due to two months of coronavirus restrictions.

Osama No fal, an economic analyst and instructor at the University College of Applied Sciences in the Gaza Strip, said that the PA cannot survive with a 60% hole in its budget.

"Government employees' salaries account for 80% of the clearance funds. Now, with the PA's refusal to accept this money, it has lost its ability to pay May salaries," he said. Also, "foreign aid has declined by 26% compared to 2019. ... These are very dangerous indicators."

Previously, when the PA had clearance-fund deduction issues with Israel, the Palestinian leadership took out loans from local banks.

"Since 2019, the PA has borrowed more from local banks," No fal said. "The extent of the PA's borrowing climbed to a peak of 9.4 billion shekels (more than \$2.7 billion), and 54% of that came from local banks.

He said that local banks in the West Bank were affected negatively; in particular, they were unable to adapt to the size of borrowing by the PA. Therefore, the latter can no longer borrow from [these] banks."

Nofal revealed that the PA's attempts to secure a financial umbrella from Arab and other Muslim countries have borne little fruit. However, it did receive "European Union assistance of 23 million euros [\$26 million] a few days ago." This "saved the economy from complete collapse, but it didn't resolve the salary issue," he said. "Without the clearance funds, it would be very hard" to pay those wages.

In 2016 and 2019, Israel made clearance-fund deductions without PA consent and then the PA refused to accept the rest of the money, he said. "But both times, the PA reversed its decision because the clearance funds are the backbone of its budget."

"At the same time, the PA can't bow to Israel and the annexation plan, and this has created a very big financial problem," Nofal added.

There are also other reasons for the PA's financial crisis, Nofal said.

"The 2020 budget for ministry operating expenses was 2.2 billion shekels, a very high number, especially since we are talking about the West Bank only and not the Gaza Strip, as well. The 2020 security budget alone accounted for 22% of the PA budget, and that's also a very high figure."

In July 2018, the Israeli cabinet approved a law to withhold tax revenue from the PA equal to the amount the PLO pays to Palestinian security prisoners in Israeli jails and to the families of those who died in violent encounters with Israelis.

In February 2019, for example, Israel withheld some \$138 million from the tax revenue, which led the PA to pay 50% of February and March 2019 salaries, and in April 2019, 60%.

Moshe Marzouk, an Israeli analyst and research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, said that the Palestinian reaction of rejecting the clearance funds after cutting ties with Israel was unexpected. "I believe that the PA is trying to put huge pressure on Israel."

Marzouk explained that previously Israel deducted from the clearance funds for various reasons, but the PA's latest move indicated that it wanted to put Israel in a position of responsibility for the Palestinian people, "as the Palestinian leadership is unable to deal with important issues, like paying workers, creating job opportunities in the Palestinian territories, and strengthening the weak Palestinian economy."

He clarified that faced with Israel's annexation plan in the context of US President Donald Trump's program for the region, the PA wanted to throw the burden on Israel to deal with the aftermath, economically and socially, "I personally believe that Israel was put in a very difficult position, especially if the PA collapses or resigns, and I also believe that the annexation project will not pass."

Article written by Dima Abumira.

06.12.20

Iran denies IAEA access at 2-sites - argues requests based on fabricated information

06.12.20

Iran says ready to cooperate with IAEA

The Iranians claim the IAEA request for access to its nuclear sites is based on fabricated information supplied by the United States and Israel

AFP| Published: 06.12.20 , 14:19

Iran insists it is ready to resolve any issues with the UN nuclear watchdog, expressing “disappointment” in a note circulated today over the International Atomic Energy Agency’s latest report complaining of blocked access.

Iran argues that the requests for access are based on “fabricated information,” accusing the US and Israel of trying to “exert pressure on the agency.”

The IAEA said in a report that was seen by AFP last Friday, that Iran has for months blocked inspections at two sites where nuclear activity may have occurred in the past. In a note to the IAEA dated June 8, Iran said it had held meetings with agency representatives in Tehran on April 29 and May 16 to discuss the access issues, followed by written correspondence and a fresh proposal to meet with IAEA representatives.

In the note circulated by Tehran’s mission to the UN in Vienna today, Iran insists it “continued its constructive engagement with the agency during the past two months, with a view to reaching a common understanding... which would pave the way for the resolution of concerning issues.”

06.11.20

Syrian replaced PM a month before elections amid crisis of US sanctions

06.11.20

Syrian president fires his PM amid worsening economic crisis

The economic meltdown comes ahead of looming new U.S. sanctions against any entity or country that does business with the Syrian government due to take effect in the second half of June

Associated Press| Updated: 06.11.20 , 18:00

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Thursday fired his prime minister, Imad Khamis, a month ahead of elections, and amid an economic crisis that caused public anger to rise in the territory under his control.

Assad also appointed the current water resources minister, Hussein Arnous, to replace Khamis, who had been the prime minister since 2016.

The Syrian president asked Arnous to replace Khamis as interim prime minister until parliament elections are held in July and a new government comes in.

The surprise decision comes amid a **deepening economic crisis**, that **caused public anger** to spill over to the streets in scenes not seen in government-held areas since the early days of the civil war that has ravaged the country over the past decade.

The **national currency, the Syrian pound, has tumbled** in recent weeks, reaching a **record low** to the dollar. The pound, which traded at **47 pounds to the dollar** before the 2011 uprising, plunged to **over 3,000 for a dollar this week**.

Prices of basic goods have skyrocketed while some staples have disappeared from the market as merchants and the public struggled to keep up with the rising cost of living. The economic meltdown comes ahead of looming new **U.S. sanctions against any entity or country that does business with the Syrian government**. The new sanctions are due to **take effect in the second half of June** but have shaken the already teetering economy. Known as the **U.S. Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act**, the sanctions are expected to worsen the already **dire economic situation in Syria**, where **more than 80% of the people live below the bread line**.

These latest hardships have sparked the protests in areas controlled by the Assad government.

Hundreds of protesters in the southern Sweida province have taken to the streets in the last four days, decrying the rising cost of living and chanting against Assad, not unlike the early days of the anti-government protests that erupted in 2011.

The peaceful 2011 protests were met with a **brutal government crackdown** and turned into a **civil war** that has devastated the country. More than 400,000 people have been killed, millions displaced and large parts of the country remain outside of government control.

The parliamentary **elections are scheduled for next month**. Originally due in April, the elections were delayed twice because of restrictions imposed to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

But testing is lacking and authorities have reported only 152 cases and six deaths in government-controlled parts of the country.

06.12.20

30 years of quake shear wave data, detect structures at the core-mantle boundary

06.12.20

Scientists detect unexpected widespread structures near Earth's core
published in the June 12 by University of Maryland

Earthquakes send sound waves through the Earth. Seismograms record the echoes as those waves travel along the core-mantle boundary, diffracting and bending around dense rock structures. New research from University of Maryland provides the first broad view

of these structures, revealing them to be much more widespread than previously known.
Credit: Doyeon Kim/University of Maryland

University of Maryland geophysicists analyzed thousands of recordings of seismic waves, sound waves traveling through the Earth, to identify echoes from the boundary between Earth's molten core and the solid mantle layer above it. The echoes revealed more widespread, heterogeneous structures—areas of unusually dense, hot rock—at the core-mantle boundary than previously known.

Scientists are unsure of the composition of these structures, and previous studies have provided only a limited view of them. Better understanding their shape and extent can help reveal the geologic processes happening deep inside Earth. This knowledge may provide clues to the workings of plate tectonics and the evolution of our planet.

The new research provides the first comprehensive view of the core-mantle boundary over a wide area with such detailed resolution. The study was published in the June 12, 2020, issue of the journal Science.

The researchers focused on echoes of seismic waves traveling beneath the Pacific Ocean basin. Their analysis revealed a previously unknown structure beneath the volcanic Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific and showed that the structure beneath the Hawaiian Islands is much larger than previously known.

"By looking at thousands of core-mantle boundary echoes at once, instead of focusing on a few at a time, as is usually done, we have gotten a totally new perspective," said Doyeon Kim, a postdoctoral fellow in the UMD Department of Geology and the lead author of the paper. "This is showing us that the core-mantle boundary region has lots of structures that can produce these echoes, and that was something we didn't realize before because we only had a narrow view."

The above image shows how areas of hot, dense rock called ultralow-velocity zones deep inside the earth bend and diffract sound waves produced by earthquakes. In a new analysis of the diffracted waves recorded by seismograms, UMD geologists reveal a new ULVZ under Marquesas and a bigger ULVZ beneath Hawaii than previously known.

Credit: Doyeon Kim/University of Maryland

Earthquakes generate seismic waves below Earth's surface that travel thousands of miles. When the waves encounter changes in rock density, temperature or composition, they change speed, bend or scatter, producing echoes that can be detected. Echoes from nearby structures arrive more quickly, while those from larger structures are louder. By measuring the travel time and amplitude of these echoes as they arrive at seismometers in different locations, scientists can develop models of the physical properties of rock hidden below the surface. This process is similar to the way bats echolocate to map their environment.

For this study, Kim and his colleagues looked for echoes generated by a specific type of wave, called a shear wave, as it travels along the core-mantle boundary. In a recording

from a single earthquake, known as a seismogram, echoes from diffracted shear waves can be hard to distinguish from random noise. But looking at many seismograms from many earthquakes at once can reveal similarities and patterns that identify the echoes hidden in the data.

Using a machine learning algorithm called Sequencer, the researchers analyzed 7,000 seismograms from hundreds of earthquakes of 6.5 magnitude and greater occurring around the Pacific Ocean basin from 1990 to 2018. Sequencer was developed by the new study's co-authors from Johns Hopkins University and Tel Aviv University to find patterns in radiation from distant stars and galaxies. When applied to seismograms from earthquakes, the algorithm discovered a large number of shear wave echoes.

"Machine learning in earth science is growing rapidly and a method like Sequencer allows us to be able to systematically detect seismic echoes and get new insights into the structures at the base of the mantle, which have remained largely enigmatic," Kim said.

The study revealed a few surprises in the structure of the core-mantle boundary.

Earthquakes, seen as yellow stars here, send sound waves through the Earth. Seismograms, seen as blue triangles here, record the echoes as those waves travel along the core-mantle boundary, diffracting and bending around dense rock structures. New research from University of Maryland provides the first broad view of these structures, revealing them to be much more widespread than previously known. Credit: Doyeon Kim/University of Maryland

"We found echoes on about 40% of all seismic wave paths," said Vedran Lekic, an associate professor of geology at UMD and a co-author of the study. "That was surprising because we were expecting them to be more rare, and what that means is the anomalous structures at the core-mantle boundary are much more widespread than previously thought."

The scientists found that the large patch of very dense, hot material at the core-mantle boundary beneath Hawaii produced uniquely loud echoes, indicating that it is even larger than previous estimates. Known as ultralow-velocity zones (ULVZs), such patches are found at the roots of volcanic plumes, where hot rock rises from the core-mantle boundary region to produce volcanic islands. The ULVZ beneath Hawaii is the largest known.

This study also found a previously unknown ULVZ beneath the Marquesas Islands.

"We were surprised to find such a big feature beneath the Marquesas Islands that we didn't even know existed before," Lekic said. "This is really exciting, because it shows how the Sequencer algorithm can help us to contextualize seismogram data across the globe in a way we couldn't before."