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Biden & Democrats rescinding all Trump's sanctions on Tehran

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U.S. informed Israel ahead of Iran policy announcement, source says
Biden aides wanted to avoid blindsiding Jerusalem over the new plans, which included
telling UN Security Council that Democrat's administration was rescinding Trump's
assertion that all UN sanctions on Tehran were reimposed
Reuters| Published: 02.19.21 , 11:34

The Biden administration informed Israel in advance that it planned to announce on
Thursday it was ready to talk to Iran about Washington and Tehran returning to the 2015
Iran nuclear agreement, a person familiar with the matter said.

Biden's aides wanted to avoid blindsiding Israel, Iran's regional arch-foe, over the U.S.
plans, which included telling the United Nations Security Council the new administration
was rescinding former President Donald Trump's assertion that all UN sanctions had been
reimposed on Iran in September.

But President Joe Biden did not directly inform Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
about the shift in U.S./Iran policy when they spoke for the first time on Wednesday, the
source said.

Netanyahu has made clear he strongly opposes a U.S. return to the nuclear deal with Iran.

Biden and Netanyahu spoke Wednesday for the first time since the Democrat entered the White House 27 days earlier, in a conversation that included Iran.

"The conversation was very friendly and warm and lasted about an hour. The two leaders noted the long-standing personal connection between them and said they would work together to further strengthen the strong alliance between Israel and the United States," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

"President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu discussed further **advancing** peace **agreements**, the Iranian threat and the region's challenges and agreed to continue talks between them," the PMO said.

"The president also congratulated the prime minister on his leadership in the fight against coronavirus and the two exchanged views on how to deal with the pandemic."

02.18.21

Detention swap 2 Syrian shepherds for Israeli who crossed the Syrian border.

02.18.21

Israeli business plane lands in Moscow amid prisoner swap reports

Development comes just hours after IDF troops released **2 Syrian shepherds** in an apparent effort to secure the release of an Israeli woman from Syrian detention; sources say deal set to be completed later in the day

Yoav Zitun, Itay Blumenthal, Itamar Eichner | Updated: **02.18.21**, 23:25

An Israeli business plane **landed in Moscow** on **Thursday** evening amid reports of a prisoner **swap** deal meant to secure the release of an **Israeli woman** from **Syrian detention** **after accidentally crossing the border**.

The development comes just hours after Israel freed two Syrian shepherds who were arrested two weeks ago for deliberately crossing into Israeli territory.

Syrian state news agency SANA confirmed the reports and said the two had been released through a Quneitra border crossing as part of the swap deal.

"Two Syrian prisoners, Muhammad Ahmad Hussein and Tariq Rassab al-Abidan, were released from a prison in Israel as part of a Russian-mediated prisoner exchange deal with Israel," said the news agency. The report added that the two returned to the village where they live in Quneitra province, which borders Israel.

It emerged on Wednesday that **Israel is holding** **Russian-mediated negotiations with Syria** over a **prisoner swap** that would see an Israeli woman released from Syrian detention in return for two Druze prisoners from the Israeli side of the Golan Heights.

National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat and Yaron Blum, the official in the Prime Minister's Office responsible for Israeli captives, have flown to Moscow to discuss the terms of the release of the Israeli woman.

Sources in Israel said the prisoner swap deal will be concluded later in the day unless developments take a surprising turn. The sources said there was hope earlier the young woman would be returned to Israel on Ben-Shabbat and Blum's flight back to Israel. The woman is set to undergo questioning by the Shin Bet upon her arrival in Israel. Foreign media reports the woman was a resident of the ultra-Orthodox settlement of Mod'in Illit in the West Bank.

The two Druze prisoners were earlier identified as Nihal al-Makt, who had been under house arrest in her village in the Golan Heights, and Ziyab Qahmouz, detained in 2016 and serving 14 years in Israeli jails. SANA said Al-Makt was serving a three-year suspended sentence in addition to reporting daily for a year to Israeli authorities. She said those restrictions were lifted on Wednesday and speaking to Syrian Al-Ikhbariya TV through Skype, she said she was now free. Qahmouz reportedly refused to leave Israeli custody as he wanted to go back to his village in the Golan and not be deported to Syria. According to the Israeli side, al-Makt also refused to be deported to Syria. Associated Press contributed to this report
First published: 20:15 , 02.18.21

02.18.21

Health Ministry issues personal Green Pass QR codes to verify event immunity

02.18.21

Eligible for Green Pass? Find out how to access your leisure permit

Those who had been vaccinated or recovered from the virus will be able to access their Green Pass from Sunday via Health Ministry 'Ramzor' app or dedicated website to present at gyms, hotels and other facilities

Adir Yanko, Dror Liba | Published: 02.18.21 , 21:29

Israel on Sunday set to kick off its "Green Pass" initiative, which gives those who had been fully vaccinated against coronavirus or recovered from the disease an ability to access leisure facilities and in the future mass events. This, however, has left some Israelis confused as to whether are eligible for the pass and how they can access it.

The government earlier this week voted to reopen gyms, pools, cultural and sporting venues, hotels and galleries to those who had received both doses of the coronavirus vaccine or recovered from COVID-19 and could be verified as immune.

Those eligible for Green Pass can access the permit via the Health Ministry's mobile app "Ramzor", which will be made available on Sunday.

Those using the app will have to enter personal details such as ID or passport number, phone number and date of birth. They will then receive a verification code by SMS, which they will then need to enter in order for the app to display the permit.

Those wishing to print the permit will need to enter the Health Ministry's dedicated coronavirus website, and click on the "Apply for Documents" button in the middle of the screen. The user then needs to choose the Green Pass option and fill in personal details: ID or passport number, date of birth, telephone number and e-mail address. After confirming the details, a printable version of the Green Pass will appear with an attached QR code, which will be scanned by business owners to confirm the pass's validity.

It will also be possible to access the Green Pass by calling the number *5400 and requesting the permit to be sent to you via email or fax.

All those who present the pass at the entrance to facilities, be it the app version or the printable version, will have to display it together with a valid ID card.

Earlier in the day, Health Minister Yuli Edelstein and the Director General of the Health Ministry Prof. Hezi Levy, officially presented the initiative during a press conference.

"Today we have big news for those who are vaccinated," Edelstein said. "From Sunday, vaccinated and convalescent will be able to go to gyms, concerts, hotels, synagogues, who will serve those who have a Green Pass."

Edelstein added that the app may have technical several issues when it launches, and urged people to wait a few days before using the app unless accessing the permit is of high priority to them.

"Those who do not have an urgent need to download the app, can wait a few days," said Edelstein, who also warned about the inevitable use of fake permits.

"Anyone who thinks this is a game and prints a certificate even though they have not been vaccinated will eventually be caught and possibly thrown in jail," said the minister.

"Those who choose not to get vaccinated - it's their right. There will also be no personal sanctions against someone who is not vaccinated. It should be understood that this is a great privilege given to all of us through."

Edelstein also wished to clarify a common misconception among those who'd been vaccinated. "Unfortunately, many of those vaccinated decided that there was no need for a mask. I say again - keep your masks on even if you have been vaccinated."

02.18.21

Election rival to Abbas, Dahlan sent tons of aid & vaccines to Gaza from UAE

02.18.21

Palestinian president's rival promises 20,000 vaccines for Gaza

Exiled politician Mohammed Dahlan claims UAE to send a large shipment of Sputnik V vaccines to Gaza in a bid to outshine Abbas ahead of May elections; Dahlan is banned from running in the elections but his allies could emerge as kingmakers

Associated Press| Published: 02.18.21 , 18:31

The United Arab Emirates is sending 20,000 doses of the Russian coronavirus vaccine to the Gaza Strip, a rival to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced Thursday, in a decision that could have repercussions for upcoming elections.

The announcement by Mohammed Dahlan came a day after Abbas' government managed to deliver 2,000 vaccines to Gaza and appeared to be aimed in part at embarrassing the Palestinian president.

Dahlan called the shipment a "generous grant" from the UAE "at a sensitive time where the pandemic is targeting all our beloved." An aide to Dahlan said the Sputnik V vaccines will be delivered to Gaza through Egypt on Sunday.

Dahlan, a former senior member of Abbas' Fatah party, has lived in exile in Abu Dhabi since falling out with the Palestinian president in 2011. Dahlan was subsequently sentenced in absentia to three years in prison over alleged embezzlement.

May's parliamentary elections are to pit Fatah against Gaza's ruling Hamas militant group. Abbas has blocked Dahlan from running in the election, which would be the first Palestinian vote in 15 years. But Dahlan's allies, running as a Fatah splinter group called the Democratic Reform Bloc, are planning on contesting the race and could emerge as kingmakers.

Dahlan was once a bitter foe of Hamas when he served as the Palestinian security chief in Gaza. But after the militant group seized control of Gaza in 2007 and forced him to flee the territory, the sides later found common ground in their animosity toward Abbas. Hamas has allowed Dahlan's supporters to run humanitarian and relief projects in Gaza, which has been under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade, and limited political activity. The expected delivery of vaccines could further boost Dahlan's standing in the territory as Abbas continues to struggle to procure vaccines for his people.

Gaza's Health Ministry has reported more than 53,000 cases and at least 538 deaths since the start of the pandemic, and authorities have been reluctant to impose widespread lockdowns because the territory is already mired in poverty.

With Emirati money, Dahlan's group has delivered tons of medical aid, including an oxygen generator, to support Gaza's weak health care system dealing with COVID-19 patients.

Israel has faced international criticism for largely excluding Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza from its highly successful vaccination campaign. It's also a potent example of global inequality in the rollout of vaccines, most of which have been scooped up by wealthy countries.

Rights groups say it has an obligation as an occupying power to share its vaccines with the Palestinians. Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war, territories the Palestinians want for their future state.

Israel denies having such an obligation and says its priority are its own citizens, as well as Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. It says the Palestinian Authority is responsible for health care in the territories it administers according to interim peace agreements.

02.17.21

Netanyahu using personal ties with Putin to secure Syrian prisoner swap

Prisoner swap of West Bank woman for 2 that plotted shopping center attack

02.17.21

Netanyahu 'using ties with Putin' to secure prisoner swap deal

Speaking to Army Radio, PM declines to comment on reports regarding the identity of two Druze prisoners set to be exchanged for an Israeli woman who was detained after accidentally crossing the border into Syria

Ynet, News Agencies | Published: 02.17.21 , 21:30

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that he was using his "personal connections" with Russian President Vladimir Putin to secure a prisoner swap deal with Syria that would see an Israeli woman released from Syrian detention in return for two Druze prisoners from the Israeli side of the Golan Heights.

"I am using my personal connections with President Putin to solve the problem. We are in the middle of sensitive contacts," Netanyahu told Army Radio. "We are acting discreetly and responsibly to handle the matter, and I believe we will solve it."

National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat and Yaron Blum, the official in the Prime Minister's Office responsible for Israeli captives, have flown to Moscow to discuss the terms of the release of the Israeli woman.

Foreign media reports the woman was a resident of the ultra-Orthodox settlement of Modi'in Illit in the West Bank.

Syrian state news agency SANA reported earlier Wednesday that Damascus was indeed in prisoner swap talks with Israel.

According to SANA, "children of the occupied Syrian Golan" will be released from Israeli prison in exchange for the Israeli woman who was detained after accidentally entering Syrian territory in the Quneitra area.

SANA named the two prisoners from the Golan as Nihal al-Makt and Diab Kahamuz.

During his interview with Army Radio, Netanyahu declined to confirm their identities.

Kahamuz was convicted in 2018 for being part of a cell that plotted to attack shopping centers in northern Israel on behalf of Syrian ally Hezbollah. He was jailed for 14 years.

He was released in an exchange of prisoners last year, also mediated by Russia, that came after Syria returned the remains of Zachary Baumel, an Israeli soldier killed in battle during the 1982 Lebanon War.

"As part of the state's effort to free its citizens from Israeli prisons in any way and at any price, an effort is being made to free Syrian citizens from the occupied Syrian Golan from prisons in Israel," the Syrian report said.

Earlier Wednesday, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said that the Israel Prison Service had informed Kahamuz of his forthcoming release as part of an agreement with Syria.

The organization also said, however, that Kahamuz did not want to be released to Syria and instead wished to go back to his home in the village of Ghajar.

Al-Makt was sentenced last year to three years in prison with hard labor after she was detained in 2017. Her brother was the longest-held prisoner in Israeli jails after spending nearly 30 years there.

"I am free in my country with no conditions attached and no (Israeli) authority over me," she told Syrian Al-Ikhbariya TV, speaking through Skype after the exchange.

Officials assured that despite their refusal, the deal will be pushed through.

The SANA report came a day after Netanyahu convened a secret, emergency cabinet meeting which was said to be related to a sensitive security issue relating to Syria and Russia.

The details of the meeting were under strict censorship and some ministers were even told that it would be about the handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

There has also been a recent flurry of high-level contact between Moscow and Jerusalem. Israel's ambassador to Russia, Alexander Ben Zvi, met recently with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu.

Last week, Netanyahu spoke with Putin, while Defense Minister Benny Gantz talked to his Kremlin counterpart.

Gantz's office said the two "agreed on the need to advance humanitarian steps in the area."