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Government to vote on outline for full coronavirus lockdown

PM, ministers agree on outline, bypassing Coronavirus Cabinet; outdoor prayer services, protests, individual sports activities will be limited to one kilometer from home; essential factories, services will continue operating

Associated Press, Ynet| Published: 09.23.20 , 23:34

The government was set to vote Wednesday night on an outline for a full coronavirus lockdown which is set to take effect from this coming Friday until after the Jewish holiday season in mid-October.

According to the outline that will be brought before the government, essential factories and services will be able to continue operating during the closure.

Outdoor prayer services and protests will be limited to groups of up to 20 people and farther than 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from home. Synagogues will only be open on Yom Kippur and subject to the government's health directives.

Individual sports activities will also be limited to one kilometer from home. A decision on whether to close Ben Gurion Airport is still pending.

The decision was made in an **alternative cabinet** comprised of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and Justice Minister Avi Nissenkorn, **bypassing the Coronavirus Cabinet.**

The rest of the members of the Coronavirus **Cabinet**, which leads the government's response to the pandemic, and Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit **were only informed of the agreement after the fact.**

Earlier on Wednesday, an argument broke out between Netanyahu and Nissenkorn over further restrictions on protests against the premier that have been taking place outside of his Jerusalem residence in disregard of coronavirus regulations.

**For months, demonstrators** have been congregating outside the Netanyahu's residence on Jerusalem's Balfour Street to **demand his resignation** due to his indictments in three graft cases and what they deem to be his **bungled handling of the coronavirus pandemic** and the subsequent **financial crisis** – while many of them fail to wear protective face masks and observe social distancing.

Nissenkorn blasted Netanyahu's request to impose restrictions on protests, arguing it would make for an undemocratic move meant to curb criticism against the veteran head of state.

"We've agreed to go with [Netanyahu's] proposal and the experts' position to rule a general lockdown in a bid to reduce infections," Nissenkorn said. "But now, you've backtracked on your statements and wish to make a decision that will, in practice, only ban holding demonstrations on Balfour. This would make an illogical and undemocratic move, and it is also wrong for you. We **must not deviate from the stance of the professionals.**"

Netanyahu said in response that leaving the status quo intact **would create a loophole that would allow citizens to roam freely under the guise of protest** and suggested those who wish to criticize him would do so next to home.

Earlier Wednesday, Netanyahu pushed for the tightening of the newly implemented nationwide lockdown and even mulled declaring a state of emergency.

The **meeting** came **hours after** the Health Ministry said **Wednesday morning** that **31 people** had **died** from COVID-19 and 6,923 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Israel in the previous 24 hours, as the **raging outbreak** **showed no signs of slowing.**

The meeting, which was scheduled for 11:30am, was pushed back to the afternoon after Netanyahu held urgent consultations with various cabinet ministers.

The prime minister was **set to demand a broader closure**, immediate and significant **tightening of restrictions** and **shuttering of additional sectors of the economy**, **including Ben-Gurion International Airport.**

Netanyahu was apparently **looking for the legal solution to declaring a state of emergency.** The attorney general was said to be **working on the technical solution** to declaring a state of emergency.

According to government sources, however, Israel **Police** had already said it would **struggle to enforce the restrictions** if there were a general ban on all gatherings, including protests and prayers.

"It's a very **complex issue** and it's going to be a very long night," said one source. Another government source, however, said Israel is heading for a "total lockdown" with the only question remaining is whether it will **happen before or after Yom Kippur**, which **begins at sundown on Sunday**.

"At the moment we want to do it [impose total lockdown] before Yom Kippur, but [Interior Minister] Aryeh Deri is not ready to hear it," the source said. According to the official, "it is not inconceivable that in the end **it will be after Yom Kippur**."

Israel, a country of some 9 million people, now has one of the world's highest rates of coronavirus on a per capita basis, and health officials say hospitals are quickly approaching capacity. The government last week imposed a nationwide lockdown that closed schools, shopping malls, hotels and restaurants. Deputy Health Minister Yoav Kisch said earlier Wednesday that regulations would have to be tightened in the near future.

"Educational institutions will be closed, the economy will be limited to essential work, synagogues will have no indoor prayers, with arrangements for outdoor prayer, and demonstrations will be allowed without protesters traveling between cities," he told Channel 12 TV.

"Everyone will demonstrate where he wants, will pray where he wants and will stay at home. That is what is required now."

Israel won international praise for its handling of the outbreak last spring, **moving quickly to seal its borders** and impose a lockdown that appeared to contain the virus.

But the government reopened the economy too quickly, and a new outbreak has quickly spread throughout the summer. The economy, meanwhile, has not recovered from a serious downturn caused by the first lockdown.

The Health Ministry has **instructed hospitals to delay non-essential surgeries** and to **open additional coronavirus wards** as the number of serious cases continues to rise. Beyond further limiting economic activity, officials have **been discussing shuttering synagogues** and **clamping down on protests** — both of which risk **sparking a public backlash**.

The **limits** would **come at a time when** Jews are **celebrating the High Holidays** and when weekly demonstrations have been held against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

**09.23.20**

**Sudan discusses Arab-Israeli peace and removal from US terrorism list**

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**Sudan discusses Arab-Israeli peace and terrorism list with U.S.**

Sudanese, U.S. officials hold talks on how **peace could stabilize region** and secure two-state **solution for Israeli-Palestinian** question, discuss **removal of Sudan from** U.S. list of state sponsors of **terrorism**

Reuters| Published: **09.23.20** , 20:49

Sudan and the United States have discussed how Khartoum could advance Arab-Israeli peace, authorities said on Wednesday, adding the talks also covered the **removal** of the **former** hardline **foe of Israel** from a U.S. list of terrorism sponsors.

Meeting in the United Arab Emirates, a Sudanese delegation and U.S. officials held talks on how peace could stabilize the region and secure a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question, the ruling sovereign council said.

The **UAE**, a leading regional partner of the United States, and **Bahrain** **normalized** ties **with Israel** this month in **deals brokered by Washington**, the first Arab states in a quarter of a century to break a longstanding taboo.

In August, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo raised the issue of Sudan establishing ties with Israel during a visit. Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok told him at the time he had no mandate to do so.

A Sudanese team led by General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, head of the council, flew to the UAE on Sunday to hold talks with U.S. officials on several issues including the removal of Sudan from a U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Sudanese officials held "serious and frank talks" on the **future of Arab-Israeli** peace, which would **lead to "stability"** in the region and preserve the right of the Palestinian people to establish their state according to the vision of a two-state solution", a council statement said after the return of the delegation.

The two sides also discussed "the **role** that Sudan is **expected to play in achieving this peace,**" it said, without giving any details.

The council, made up of the military and civilians, has been in charge of Sudan since the toppling of autocrat Omar al-Bashir last year.

Ties with Israel are a sensitive issue in Sudan, which was among the hardline Arab foes of Israel under Bashir.

In **February**, **Burhan met** Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu in Uganda**, a meeting **condemned by Sudanese** protesters. He afterward cast doubt on any rapid normalization of relations, though Israeli aircraft soon began **overflying Sudan**.

The talks also tackled **lifting Sudan from the terrorism list**, which **hinders its ability** to access **foreign loans to tackle an economic crisis**, the council said, without giving details.

**09.23.20**

## Israel record 6,923 virus cases as 31 die in one day, 5-days before Yom Kippur

09.23.20

Israel sees record 6,923 new virus cases as 31 die in one day

Health Ministry says surge in testing after holiday weekend saw nearly 60,000 tests conducted; Gamzu tells Ynet that economy won't fully reopen right away after lockdown, 'no schools, no entertainment, no malls, no cafés,' he says

Adir Yanko, Yaron Drukman | Updated: 09.23.20, 11:44

Thirty-one people died from COVID-19 and a record 6,923 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Israel in the last 24 hours, the Health Ministry said Wednesday morning.

Nearly 60,000 tests were conducted after the holiday weekend, in which Jews in Israel and around the world celebrated the New Year.

The Health Ministry said 59,169 COVID-19 tests had been conducted, after the ministry failed to publish any new data on Tuesday. The figures put the contagion rate at an alarming 11.6%.

In the meantime, the coronavirus cabinet, which leads the government's response to the pandemic, was to reconvene on Wednesday morning after it failed Tuesday to reach a decision on further restrictions on Israeli society and economy in a bid to rein in the spread of the pathogen.

The cabinet concluded the meeting after nine hours of deliberations that centered chiefly on whether to impose restrictions on protests, most of which have been aimed recently against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and which he claims disregard the coronavirus regulations.

The Health Ministry said 631 patients were in a serious condition, including 163 people on ventilators. The national death toll from coronavirus-related complications rose to 1,316.

Coronavirus czar Prof. Ronni Gamzu told Ynet on Tuesday that if the government were to decide on banning protests, he would support the decision.

"Obviously when you take off your mask to shout during a demonstration or when your mask falls or moves aside in the heat of the moment, it is clear what is happening," he said.

He also said that the country would reopen slowly after the new lockdown, unlike in May when a rapid reopening was quickly followed by soaring infection rates.

"We will not reopen the way we did the last time, there will be no education system, no entertainment, no leisure, no malls and no restaurants. Everything will be very measured, very careful, very very gradual," he told Ynet.

Gamzu also presented the government with a proposal to close synagogues on Yom Kippur as part of necessary measures, sparking opposition from ministers from ultra-Orthodox parties as well as the prime minister.

"You are only allowed to go to the [Western] Wall if you live 1,000 meters from there, but you can come to Balfour from all over the country," Netanyahu said, referring to the protests outside his official Jerusalem residence.

"There must be one rule for prayers, protests, and all gatherings wherever they are. If not, the public will not listen to the directives, and the disease will reach horrifying magnitudes," Netanyahu said.

On Wednesday, ultra-Orthodox Shas party leader and Minister of Interior Aryeh Deri threatened his party would resign from the government if synagogues were shuttered on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement that is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

Israel has been under a nationwide lockdown since Friday in an effort to regain control over the spread of the virus, but has kept many private sector and public sector work places open.

09.23.20

Pentagon vows to keep Israel's military edge amid UAE jet sale

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Pentagon vows to keep Israel's military edge amid UAE jets sale

Defense Secretary Mark Esper says preserving 'Israel's qualitative military edge' is a 'cornerstone of our defense relationship' as U.S. is said to be in talks with UAE over the sale of advanced F-35 warplanes

AFP | Published: 09.23.20 , 08:53

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper pledged Tuesday to help maintain Israel's military superiority in the Middle East, amid its concerns over a possible U.S. sale of advanced F-35 jets to the United Arab Emirates.

"A cornerstone of our defense relationship is preserving Israel's qualitative military edge in the region," Esper said as he welcomed Defense Minister Benny Gantz to the Pentagon.

"The United States is committed to that, and the Department of Defense is committed to that imperative. We will continue to support the longstanding U.S. policy to maintain Israel's security," said Esper.

The question of whether the U.S. will sell the advanced fighters to the UAE cast a cloud over the White House signing ceremony last week of the diplomatic normalization agreements between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain.

President Donald Trump said at the time that he would have "no problem" selling F-35 warplanes to the Gulf state, despite objections from the Jewish state.

Israel has long opposed the sale of F-35 jets to any U.S. allies in the region including Jordan and Egypt, both of whom already recognize Israel.

Such a sale would erode Israel's military advantage over its neighbors.

Since the 1960s the U.S. has approached the issue on the principle that Israel should maintain a "qualitative military edge" (QME), and the concept has been formalized in legislation from Congress.

But the UAE, which sits astride the strategic Strait of Hormuz across from Iran and is seen by Israel and the United States as a major threat, has sought for several years the advanced fighters.

At the Pentagon, Gantz stressed the importance of the U.S.-Israel partnership in the "unstable" Middle East region, and said the relationship goes beyond "QME".

"As I always said, we have no other United States, nor do you have any other Israel," he said.

"We will continue those relations into the future. And we see those relations as a privilege, but also as a necessity, a continued necessity," Gantz said.

09.23.20

Arab peace solution ensures Palestine obtain a state with East Jerusalem as its capital

09.23.20

In UN debut, Saudi king calls for comprehensive solution on Iran

King Salman says Iran exploited 2015 nuclear deal with world powers 'to intensify expansionist activities, create terrorist networks, and use terrorism'; monarch calls to disarm Hezbollah

Reuters| Published: 09.23.20 , 20:14

Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz on Wednesday called for a comprehensive solution on Iran and disarming its affiliate Hezbollah in Lebanon, and expressed support for U.S. efforts to start talks between Israel and the Palestinians during his first address to the United Nations General Assembly.

He said Iran has exploited a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers "to intensify its expansionist activities, create its terrorist networks, and use terrorism," adding that this had produced nothing but "chaos, extremism, and sectarianism."

"A comprehensive solution and a firm international position are required," he told the 193-member General Assembly in a video statement, prerecorded due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The United States quit the Iran nuclear pact in 2018 with President Donald Trump dubbing it the "worst deal ever." Washington has since imposed unilateral sanctions and

asserts that all countries also have to reinstate UN sanctions in an attempt to push the Islamic Republic to negotiate a new deal.

But all the remaining parties to the nuclear deal, including longtime U.S. allies, and 13 of the 15 UN Security Council members say the U.S. claim on UN sanctions is void and diplomats say few countries are likely to reimpose the measures.

"Our experience with the Iranian regime has taught us that partial solutions and appeasement did not stop its threats to international peace and security," King Salman said.

On attempts to mediate peace between Israel and the Palestinians, the Saudi monarch said a 2002 Arab peace initiative is the basis for a "comprehensive and just solution" ensuring the Palestinians obtain an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"We support the efforts of the current U.S. administration to achieve peace in the Middle East by bringing the Palestinians and the Israelis to the negotiation table to reach a fair and comprehensive agreement," he said.

The king stopped short of endorsing recent U.S.-brokered agreements by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to establish ties with Israel. Saudi Arabia has quietly acquiesced to the deals but has signaled it is not ready to take action itself.

Palestinian leaders have condemned the UAE and Bahrain's warming of relations with Israel, describing it as a betrayal of their efforts to win statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

King Salman also said a deadly blast in Lebanon's Beirut port last month "occurred as a result of the hegemony of Hezbollah... over the decision-making process in Lebanon by force of arms."

"This terrorist organization must be disarmed," he said.

Authorities have blamed the Aug. 4 blast on a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate stored for years at the port without safety measures.