

Ynet-News, July 19, 2020 – Sunday

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Ministers approved 750 shekels to all citizens to jump-start the economy
Sunday approved

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Netanyahu required to attend court graft trial three times per week in January 2021

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Chief Rabbi Yosef ends kashrut monopoly utilizing global experts to ensure kosher

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Jerusalem and Tel Aviv anti-gov't rallies yield 28 arrests for damaged property

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Officers use water cannons in Jerusalem & tear gas in Tel Aviv to disperse protests

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Iran mishaps continue; power plant transformer exploded & fire at cellophane factory

Mid-January 2021 (July 19, 2020 News) - - - News Placed in Dec 15 spot – Tuesday
Fragmented Comet 141P/Machholz-2 will pass Sun Dec 15 & 0.52 AU from Earth in
mid-January Comet discovered in 1994, seen in 1999, 2015, will return Jan 2021

07.19.20 – Su - - -
Ministers approved 750 shekels to all citizens to jump-start the economy
Sunday approved

07.19.20
Ministers approve NIS 6 billion for coronavirus payout
The original plan to distribute at least 750 shekels to each citizen came under attack from
economists and the opposition factions in the Knesset claiming they were an attempt to
buy silence from anti Netanyahu protesters
Itamar Eichner, Gad Lior | Updated: 07.19.20 , 18:26

The government on Sunday approved the budgetary request by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a cash stipend to citizens announced last week though ministers insisted on a more deliberate effort to help those in need and not a universal distribution to all.

Netanyahu and Finance Minister Israel Katz said the government would deliver 750 shekels for each citizen and up to 3000 shekels for each family.

The plan drew condemnation from many economists and the parliamentary opposition who called it an attempt to buy off the public in order to stop the daily demonstrations calling for the prime minister's resignation over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout as well as the corruption cases now being heard against him in the courts.

The inner cabinet on economy comprised by the prime minister, Defense Minister Gantz, Finance Minister Israel Katz and Economic Minister Amir Peretz – will meet in the evening hours to determine how the money is to be distributed with legislation to be tabled by Tuesday according to the government's statement released at the end of the cabinet meeting.

Netanyahu told ministers the six-billion-shekel influx of funds to citizens would jump-start economic activity. "Speed is of the essence," he told the government insisting that any plan that would place criteria for identifying those in need, would take too long.

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Netanyahu required to attend court graft trial three times per week in January 2021

07.19.20

Judge: PM must be in court 3 times per week when graft trial calls witnesses in January
Judge rules that witness cross-examination stage will begin at start of 2021, after Netanyahu's attorney asked court to postpone trial due to coronavirus, saying he can't question witnesses 'with a mask on'

Yael Freidson| Updated: 07.19.20 , 12:09

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be required to attend court three times per week when his corruption trial begins calling witnesses in January 2021, Jerusalem District Court ruled Sunday.

Netanyahu did not appear in court as the trial resumed Sunday for a procedural hearing following a two-month hiatus, as his presence was not required.

Two of his co-defendants, Ynet publisher Arnon Mozes and former Bezeq boss Shaul Elovitch, were also exempt from appearing at the hearing. Elovitch, who is charged in Case 4000, decided to attend voluntarily.

In Case 4000, the prime minister is suspected of taking bribes and acting in a conflict of interest by promoting regulations worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Bezeq and its then-majority shareholder Elovitch. In return, the prime minister allegedly received favorable coverage on the Walla! News website, which is owned by Bezeq.

Elovitch's attorney Michal Rosen-Ozer on Sunday called for a halt to the trial due to "the investigation's tricks." The attorney claimed investigators tried to recruit Elovitch's son as a state witness.

Netanyahu's attorney Yossi Segev also asked for the trial to be postponed for six months due to the coronavirus crisis, adding he could not cross-examine witnesses while all present were required to wear masks due to coronavirus regulations.

"I cannot interrogate witnesses when the witness is sitting with a mask on," Segev said. "How can a cross-examination be performed when I have a mask on, the witness has a mask on and the judge has a mask on?"

He added: "I came here today when I am not ready. I suggest we meet here again in six months, after the coronavirus, when we will be smarter."

Prosecutor Liat Ben Ari responded by saying that in recent months no one from Netanyahu's defense team requested to see the investigation material in preparation for the trial, and Segev's plea for postponement wasn't warranted.

Judge Rivka Friedman-Feldman, who heads the judicial panel for the trial then ruled the cross-examination stage will begin in January 2021, with three weekly hearings.

Friedman-Feldman said the hearings will take place on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and the defendants will be required to attend.

Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals in which he is alleged to have received lavish gifts from billionaire friends and exchanged regulatory favors with media moguls for more favorable coverage of himself and his family.

The hearing was designed to the defense and prosecution a final opportunity to update the court on their progress in examining the investigation material, before the trial enters the cross-examination stage.

Netanyahu denies wrongdoing, painting the accusations as a media-orchestrated witch-hunt pursued by a biased law enforcement system.

The trial, which began in May, resumes as Netanyahu faces widespread discontent over his government's handling of the coronavirus crisis. Israelis have been increasingly taking to streets to demand his resignation.

Mozes is a defendant in Case 2000, which concerns alleged discussions between him and Netanyahu over a quid pro quo of positive media for the prime minister in return for Netanyahu weakening Yedioth's main rival newspaper Israel Hayom.

In the third case, Case 1000, Netanyahu is accused of receiving expensive gifts worth up to one million shekels from Israeli Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer.

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Chief Rabbi Yosef ends kashrut monopoly utilizing global experts to ensure kosher

07.19.20

Rabbinate drops kosher demand to break food import monopolies

Move launched in bid to lower prices for Israeli consumers, and will instead utilize experts and insiders to decide whether a product is kosher without the need for the manufacturer's cooperation

Kobi Nachshoni | Published: 07.19.20 , 10:23

In an effort to encourage food imports and lower prices on Israeli supermarket shelves, the Chief Rabbinate has decided to exempt importers from presenting a certificate of supervision from a recognized local kashrut agency as a condition for receiving a kosher stamp in the country.

The decision was made by the Chief Rabbinate's Rabbinical Council, after its members approved a proposal by the council president, Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, who called for the rabbinate to dabble in a kind of "industrial espionage" to ensure the products are indeed kosher.

The Chief Rabbinate's main motive is to bypass manufacturers who often prevent competition in the local market.

The so-called "cornflakes reform" initiative was launched about four years ago, and pledged to remove legal, regulatory and other barriers to imports, which had preserved an ongoing monopoly by exclusive importers and local manufacturers.

Until the reform, products from a brand such as Coca-Cola could not be imported to Israel because a local franchise holder already produced the company's products, thereby preventing competition that could have lowered prices.

Today, however, the soft drink giant's products can be purchased from another official manufacturer abroad and imported to Israel.

The reform, however, did not take into account products' kashrut certification, almost completely torpedoing the prospect of parallel imports to Israel, as the law states that imported products cannot be marketed as kosher without authorization from the Chief Rabbinate.

Official importers usually obtain these certificates quite easily, because they usually have a certification from kosher agencies abroad who oversee the production process to make sure it complies with Jewish dietary law.

Parallel importers, on the other hand, find it difficult to obtain these certificates as manufacturers usually prohibit independent inspectors in their factories, so that they can eliminate competition by having a sole importer who can charge a higher price.

About two years ago, the Rabbinate announced an experimental move to waive its requirement for a kosher certificate for some products and instead promised to use the official importers' own kosher supervisors to evaluate the production process.

But it soon became clear that they too were committed to the commercial interests of the manufacturers who employ them as they often refused to provide information that might encourage competition and **end their monopoly**.

According to the recently approved decision, the Chief Rabbinate will completely **bypass the manufacturers by using private external parties to gather information on the raw materials and production procedures**.

The Chief Rabbinate will also **utilize the assistance of global experts in the field to determine whether or not a product is kosher** - without any need for first-hand supervision.

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv anti-gov't rallies yield 28 arrests for damaged property

07.19.20

Wave of arrests following anti-gov't rallies in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv

Police says it will seek to extend the **remand of protester who attacked an officer in Jerusalem and 6 demonstrators accused of damaging property during Tel Aviv rally; 28 arrests were made at two locations**

Ynet, News agencies | Published: **07.19.20** , 08:46

Israeli police made a wave of arrests following mass, anti-government rallies held in Jerusalem in Tel Aviv on **Saturday evening**.

Thousands of protesters gathered at Charles Clore Park **in Tel Aviv and in front of Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem** with signs reading “Out of touch. We’re fed up,” in response to what they see as a bungled government response to the economic fallout from the new coronavirus.

It was the second week of demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu government’s response, which critics say has provided too little assistance and doesn’t offer a safety net for hundreds of thousands of self-employed workers and business owners to weather the crisis.

Israel Police said **13 protesters had been arrested at Habima Square in Tel Aviv and 15 demonstrators had been detained at Paris Square in Jerusalem**.

Police said they **will ask the court to extend the remand of the protester who attacked an officer in Jerusalem and six demonstrators accused of damaging property during the rally in Tel Aviv**.

During Saturday's protests, **police used water cannons to disperse the crowd of 1,500 people around Netanyahu's residence, while in Tel Aviv, police used tear gas to try to stop the demonstrators from marching through the streets**.

Israel appeared to have largely contained a first wave of coronavirus infections earlier this year, but a reopening that critics say was hasty sent infections soaring and the country has begun to reimpose new restrictions on gatherings. The crisis has battered the economy and sent unemployment skyrocketing.

07.18.20 – Sa - - -

Officers use water cannons in Jerusalem & tear gas in Tel Aviv to disperse protests

07.18.20

Israelis protest against Netanyahu's handling of coronavirus crisis

Police officers use water cannons to disperse the crowd of 1,500, gathered outside PM's residence in Jerusalem; at least 2 protesters were arrested; in Tel Aviv thousands gathered at a rally by the beach

Reuters| Published: 07.18.20 , 23:42

Israeli police used water cannons to disperse demonstrators around Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence on Saturday as protests mounted against him over alleged corruption and his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

Hit by high unemployment, a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases and reimposed coronavirus curbs, Israelis have taken to the streets in almost daily demonstrations against the government. Public anger has been compounded by corruption alleged against Netanyahu, who went on trial in May for bribery, fraud and breach of trust - charges he denies.

In Jerusalem, 1,500 people gathered outside the prime minister's residence and then marched through the streets, calling for Netanyahu's resignation as police used water cannons to disperse the crowds. At least two people were arrested, police said.

In Tel Aviv's Charles Clore Park thousands gathered at a rally by the beach, demanding better state aid to businesses hurt by coronavirus restrictions and to people who have lost jobs or have been put on unpaid leave. Police said several people were also arrested at the Tel Aviv rally.

Israel's Reshet TV News said police in Tel Aviv used tear gas to try to disperse the demonstrators who had marched through the streets. It broadcast footage of scuffles with police. Police said arrests were under way at that demonstration.

Israel reopened schools and many businesses in May, lifting restrictions that had flattened an infection curve after a partial lockdown imposed in March.

But with the infection rate rising sharply in the past few weeks, many public health experts said the government had moved too fast while neglecting to take the necessary epidemiological steps to control the pandemic once the economy reopened.

A poll by the nonpartisan Israel Democracy Institute on Tuesday found only 29.5% of the public trust Netanyahu's handling of the crisis.

Netanyahu has announced numerous economic aid packages, some of which have been slow to come through while others have drawn criticism for being ineffective.

Israel, with a population of 9 million, has reported alm

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Global deaths 600,000+, US 140,119, Brazil 78,772, England 45,358, Mexico 38,888

07.19.20

Global coronavirus deaths top 600,000 as countries battle surges

U.S. heads list with 140,119 deaths as WHO again reports single-day record of new infections with 259,848; president of Iran, which has region's worst outbreak, says as many as 25 million Iranians could have been infected

Associated Press| Published: 07.19.20, 11:12

Countries from the U.S. to South Africa to India were struggling to hold down rising rates of the coronavirus, as global deaths from COVID-19 surged past 600,000 in a sign of how far off the world remains from a return to normalcy.

While the U.S. leads global infections, South Africa now ranks as the fifth worst-hit country in the pandemic with 350,879 cases -- roughly half of all those confirmed on the African continent. Its struggles are a sign of trouble to come for nations with even fewer health care resources.

India on Sunday reported a 24-hour record surge of 38,902 new cases, taking the country's total to 1,077,618.

Elsewhere in Asia, China confirmed 13 new cases in the northwestern city of Urumqi while South Korea reported less than 40 additional cases for a second straight day.

The Urumqi outbreak is the latest to pop up since China largely contained the domestic spread of the virus in March.

At least 30 people have been infected and authorities are conducting universal testing in communities where cases were discovered, later to be expanded to other parts of the city and major businesses.

South Korean authorities are also struggling to suppress an uptick in local infections, with 34 additional cases, 21 of them domestic and 13 from overseas, raising the country's total to 13,745 with 295 deaths.

Both countries are mandating testing and enforcing two-week quarantines on all overseas arrivals.

After a one-day respite, COVID-19 cases in the Australian state of Victoria rose again, prompting a move to make masks mandatory in metropolitan Melbourne and the nearby shire of Mitchell.

Health officials on Sunday recorded 363 new cases in the past 24 hours. Two men and a woman in their 90s died, taking the national death toll from COVID-19 to 122.

The World Health Organization on Saturday again reported a single-day record of new infections with 259,848.

South Africa now trails the U.S., Brazil, India -- all far more populous countries -- in the number of infections, surpassing Peru, after health authorities announced 13,285 new cases.

South Africa's new coronavirus epicenter, Gauteng province, hosts the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria and one-quarter of the country's population of 57 million, with many poor people living in crowded conditions in the middle of a frosty Southern Hemisphere winter.

"The simple fact is that many South Africans are sitting ducks because they cannot comply with World Health Organization protocols on improved hygiene and social distancing," the foundation of former South African archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu and his wife, Leah, warned in a statement.

Global COVID-19 deaths have hit 601,549, according to Johns Hopkins University data. The United States tops the list with 140,119 deaths, followed by 78,772 in Brazil and 45,358 in the United Kingdom and 38,888 in Mexico, where a surge in cases have frustrated plans to reopen the economy.

The number of confirmed infections worldwide has passed 14.2 million, out of which 3.7 million are in the United States. There are over 2 million in Brazil and more than 1 million in India. Experts believe the true numbers around the world are higher because of testing shortages and data collection issues in some nations.

Infections are soaring in U.S. states like Florida, Texas, Arizona, fueled by the haphazard lifting of lockdowns and the resistance of some Americans to wearing masks.

Teams of military medics have been deployed in Texas and California to help hospitals deal with a deluge of patients who are flooding emergency rooms in parts of the U.S. Some patients are being moved into hallways to make room for most seriously ill and nurses are working extra shifts to keep up with the surge.

Patients struggling to breathe are being placed on ventilators in emergency wards since intensive care units are full, officials say.

Patients are waiting "hours and hours" to get admitted, said Dr. Alison Haddock of the Baylor College of Medicine in the state of Texas, which reported a new daily record for virus deaths Friday and more than 10,000 confirmed cases for the fourth consecutive day. More than 80 infants have tested positive for the virus in the state.

"I've never seen anything like this COVID surge," said Haddock, who has worked in emergency rooms since 2007. "We're doing our best, but we're not an ICU."

The surge of infections means that millions of American children are unlikely to return to classrooms full time in the fall.

Police in Barcelona are limiting access to some of the city's beaches because sunbathers are ignoring regulations amid a resurgence of the coronavirus. Authorities in Amsterdam

are urging people not to visit the city's famous red light district and have closed off some of the historic district's narrow streets because they are too busy.

Local governments in India continued to reimpose focused lockdowns in several parts of the country following a surge in cases. And in Iran, the president made the startling announcement that as many as 25 million Iranians could have been infected, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

President Hassan Rouhani cited a new Health Ministry study that has not been made public. Iran has the Middle East's worst outbreak with more than 270,000 confirmed cases.

In Bangladesh, confirmed cases surpassed 200,000 but experts say the number is much higher as the country lacks adequate labs for testing. Most people in rural areas have stopped wearing masks and are thronging shopping centers ahead of the Islamic festival Eid al-Adha this month.

Scientists, meanwhile, poured cold water on British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's hope that the country may return to normal by Christmas, saying that, without a vaccine, normal life was a long way off.

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Iran FM visits Iraq PM in Baghdad on Hezbollah militia & gas and electricity imports

07.19.20

Iran FM visits Baghdad ahead of Iraq PM trip to Saudi Arabia
Zarif's visit, the first by an Iranian official since the killing of Qassem Soleimani by the U.S. in January, comes as Baghdad tussles with Tehran-backed Shiite militia groups, some of which have become increasingly difficult to control

Associated Press| Published: 07.19.20 , 21:10

Iran's foreign minister on Sunday stressed that Iran-Iraq relations would not be "shaken" ahead of the Iraqi prime minister's planned visit this week to Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival.

Several hours after Mohammad Javad Zarif landed in Baghdad, three mortars struck near the U.S. Embassy in the heavily fortified Green Zone without causing any losses, according to two security officials. The Green Zone is the seat of Iraq's government and home to many foreign embassies. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein, right, and visiting Iranian counterpart Mohammad

Zarif's visit to Iraq was the first since the American assassination of top Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani outside Baghdad's international airport in January. The drone strike catapulted Iraq to the brink of a U.S.-Iran proxy war that could have destabilized the Middle East.

The visit also came as the Iraqi government tussles with Iran-backed militia groups, some of which have become increasingly difficult to control in the absence of Soleimani and senior Iranian militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was also killed in the strike. In late June, Iraq raided the headquarters of the Iran-backed group Kataib Hezbollah over a spate of rocket and mortar attacks targeting the U.S. installations in Iraq. Most of the fighters were later released.

Facing near-weekly rocket attacks, the U.S. Embassy recently installed C-RAM defense systems. It was unclear if the system was operational during the attack Sunday afternoon. The daytime attack was unusual; most have occurred after nightfall. The U.S. has blamed Kataib Hezbollah for previous attacks.

Upon his arrival, Zarif paid a visit to the site where Soleimani was killed, saying "Iran-Iraq relations will not be shaken" despite the general's death, which Zarif called "a major loss" in the fight against the Islamic State group. Soleimani led Iran's expeditionary Quds Force and was the architect of its regional military activities.

The Iranian minister met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a day before the premier was set to fly to Riyadh, then to Tehran on Tuesday.

"Iraq seeks to assert its balanced and positive role in making peace and progress in the region," al-Kadhimi tweeted during the meeting with Zarif.

Al-Kadhimi's advisors said his visit to Riyadh seeks to open new avenues for economic cooperation, while also enhancing Iraq's potential to be a regional mediator. But here, al-Kadhimi walks a fine line.

Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia accept Iraq playing the role of intermediary, said Hisham Daoud, the premier's advisor. "The Gulf and the Americans want Iraq to have its sovereignty, and to them this means distance from Iran."

Iran, meanwhile, "wants Iraq to be a messenger, but this will not be acceptable to Iraq and to al-Kadhimi," he said.

Iraq's Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said he and Zarif "stressed that we want balanced relations with all neighboring countries, based on Iraqi interests, mutual interests and non-interference in internal affairs."

"We stressed the necessity of keeping the region and Iraq out from international tensions and protecting Iraqi sovereignty," Hussein told reporters after their meeting.

The two diplomats discussed trade, as border points were recently reopened and fortified with additional security forces in line with reform plans devised by Iraq's government.

Talks encompassed energy and investment, with Iraq relying heavily on Iranian gas and electricity imports to meet power demands.

"Iran has good relations with Iraq on the energy level and will continue to," said Zarif. "There are many agreements with Iraq that will be activated."

07.19.20 – Su - - -

Iran mishaps continue; power plant transformer exploded & fire at cellophane factory

07.19.20

Iran 'mishaps' continue with power plant blast

A fire was also reported to have damaged a cellophane printing factory in Iran's northwestern city of Tabriz, the latest in a string of incidents occurring at both military and civilian sites in recent weeks

AFP| Updated: 07.19.20 , 19:41

An explosion hit a power plant in the central Iranian province of Isfahan on Sunday, state news agency IRNA reported, saying it was over faulty equipment and caused no casualties.

A "worn out transformer... at Isfahan's Islamabad thermal power plant exploded at around 5am today," the managing director of Isfahan's electricity company Said Mohseni told the AFP.

The facility returned to normal working conditions after about two hours and Isfahan's power supply was uninterrupted, he added.

Also on Sunday, a fire broke out at a cellophane factory in northwest Iran on Sunday, the ILNA news agency reported, posting a video of thick black smoke rising from the site. The fire was in the town of Sheikh Hassan in East Azerbaijan province.

These incidents are the latest in a string of fires and explosions at military and civilian sites across Iran in recent weeks.

Two explosions rocked Tehran in late June, one near a military site and the other in a health center, the latter killing 19 people.

Fires or blasts also hit a shipyard in southern Iran last week, a factory south of Tehran with two dead and the Natanz nuclear complex in central Iran earlier this month.

Iranian authorities called the Natanz fire an accident without elaborating and later said they would not reveal the cause, citing "security reasons".

The string of fires and explosions have prompted speculation in Iran that they may be the result of sabotage by arch-enemy Israel.

Jerusalem accuses the Islamic Republic of seeking to acquire a nuclear bomb while Tehran insists its nuclear program is entirely peaceful.

Mid-January 2021 Comet discovered in 1994, seen in 1999, 2015, will return in 2021
Fragmented Comet 141P/Machholz-2 will pass Sun Dec 15 & 0.52 AU from Earth in
mid-January

COMET 141P/MACHHOLZ 2 (Perihelion 2020 December 15)

Prior to this comet's discovery return in 1994 (no. 193) it fragmented into several pieces, some of which were visually detectable during that return (with the primary component becoming as bright as 7th magnitude). The secondary components have all faded away since then -- although the brightest one was still visually detectable for a while during the 1999 return (no. 273) -- and the primary itself has faded quite a bit, appearing as only a vague, diffuse object of 12th magnitude in 2015 (no. 581); meanwhile, a new faint component was detected in CCD images during that return. The viewing geometry for the 2020 return is moderately favorable, with the comet's passing 0.52 AU from Earth in mid-January 2021; how bright the primary component might become, and whether or not any other components might be present, remains to be seen.