

Ynet-News, February 08, 2021 – Monday

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Netanyahu's lawyer asked judges to postpone trials to process March 23 elections

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Netanyahu's team asks for 3-months trial postponement

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Palestine urging outgoing ICC International Judge to litigate Israel's annexations

02.07.21 – Su - - - News Placed in Feb 06 spot – Saturday
PA Fatah West Bank & Hamas Islamists vote Faction May 22 & Leader July 31

02.07.21 – Su - - - News Placed in Feb 07 spot – Sunday
Israel opened schools & business as infection & hospitalization are down 26%

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Biden said US will not lift sanctions until Iran stops enriching uranium

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02.08.21
Netanyahu's lawyer asked judges to postpone trials to process March 23 elections

02.08.21
PM: Not delaying my corruption trial would be election interference
Netanyahu speaks at press conference hours after court appearance in bid to show he is conducting business as usual, claims proceedings show cases against him on charges of corruption were fabricated and likely to fall apart
Ynet, Agencies | Updated: 02.08.21 , 19:33

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday said that a decision by the Jerusalem District Court to proceed with his criminal trial before the March 23 elections could be viewed as interference in the political process.

Netanyahu was speaking at a press conference in Jerusalem hours after he appeared at Jerusalem District Court to respond to charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust in three separate investigations.

"Everyone know the cases against me were fabricated," Netanyahu said, adding that they would likely fall apart as the trial progressed.

The prime minister's defense team asked the court earlier on Monday to postpone the next stage of his trial by three months due to the elections.

Netanyahu was indicted last year for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases. He stands accused of accepting lavish gifts from wealthy friends and offering to grant favors to powerful media moguls in exchange for favorable coverage of him and his family.

The latest hearing was postponed last month due to lockdown restrictions on public gatherings.

Netanyahu arrived at Jerusalem District Court on Monday morning for the resumption of the trial, where he pleaded not guilty.

"I confirm the written answer submitted in my name," Netanyahu said, standing before the three-judge panel in a heavily guarded courtroom.

After around 20 minutes, Netanyahu left the courtroom without explanation and his motorcade departed. The hearing continued in his absence, with his lawyers arguing for more than an hour that constitutional procedures had not been followed.

The prosecution then rejected those arguments, saying the attorney general had approved the investigations in dozens of meetings.

Netanyahu's lawyer, Boaz Ben Tzur, later asked the judges to postpone the next hearing by "90 to 120" days.

Judge Rivka Friedman-Feldman, who heads the judges' panel, replied the trial has already been postponed multiple times due to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent health restrictions.

"Basically, you want to postpone the evidentiary phase [of the trial] by six months," Friedman-Feldman said.

The hearing ended without a decision on whether the evidentiary phase will be postponed.

Friedman-Feldman said at the end of the hearing the panel will "consider everything" when making a decision on another possible postponement, which looks to be at least another month to a month and a half.

Despite the appeal to both pro and anti-Netanyahu protesters not to congregate outside the court due to coronavirus, demonstrators who gathered outside could be heard inside the room where the hearing was being held. They held banners and chanted anti-Netanyahu slogans.

The charges against Netanyahu are divided into three separate cases.

The most serious - known as Case 4000, in which the premier is accused of bribery, fraud and breach of trust - centers on the allegation that Netanyahu negotiated with Shaul Elovitch of the telecommunications giant Bezeq to secure positive coverage on his Walla! news site in exchange for government policies benefiting Bezeq. Elovitch and his wife were also indicted.

Case 2000 concerns allegations Netanyahu sought a deal with Arnon Mozes, the owner of Yedioth Aharonoth newspaper, that would have seen it give him more favorable

coverage. Mozes is also the publisher of Ynet. Elovitch and Mozes also appeared in court on Monday.

Case 1000 involves allegations Netanyahu and his family received gifts, including luxury cigars, champagne and jewelry estimated to be worth more than NIS 700,000 (\$213,000), from wealthy individuals, in exchange for financial or personal favors.

02.08.21

Netanyahu's team asks for 3-months trial postponement

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PM's defense lawyers ask Jerusalem court to postpone the next trial stage by '90 to 120 days' prompting one of the judges to remark that this would mean a 6-month overall delay due to previous virus-related postponements; unlikely trial will be postponed by more than month

News Agencies, Ynet | Published: 02.08.21 , 13:50

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defense team on Monday asked the court to postpone the next stage of his trial on corruption charges by three months.

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02.07.21

Palestine urging outgoing ICC International Judge to litigate Israel's annexations

02.07.21

Israel has been given a warning by the ICC

In-depth: The **decision by the Hague** on Friday at the moment only a psychological impact and is a public relations **blow** to the country, but experts warn it is no small matter and that **any Israeli action on the West Bank may now be litigated**

Tova Zimuky | Published: **02.07.21** , 23:30

In 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had decided to appoint Avichai **Mandelblit as attorney general** because he was the best person **to defend Israel against** future actions from the **International Criminal Court.**

Netanyahu and Mandelblit were close at the time and the latter was qualified in International law and had dealt with matters pertaining to the ICC during his tenure as the Military Advocate General.

The prime minister believed that Israel's highly respected judicial system and especially its Supreme Court would be a barrier against any attempt by the ICC to advance prosecution of Israelis.

This was before Netanyahu turned on Israel's law enforcement and judiciary in his efforts to fight the criminal charges for corruption that he now faces.

The decision Friday by the ICC to allow an investigation of possible war crimes committed by Israel during the 2014 Gaza war and illegal settlement activity is seen as a dramatic one in diplomatic and judicial circles.

The Palestinians asked the court to look into Israel's actions during the 2014 war against terror groups in the Gaza Strip and its construction of settlements in the West Bank and annexed East Jerusalem.

For now, the decision only poses a psychological impact and a public relations nightmare for Israel, but experts warn this is no small matter.

Senior sources in Israel's judiciary say that the country is now headed down a path to eventual ICC rulings against its politicians and military officials.

Political observers say there will be no imminent prosecution of Israel or a slew of arrest warrants issued against its leaders or IDF brass, but the government can expect legal action in the international court over any construction in West Bank settlements or demolition of homes belonging Palestinians who have committed deadly acts of terror.

"It is unprecedented that every action taken on the West Bank can now be investigated by the court," an official told Ynet.

Israel and the United States never joined the International Criminal Court after its establishment in 2002.

Jerusalem was quick to understand it could find itself in the dock over charges of war crimes due to its settlement policies.

Meanwhile the U.S. was concerned were that actions taken by its military in Afghanistan may bring lead to ICC action against them.

Until now, all attempts to prosecute Israel in the ICC have failed, not least because of its judicial system, which is seen as independent and able to investigate any allegations of crimes in the territories on its own.

The ongoing support of the United States, especially during the administrations of presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump was also helpful - although the latter threatened action against the court should the U.S. be investigated in any way.

The Biden administration's position, though, is still unclear. The United States issued a condemnation of the ICC decision on Friday, but some officials in Jerusalem worry that the American defense of Israel may in future depend on willingness to make certain concessions.

In practical terms, officials say, ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has not yet decided to launch her investigation into possible Israeli war crimes. She had only requested and now received authority from the court to do so.

"The ball is in her court," the officials say, and since she is set to leave her post this summer, she is likely to make the decision to investigate alleged Israeli crimes her legacy.

Other sources chose to be more optimistic and say she may leave that hot potato for her successor, who may be persuaded to refrain from the move.

Prof. Yuval Shany of the Israel Democracy Institute says there is no imminent action that will be taken by the court.

"The prosecutors at the Hague will first have to decide if an investigation by the IDF of its own conduct in 2014 is enough to avoid investigating charges in the Hague," he says. Besouda will have to approach Israel and demand a preliminary hearing, Shany says.

"A similar case involving British soldiers who were accused of war crimes in Iraq lowered the bar enough to indicate a prosecution of military personnel by a military court in Israel might negate the need for further action," he says.

Israel's judicial establishment has been preparing for possible scenarios of ICC action for the past decade, especially the possibility that members of past and current governments may have international arrest warrants issued against them.

But it is also cognizant of the fact that legal arguments apart, Friday's decision by the ICC leaves many question marks as to Israel's future as far as criminal indictments for war crimes are concerned.

02.07.21

PA Fatah West Bank & Hamas Islamists vote Faction May 22 & Leader July 31

02.07.21

Palestinian rivals Fatah, Hamas to discuss elections

Cairo meeting to hammer out technical, legal, and security issues that must be resolved first before the legislative and presidential votes, set to be held on May 22 and July 31, the first since 2006 - which saw a landslide victory for the Gaza-based Islamist group AFP| Updated: 02.07.21 , 17:19

The key Palestinian factions -- Fatah, which controls the West Bank, and Gaza's Hamas Islamists -- plan to meet in Cairo this week to tackle issues that could threaten long-awaited Palestinian elections.

Technical, legal and security issues must be resolved first, observers say, to ensure the first Palestinian votes in 15 years are not derailed by acrimony between the former enemies.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas last month announced the dates for the first polls since 2006, setting a legislative vote for May 22 and a presidential election on July 31. They come in a year when veteran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a hardliner in the conflict, also faces new elections, months after the White House departure of his close U.S. ally Donald Trump.

While Palestinians cut ties with Trump's administration, accusing it of egregious pro-Israel bias, they hope for renewed diplomacy under Joe Biden, who supports a two-state solution and has vowed to restore aid to them.

The last Palestinian parliamentary vote saw Hamas win an unexpected landslide, a victory not recognized by Abbas's Fatah, which ultimately led to bloody clashes and a damaging split in Palestinian governance.

Fatah has since held control of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and Hamas has been in power in Gaza since 2007, the year Israel and Egypt began imposing a blockade on the Mediterranean enclave.

The divide has left the Palestinian Territories under two different political systems and without a functioning parliament.

By calling elections, experts say, Abbas is seeking to restore credibility in Palestinian governance amid hopes that Biden can revitalize negotiations with Israel aimed at the creation of the Palestinian state.

Policing the polls

However, before any vote, a string of nuts-and-bolts issues must be addressed, Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, told AFP.

If there are election disputes, "which judiciary -- the one in Gaza or the one in the West Bank -- is going to adjudicate?" he asked.

He noted that PA's judiciary does not recognize Hamas courts, while the Islamists might insist their judges be allowed to rule on Gaza poll disputes.

"Who is going to police the process?" he asked, warning of potential friction if Fatah insists on dispatching PA forces to Gaza.

"It is essential that they agree on these terms. If they don't agree, most likely there won't be elections."

East Jerusalem

Even if the Fatah delegation led by Jibril Rajoub and Hamas's team headed by Saleh al-Arouri make progress in Cairo, major challenges still loom over the vote.

Top of the list is east Jerusalem, the majority Palestinian part of the city annexed by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War in a move not recognized by most of the international community.

Abbas has previously said he would not agree to elections unless Palestinians in east Jerusalem can vote.

But such a guarantee is unlikely from Israel's government, which has labeled the entire city its "undivided capital".

The PA has asked the European Union to send an election observer mission to, in particular, oversee the vote in east Jerusalem.

Code of honor

Regional powers are meanwhile concerned that a victory by Hamas, which has links to the Muslim Brotherhood, could spell momentum for other Islamist political groups, said Ofer Zalzberg of the Kelman Institute for Conflict Transformation.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in hosting the talks, is seeking to show the Biden administration that, despite its domestic human rights record, it remains a force for regional stability, Zalzberg said.

But Egypt is also concerned that Hamas's performance in the vote "could have knock-on effects on the status of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and across the region," he added.

That concern applies to **Jordan** and to **Israel**, which has fought **three wars with Hamas since 2008** and is worried Palestinian **elections could be "the first step for Hamas to take over the West Bank,"** Zalzburg said.

To avert that outcome, regional players might push for a "formula in which Hamas will only be a junior partner in a power-sharing arrangement," he added, speculating that Hamas and Fatah might try to forge a joint candidates list to foster unity.

Jamal al-Fadi, a political scientist at Gaza's Al-Azhar University, said establishing unity between Hamas and Fatah requires **both factions agreeing to a "code of honor" to allow everyone to campaign freely and "commit to respect the outcome, whatever it is".** "The **factions must make this statement explicitly and clearly to prevent the 2006 scenario from happening again,**" he told AFP. First published: 17:18 , 02.07.21

02.07.21

Israel opened schools & business as infection & hospitalization are down 26%

02.07.21

Virus czar 'uneasy' as Israel lifts restrictions amid high morbidity

Prof. Nachman Ash says there is **no perfect way to reopen schools in pandemic** but Health Ministry will **monitor infection rates**; says vaccine drive to get new push after **drop in hospitalization** among over-60s, **the first sector** to be widely **inoculated**
Atilla Somfalvi | Published: **02.07.21** , 15:54

Coronavirus czar Prof. Nachman Ash on Sunday expressed concern about the further spread of coronavirus after Israel moved to **lift some lockdown restrictions** after more than one month.

The country extended its **end date for the lockdown** from Friday in an effort to prevent mass gatherings on the first weekend after the closures, and on **Sunday** morning some **businesses reopened** under strict guidelines although a decision had yet to be made on how to return children to school.

Speaking from the Ynet studio, Ash said the limited reopening of some commerce requires Israelis to be more vigilant than ever.

"I am uneasy - we are **coming out of lockdown with high morbidity**. This forces us to more closely observe the regulations," he said.

"Wear masks, refrain from crowded gatherings and stay out of indoor settings as much as possible. We must all protect ourselves and our families."

Ash said the Health Ministry was trying to find the safest way to reopen at least some of the education system.

The ministry's proposal includes opening kindergartens and schools for the under-10s in cities with low infection rates and allowing municipalities with high morbidity to operate their schools in small groups and outdoors.

"We will monitor the situation on a daily basis to see what the increase in new cases will be," Ash said.

"I know this is not a perfect plan and that some days will be too cold and rainy for children to study outside, but we hope to take advantage of the coming week that is forecast to be sunny," he said.

He said that there was no ideal solution to reopening the schools during a pandemic. Masks however are a must, Ash said, whether inside or outside. And social distancing must be observed as well.

Ash also urged teachers of all ages to get vaccinated. He said that the British variant now responsible for most of the new coronavirus cases is more contagious.

Children already make up 40% of the recently infected population but Ash said a solution that will allow children back in school is necessary.

"We will be taking a calculated risk here," he said.

With COVID-19 cases remaining high and contagion spreading further in Haredi communities, Ash urged ultra-Orthodox population to adhere to Health Ministry regulations.

"Police enforcement has been and will continue to be limited," he said. "We must find the right balance between public health safety and allowing the economy to operate but enforcement must be used where the public is in violation of the rules."

Asked about the efficacy of vaccines on the new variants spreading around the country, Ash said that there is no indication that the British variant is not covered by vaccines but the South African variant is still being studied.

Israel launched its vaccination drive in December and has already administered vaccines to more than 2 million of its 9 million citizens.

Infection rates among the over-60 population, which was the first to be inoculated, has dropped by 45% while hospitalizations for that age group have been down by 26% in the past two and a half weeks.

However, the positivity rate of tests conducted over the weekend remained over 9% and the reproduction ("R") number has again passed 1, which means that each newly infected person passed the disease to at least one other.

"Since we began offering vaccines to everyone over the age of 16 last week, we see longer lines and more young people arriving at the vaccination centers," Ash said.

"We've increased the public campaign calling people to get their shots and will soon begin to allow those who are one week after have received both doses to exercise more freedom of movement, which will motivate people to take the step."

But Ash also voiced fears that in some communities, mostly with a low income population, the turnout for the vaccines was still low.

"We are now trying to bring vaccines to more remote areas and hope to overcome some of the misconceptions being spread on social media about their safety and importance," he said.

02.07.21

Biden said US will not lift sanctions until Iran stops enriching uranium

02.07.21

Biden: U.S. will not lift sanctions to get Iran to negotiating table

American president indicates that Tehran must first stop enriching uranium in violation of nuclear deal brokered while he was VP; comments recorded Friday released hours after Iranian leader insists on end to restrictions before country returns to agreement

Associated Press| Published: 02.07.21 , 18:22

U.S. President Joe Biden said the United States will not lift its economic sanctions on Iran in order to get Tehran back to the negotiating table to discuss how to revive the Iran nuclear deal, according to a video released by CBS News on Sunday.

Asked if the United States will lift sanctions first to get Iran back to the negotiating table, Biden replied: "no" in the interview, which was recorded on Friday. Asked if Iran had to stop enriching uranium first, Biden nodded. It was not clear exactly what he meant, as Iran is permitted to enrich uranium under the 2015 nuclear deal within certain limits.

Biden has said he will seek to revive the deal, but insisted that Iran must first reverse its nuclear steps, creating a contest of wills between the nations.

Earlier Sunday, Iran's supreme leader on Sunday urged the United States to lift all sanctions if it wants Iran to live up to commitments under its nuclear deal with world powers, state TV reported, his first comments on the matter since Biden took office.

"If [the U.S.] wants Iran to return to its commitments, it must lift all sanctions in practice, then we will do verification - then we will return to our commitments," state TV quoted Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as saying.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Iran receiving compensation from the United States for the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal was not a "pre-condition" for reviving the agreement.

Former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. in 2018 from the atomic deal, which saw Iran agree to limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

"This is the definitive and irreversible policy of the Islamic Republic, and all of the country's officials are unanimous on this, and no one will deviate from it," Khamenei added Sunday, reiterating Iranian leaders' previous remarks that the U.S. must ease its sanctions before Iran comes back into compliance.

The supreme leader, 81, has the final say on all matters of state in Iran and approved the efforts at reaching the nuclear deal in 2015.

In response to Trump's so-called "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, the country began to gradually violate its atomic commitments, and threatened further provocations in a bid to increase its leverage and get Biden to prioritize a return to the deal as he moves to dismantle Trump's legacy.

Biden has signed a series of executive actions that reverse course on a wide range of issues, including climate change and immigration.

Following last November's killing of an Iranian scientist credited with spearheading the country's disbanded military nuclear program, Iran's parliament approved a law to block international nuclear inspectors later this month - a serious violation of the accord. Iran also has begun enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade levels and said it would experiment with uranium metals, a key component of a nuclear warhead.

The country has announced its moves and insisted that all breaches of the pact are easily reversible.

Tehran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

01.26.21

US House Democrats deliver Trump impeachment charge to Senate

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U.S. House Democrats deliver Trump impeachment charge to Senate

The Senate is expected to start a trial on Feb. 9 on the article of impeachment against Trump with 100 senators due to serve as jurors in proceedings that could result in Trump's disqualification from ever again serving as president

Reuters| Published: 01.26.21 , 07:57

The U.S. House of Representatives delivered to the Senate on Monday a charge that former President Donald Trump incited insurrection in a speech to supporters before the deadly attack on the Capitol, setting in motion his second impeachment trial.

Nine House Democrats who will serve as prosecutors in Trump's trial, accompanied by the clerk of the House and the acting sergeant at arms, carried the charge against Trump to the Senate in a solemn procession across the Capitol.

Wearing masks to protect against COVID-19, they filed through the ornate Capitol Rotunda and into the Senate chamber, following the path that a mob of Trump supporters took on Jan. 6 as they clashed with police.

On arrival in the Senate, the lead House impeachment manager, Representative Jamie Raskin, read out the charge. "Donald John Trump engaged in high crimes and misdemeanors by inciting violence against the government of the United States," he said.

Ten House Republicans joined Democrats in voting to impeach Trump on Jan. 13. But Senate Democrats will need the support of 17 Republicans to convict him in the evenly

divided chamber, a steep climb given the continued allegiance to Trump among the Republican Party's conservative base of voters.

President Joe Biden said on Monday he did not believe there would be enough votes to convict Trump, according to CNN, citing a brief interview with Trump's Democratic successor.

Over 30 Democrats were present to hear Raskin's remarks, but just three Republicans: Senate party leader Mitch McConnell, Senator Mitt Romney and Senator Roger Marshall, who was just elected in November.

Capitol Police were scattered along the lawmakers' route from the House to the Senate, and security around the Capitol remained tight, with roads closed off and barbed wire-topped fencing. Many of the National Guard troops deployed after Jan. 6 had been sent home, but thousands remained.

Trump, a Republican, is the only U.S. president to have been impeached by the House twice and is set to become the first to face trial after leaving office. His term ended last Wednesday.

The Senate is expected to **start a trial on Feb. 9** on the article of impeachment against Trump. The 100 senators are due to serve as jurors in proceedings that could result in Trump's disqualification from ever again serving as president.

Democrat Patrick Leahy, the Senate's longest-serving member, said on Monday he would preside over the trial.

Although the Constitution calls on the U.S. chief justice to preside over presidential impeachments, a senator presides when the impeached is not the current president, a Senate source said. First elected to the chamber in 1974, Leahy, 80, holds the title of Senate president pro tempore.

Chief Justice John Roberts presided over the impeachment trial when the Senate, then controlled by Trump's fellow Republicans, acquitted Trump in February 2020 on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress **arising from his request that Ukraine investigate Biden and his son.**

Leahy will still be able to vote in the trial, an aide said, noting that senators still vote on all matters when presiding over the chamber.

A number of Republican lawmakers have objected to the impeachment, some arguing that it would be a violation of the Constitution to hold a trial now because Trump no longer serves as president.

"I still have concerns about the constitutionality of this, and then the precedent it sets in trying to convict a private citizen," Republican Senator Joni Ernst told reporters. "So in the future, can this be used against (former) President (Barack) Obama?" she asked. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, rejected that argument on Monday. "The theory that the Senate can't try former officials would amount to a constitutional get-out-of-jail-free card for any president," Schumer told the Senate.

The Senate is divided 50-50, with Democrats holding a majority because of the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris. Senate leaders agreed on Friday to put off the trial for two weeks to give Trump more time to prepare a defense and let the chamber focus on Biden's early priorities, including Cabinet appointments.

The impeachment focuses on Trump's speech to supporters on a grassy expanse near the White House shortly before a mob stormed the Capitol, disrupted the formal certification

of Biden's victory over Trump in the Nov. 3 election, sent lawmakers into hiding and left five people dead, including a police officer.

During his speech, Trump repeated his false claims that the election was rigged against him with widespread voting fraud and irregularities. He exhorted his supporters to march on the Capitol, telling them to "stop the steal," "show strength," "fight much harder" and use "very different rules."

McConnell and other Republican lawmakers have condemned the violence and some have accused Trump of inciting it. Romney told CNN on Sunday that the trial was necessitated by Trump's inflammatory call to his supporters.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll on Friday found that 51% of Americans thought the Senate should convict Trump, breaking down largely along party lines.