

Ynet-News, July 31, 2020 – Friday

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Continued anti-PM protests, 5 in Tel Aviv were injured by gang of PM supporters

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Thousands gather for anti-Netanyahu protest at PM's Jerusalem home

Member of 'crime minister' protest outside prime minister's official residence says they 'will not let Netanyahu burn this country down', while eight members of the pro-Netanyahu La Familia gang were arrested after rioting nearby

Itay Blumenthal, Haim Golditch | Updated: 07.30.20 , 23:42

Around 1,000 protesters against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gathered outside his official residence in Jerusalem on Thursday evening and more assembled outside the home of Public Security Minister Amir Ohama in Tel Aviv, as police continued to track down those behind Tuesday night's violent attacks on protesters.

In Jerusalem, where daily protests have centered outside the prime minister's official Balfour Street residence, protesters vowed that they would not be deterred by what they called Netanyahu's incitement.

Police have been deployed in large numbers to the planned sites of the protests, aiming to prevent further violence.

But the La Familia gang, whose members were blamed for attacks on protesters, rioted at a location blocks away from the demonstration, chanting death to leftists and assaulting a television crew. At least eight people were arrested, as others vowed they "would not quietly by while the state crumbles in front of our eyes."

The group said it has "no interest in politics, only an interest in the extremist anarchists who have crossed the line."

A member of the “crime minister” protest, Yishai Hadas, said that its **members** would “**turn out this evening for another protest**” in a massive series of protests at Balfour Street.”

“We will not let Netanyahu burn this country down,” he said. “The police, Jerusalem police in particular, are very well acquainted with La Familia and know their methods of stopping our people. We are aware of the level of incitement and we are not afraid. We won’t be stopped. Not by incitement and not by Netanyahu.”

Thursday was already expected to be a particularly tense day for the police as they dealt with the safety of worshipers at the Western Wall on the occasion of Tisha B'Av, the of Jewish mourning for the two biblical Temples, and demonstrations outside Netanyahu's official residence.

After demonstrations in Tel Aviv escalated into violent clashes, the **police were preparing Thursday for higher numbers** at the **demonstration** outside Netanyahu's home.

The head of Jerusalem District Operations Branch, Deputy Superintendent Shlomi Bachar, told Ynet on Wednesday night that this was a challenging time for the police. He said that despite harsh criticism of the police in recent weeks, the Jerusalem District was learning from incidents at previous demonstrations.

On **Tuesday** night, anti-Netanyahu **protesters in Tel Aviv were attacked**, apparently **by a gang of supporters of the prime minister**.

At least **five** people were **wounded** in the attacks and **five people have been arrested** so far as police examine video footage taken of the attacks.

“In light of what happened in Tel Aviv, we will also be preparing to secure the demonstrators in a very wide circle to prevent friction between the protests themselves and to prevent acts of violence between civilians,” Bachar said.

The Jerusalem District was planning to deploy hundreds of police officers for Thursday across all areas of the city.

“There will be overt and covert activity,” Bachar said. “The goal is to prevent the violence that we have already seen.”

The increased deployment of the **police** in **intended to allow all protesters** at the scene. Furthermore, the compound itself has been expanded to allow more protesters to enter.

07.30.20 – Th - - -

Sacrifice of sheep & calves in 4-day Muslim festival is down 20% to half by economy

07.30.20

In West Bank, Eid sacrifices plummet as Palestinian virus cases soar

'Who can afford **sheep to sacrifice**?' asks a livestock merchant, 'People are unable to cover expenses for their children, there's no work', 'the coronavirus is weighing down on us' says another as 75 deaths are already recorded

Reuters| Updated: **07.30.20** , 18:53

Slaughterhouses **typically crowded** with Palestinian **Muslims buying sheep** for the **annual Eid al-Adha "feast of sacrifice"** were nearly empty this week as coronavirus curbs weigh on the economy in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has imposed a partial lockdown over areas under its control to battle a surge in new cases, forcing many businesses to close and sending **unemployment** to an estimated **18 percent**.

"Who exactly can afford (sheep) to sacrifice?," livestock merchant Daoud Ebayat asked at a hillside market in Bethlehem. "People are unable to cover expenses for their children, there's no work."

Around 115,000 sheep and ten thousand calves were **sold** during Eid al-Adha in the West Bank and **in East Jerusalem last year**, according to ministry data.

But with many out of work and public servants on reduced pay as the PA attempts to weather a financial crisis, local officials say **sheep sales have plummeted**.

"There will be a **decrease**, some are saying, of **about 20% or more**," said Tareq Abu Laban, an official at the Palestinian agriculture ministry, noting that final figures were not yet available.

In Bethlehem, several dozen customers haggled with merchants at the sparsely-crowded market, hoping for a bargain on **sheep** that Ebayat says **sell for around 2,000 shekels (\$588) each**. The average monthly income in the West Bank is \$350.

Many **buyers share larger animals**, such as cows or camels, with their extended families to manage the cost ahead of the **four-day Muslim festival**, which begins on Friday.

Eyad Daraghme, who runs a slaughterhouse in Al-Bireh, pointed to **empty animal pens** at his sprawling facility as evidence of Palestinians' economic hardship.

"These **sheds used to be full** of livestock and sacrifices, **at least 6,000** available for slaughter," Daraghme said. Behind him, a lone calf walked around an otherwise empty pen.

Fawzat Rayyan, a livestock breeder in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, said that by this point in a **typical year** he would have sold **120 animals**.

"**This year** it is **hardly half** that number ... the coronavirus is weighing down on us," he said.

Palestinians have reported 75 deaths and over 10,000 COVID-19 cases in the occupied West Bank, the majority of them in the last two months.

07.29.20 – We - - -

Anti- government protester beaten by organized group says cops abandoned them

07.29.20-

Anti-Netanyahu protester beaten by mob says cops 'abandoned' him

'I am afraid, mainly because I believe the police has chosen a side' says Shai Sekler, who required five stitches after a bottle was smashed over his head in a violent attack, allegedly ignored by police, following anti-government rally in Tel Aviv

Itay Blumenthal | Published: 07.29.20 , 23:12

One of the anti-government demonstrators, who violently attacked during a rally against in Tel Aviv, said Wednesday the police "abandoned us and disappeared" as his pleas for help went unanswered.

Protesters at a march calling for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's removal from office came under violent attack in Tel Aviv on Tuesday night. At least five of the protesters were wounded and required hospitalization in attacks attributed to pro-Netanyahu activists. Several people have been arrested over the attacks.

Twenty-seven-year-old Shai Sekler said before the attack, group of approximately ten people joined the demonstration and then suddenly began attacking the protesters with various objects. "At first we thought they were undercover detectives because they walked around as an organized group," he said.

"A group of ten people dressed in black, began attacking the protesters with knives, batons and glass bottles," Sekler told Ynet. "I ran to help the wounded and then I was attacked myself with a sharp object," he added. He added the attack was allegedly ignored by several undercover police officers who were present in the area. "The police abandoned us and disappeared exactly in the area where we were attacked," he said.

Sekler said a bottle had been smashed over his head and he was taken to the Ichilov Medical Center in Tel Aviv, where he got needed stitches.

"One of them attacked me with a sharp object and shortly after two other men jumped me. After the incident, I ran after them to get their faces on video and notify the police." Sekler and several protesters chased after the protesters until they reached the Kaplan Street. "We saw a few undercover cops there, I was all bloodied up and asked them for help, to call a cop car or an ambulance, and they simply ignored me," said Sekler. "The moment that frightened me the most, was when I realized the police are not here to keep order or to defend our civil rights."

After the attack, some argued it was nothing more than a scuffle between fans of rival soccer teams. "I will not belittle the incident by saying it was a group of fans of some team or another," said Sekler. "It was an organized group, which has been incited by the indicted man in Balfour and his envoys in the media."

Sekler added: "I am afraid, mainly because I believe the **police has chosen a side**. Yet, we cannot fight for our country. We have no choice but to take to the street and fight for our democracy."

Tamar, another protesters, was hit with pepper spray during the attack. "**They were walking among us** along the Ibn Gvirol Street, **quite close to each other** but not too close, and **then**, when we got to the cinematheque, **one of them shouted 'Now!'**, And **they started hitting** one of the protesters."

According to Tamar, "there were some who tried to break the fight and keep them away, but they continued to throw chairs, before finally fleeing as a group to a another street while spraying tear gas."

Alon, another protesters, said he recognized the assailants, who watched a basketball game in one of Tel Aviv's restaurants prior to the attack.

"They watched the game and decided to celebrate with violence," Alon said. "Throughout the whole rally we were escorted by police officers, but as we got to the cinematheque there were suddenly no cops and no detectives. And although we called for police, no one came."

Wednesday evening, three more suspects were arrested on **suspicion of involvement** in the "**various violent incidents**." According to police, various pieces of evidence were gathered, linking the three to the violence.

"The right to protest is a basic right," said the police in a statement, "the police will do all in its power to make sure this right is sustained, while fighting relentlessly against those who act with any sort of violence. We will continue to thoroughly investigate each case of violence and take all necessary actions in order to reach the truth and bring to justice those involved."

The attack sparked a series of condemnations from Israeli officials, including President Reuven Rivlin, who warned of escalating violence, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Netanyahu himself.

07.30.20 – Th - - -

Lebanon mountain club is where elite shelter in luxury escape from the country's crisis

07.30.20

'Life at the top': Lebanon mountain club dodges economic crisis

Around 200 of the country's most **wealthy families** find an escape in Faqra Club, a **private club** perched 1,600 meters (5,250 feet) **above the Mediterranean**, an **oasis of luxury** in an otherwise collapsing country

AFP| Updated: **07.30.20** , 21:40

Panama hats and designer sunglasses, champagne buckets and luxury cars: in the mountain resort town **of Faqra, Lebanon's** economic crisis is not immediately obvious.

Advertisement

Digging into a crunchy salad at an exclusive country club in the Lebanese mountains, Zeina el-Khalil said she was glad to have escaped here for the summer.

"The atmosphere in Beirut has become heavy and depressing. Reality is everywhere. But here we feel like we're in another country," she said.

Lebanon is mired in its worst economic crisis in decades, with the downturn sparking soaring inflation and plunging almost half the country's population into poverty.

For the better-off, any plans of holidays abroad have been dashed this year after banks prevented dollar withdrawals or transfers and the coronavirus pandemic further complicated international travel.

But around 200 of the country's most wealthy families have found an escape in Faqra Club, a private club perched 1,600 meters (5,250 feet) above the Mediterranean.

"Usually we spend our holidays abroad, but this year we can't travel for financial reasons and COVID-19," said the woman in her fifties with a golden tan.

Nestled in a mountain resort town famous for its ski slopes, the Faqra Club is an oasis of luxury in an otherwise collapsing country.

Its motto, according to the official website, is: "Life at the top."

Expensive cars packed the parking lot outside, while club members shuffled between its many facilities, which include a horse stable, a tennis court and a 9D movie theatre.

Around a long swimming pool, bronzed bodies sprawled on sofas and sun loungers, some sipping cocktails, as music blasted in the background.

"Life must go on," said Sara, a 26-year-old lawyer, a smile on her face.

"We won't stay trapped in the house," she told AFP from in the pool.

Sealed off from the many woes plaguing the rest of the country, the Faqra Club has become a magnet for those looking to make brisk business.

Many restaurants and stores have opened Faqra chains, with the hopes of softening the blow of an economic crisis that has seen the value of the Lebanese pound plummet against the dollar on the black market.

Along a bustling alley, around 40 kiosks dotted the side of the street, some displaying luxury swimsuits and silk Abayas.

Selim Heleiwa, who owns a high-end liquor store in Faqra, said that people here can afford the luxury, unlike the rest of their compatriots.

"The customers here suffer less from the crisis. They are often people who work or have bank accounts abroad," he told AFP.

Thousands of businesses across the country have closed, but for Heleiwa it is a "satisfactory" season, and he is not alone.

The Auberge de Faqra, the main hotel in Faqra Club, is fully booked every weekend, while landmark hotels across the country have shut down because of bankruptcy.

Its rate stands at 795,000 Lebanese pounds per night, equivalent to \$530 at the official rate of 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

But at the black market exchange rate, the stay costs only around \$100.

For those who have access to the greenback, the price is a bargain, even though the club has almost doubled its rate since last summer.

"Many of our customers have dollars. For them, the stay has actually become cheaper," said a hotel employee, who asked not to be named.

The relative prosperity on display in Faqra has not gone unnoticed.

In early July, a video showing a teenager flaunting a dollar banknote to a TV reporter caused a storm of social media criticism against an out of touch elite sheltered from the country's crisis.

But for Khalil, the criticism is unfounded.

"Getting the economy moving and making life better is not a bad thing," said the woman, who is a director of a Lebanese NGO that teaches underprivileged children.

"All the people here are trying to help the poor. If they are trying to live (at the same time)... that should not be seen in a negative light."

Leaving a nearby restaurant with his family, Sharif Zakka, a 38-year-old expatriate, echoed a similar sentiment.

"Being physically here doesn't make you disconnected from people," said the man who has rented a chalet for \$2,500 a month.

"It's (only) an escape."

Faqra Club owner Liliane Rahme said the club does not just benefit the rich.

It is also an economic lifeline for more than 200 employees, mostly young students, she told AFP. For its members, it also serves an important purpose.

"We don't want to die," she said.