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Bahrain will open embassy in Tel Aviv with ambassador Al-Jalahma

03.29.21 – Mo - - - News Placed in Mar 27 spot – Saturday

PA factions submit lists to vote on 132-member Council May 22 & July 31

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Israel advised tourists to avoid Iranian threat in Arab, Indian & Asian countries

03.29.21 – Mo - - - News Placed in Mar 28 spot – Sunday

Court allows Green Pass safeguard to ban workers refusing virus vaccine or testing

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President Rivlin will broadcast live consultations April 7 with all PM candidates
Wednesday

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Priestly Blessing at Western Wall allows all public members Monday & Tuesday

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Likud Orthodox party largest of 13 parties in deadlock 52 to 57, needing 61 seats

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03.30.21

Bahrain will open embassy in Tel Aviv with ambassador Al-Jalahma

03.30.21

Bahrain appoints first-ever head of mission in Israel

Khaled Yousif Al-Jalahma previously served as no. 2 at Gulf state's embassy in
Washington; mission in Tel Aviv set to open in the coming weeks

Reuters| Updated: 03.30.21 , 17:10

Bahrain has appointed **Khaled Yousif Al-Jalahma** as head of its diplomatic mission to Israel, state news agency BNA reported on Tuesday following a deal to establish relations last year.

Al-Jalahma was previously **director** of the operations directorate at Bahrain's foreign ministry since 2017 and had also served as deputy chief of mission at the kingdom's **embassy in the United States** from **2009-2013**.

The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem said that a team from Bahrain would arrive in Israel in the coming weeks to make the necessary arrangements for the **Bahraini embassy**, set to be located **in Tel Aviv**.

Al-Jalahma was approved after a conversation Sunday evening between Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif Al Zayani, where all the "relevant checks were made."

During that call, Ashkenazi also thanked Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa for his courage and leadership in establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel, according to a foreign ministry statement.

Bahrain's move closely followed the United Arab Emirates' naming of an **ambassador to Israel** after the two Gulf Arab states signed agreements last September to normalize ties with Israel in U.S.-brokered deals.

03.30.21

Israel requires vaccine & permit for up to 300 citizens crossing into Sinai

03.30.21

Israel reopens border with Sinai for vaccinated, recovered citizens

After a year away due to pandemic measures, up to 300 Israelis will be able to cross into the popular tourist destination at the **Taba border crossing** each day **through April 12**
i24NEWS| Published: **03.30.21** , 11:26

The **Taba** border **crossing**, **connecting Israel with Egypt's Sinai peninsula**, reopened on Tuesday for Israelis who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or recovered from the disease.

Under a plan approved by the government last week, **up to 300 people per day** will be able to use the crossing in each direction.

The outline will remain in place until April 12, with some reports in Israeli media suggesting the number of daily crossings will grow in the future.

Despite being vaccinated, **those crossing the border** will still **need to present a recent negative** COVID-19 **test** both upon departing and returning to the country.

Travelers will have to purchase a **crossing permit** that they will be **required** to present at the time of departure and register **for a specific date**.

Sinai is a popular tourist destination for Israelis, with almost 500,000 citizens of the Jewish state traveling there in 2019, as reported by Haaretz.

03.29.21

PA factions submit lists to vote on 132-member Council May 22 & July 31

03.29.21

Hamas unveils own list for Palestinian polls

Islamist group's roster includes 'a dozen' women, senior official says; polling body says 15 factions submit lists, with five already approved while rest were being examined ahead of May elections

AFP| Published: 03.29.21 , 23:27

Hamas on Monday unveiled its list of candidates for Palestinian elections, ending speculation over a joint list between the Islamic movement ruling Gaza and the secular Fatah that runs the West Bank.

Legislative polls have been called for May 22 and a presidential vote on July 31, the first Palestinian elections in 15 years.

Hamas won a surprise victory in 2006 but the result was not recognized by Fatah's leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, intensifying divisions.

Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip in a week of bloody clashes in 2007, while Fatah has retained control in the West Bank.

The rival movements have jointly agreed to hold elections, voicing hope the process would foster unity and restore international confidence in the Palestinian political system. "We hope these elections will offer a path to end the division," Hamas official Khalil al-Haya said as the Islamists submitted their list of candidates in Gaza City.

He acknowledged there had been discussions on forging a unified list with Fatah but the prospect was "difficult and now out of reach".

Senior Fatah official Jibril Rajoub said on Saturday that the movement was committed to running independently.

"Fatah will enter this electoral fight alone and we have not sought to present a common list," he said.

Haya said the Hamas list included "a dozen" women, in the latest step by the Islamists towards broader female participation in its political wing.

Palestinian factions have until midnight Wednesday to submit names of candidates for the 132-member Palestinian Legislative Council.

Officials with the electoral commission said 15 factions had submitted lists as of Monday. Five had been approved, while the rest were being examined.

The approved lists are to be unveiled on April 6.

Mohammed Dahlan, who is living in exile in the United Arab Emirates and has accused Abbas of seeking to silence dissent to stay in power, submitted his "List of the Future" on Monday.

Dahlan had been the Palestinian Authority's security chief in Gaza before falling out with the president.

03.29.21

Israel advised tourists to avoid Iranian threat in Arab, Indian & Asian countries

03.29.21

Israel urges citizens to avoid UAE, citing Iranian threat

National Security Council counter-terrorism office warns Tehran seeks to carry out attacks on Israeli targets, citing Jan. bombing near Israeli embassy in India which New Delhi attributed to Islamic Republic

Associated Press, Itamar Eichner | Published: 03.29.21 , 22:22

As coronavirus infections continue to decline and tourism expected to pick up steam in the coming months, the National Security Council on Monday advised tourists against travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries across the region, citing the threat of attack by Iran.

The warning included both Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the Gulf state as well as Bahrain. Both Arab countries established diplomatic ties with Israel last year under historic U.S.-brokered agreements.

"We estimate that Iran will continue to operate in the near future to harm Israeli targets," the council's anti-terrorism office said in a statement.

In the advisory, the council said that Iranian officials had threatened to attack Israeli targets over the last few months, adding that the Islamic Republic had already conducted a bombing attack near the Israeli embassy in India in January.

"Officials in India have determined that Iran was behind the bombing," the statement said.

It identified Georgia, Azerbaijan, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bahrain, the Kurdish region of Iraq, as well as Turkey, Jordan and Egypt as areas to avoid.

After establishing ties with Israel last year, the UAE became a popular destination for Israeli tourists, even after a similar travel advisory was issued.

The statement also warned against international Jihadist organizations, particularly Islamic State, that "continue to demonstrate motivation to execute attacks in various nations, including those visited by Israelis."

"The central regions where these organizations operate are the Sahel, especially Mali and Burkina Faso, Central Africa, particularly in northern Nigeria and its neighboring countries."

The council also issued travel warnings to several Asian countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, the Kashmir region in India and the southern Philippines.

Netanyahu is facing painful payday from former political allies

Opinion: PM appears unable to form a right-wing government after a host of his former disgruntled political partners ran against him in the March 23 elections; he also can't count on unity government after shamelessly violating agreement with Gantz

03.29.21

Court allows Green Pass safeguard to ban workers refusing virus vaccine or testing

03.29.21

Court upholds retailer's decision to furlough employee refusing virus vaccine, testing
Haifa labor court rules Shufersal's policy to ban workers refusing to comply with safety measures from company premises was reasonable, citing health concerns

Lital Dobrovitzky | Published: 03.29.21 , 21:45

The Regional Labor Court in Haifa on Monday upheld a retail chain's decision to furlough an employee after she refused to either get vaccinated against COVID-19 or present a negative virus test on a regular basis.

The dispute began when Israel's largest supermarket chain Shufersal announced at the beginning of March that starting April 4, 2021, it would only allow workers who hold a Green Pass — given to those who have received both vaccine doses or recovered from the virus — or those who present a negative coronavirus test every 72 hours back on company premises in order "to safeguard the health of both workers and costumers."

Shufersal also stated that workers that cannot receive the vaccine for medical reasons will be able to request an exemption. The company clarified that workers who refuse to cooperate with the new policy, and are unable to either work from home or in an isolated work environment, will be placed on furlough and be subject to a hearing before dismissal if they continued to object.

The employee, who works at the company as a cashier, filed a petition to the regional labor court, stating that the new policy infringed on her rights and added that she was advised to not receive the vaccine due to a past severe allergic reaction. Shufersal argued that the policy was reasonable and in accordance with laws put in place to ensure a safe environment for both its workers and customers.

Judge Iris Rash rejected the cashier's petition, saying that Shufersal was obligated to protect the health and safety of both its employees and patrons. The court also ruled that the policy was reasonable since it was agreed upon by worker union representatives and that it offered sufficient alternatives to workers who wish to continue their employment at the company.

The court also demanded the woman pay NIS 2,000 in legal costs.

03.29.21

President Rivlin will broadcast live consultations April 7 with all PM candidates Wednesday

03.29.21

Rivlin to task PM candidate next Wednesday

President invites party leaders to round of consultations starting next Monday which will be broadcast live; Shas leader backs Netanyahu while Gantz calls for four-way meeting with Lapid, Bennett and Saar

Itamar Eichner, Moran Azulay | Published: 03.29.21 , 16:50

Israel's party leaders will arrive at President Reuven Rivlin's residence in Jerusalem next Monday for consultations, two days before the president is set to task the candidate best positioned to become prime minister with forming the next government.

In a statement, the President's Residence said that the meetings will be broadcast live at Rivlin's own request.

"As was done for the first time during the 2019 elections, the president instructed that his meetings with the factions be broadcast live, on all various media and in full transparency with the citizens of Israel," the statement read.

Earlier on Monday, Shas leader Arye Deri announced he intended to recommend Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as his candidate to form the next government.

"Shas will work to form a right-wing government led by Netanyahu that will preserve the Jewish identity of the state and work for the benefit of the state's weaker sectors," Deri said in a statement. "Shas calls on all right-wing parties, especially Yamina and New Hope, to rise to the occasion and join a fully right-wing government."

Blue & White Chairman Benny Gantz on his part, called on Yesh Atid chief Yair Lapid, Yamina leader Naftali Bennett, and New Hope head Gideon Saar to convene as soon as possible in order to unseat Netanyahu.

"Let's sit down soon to find a way to stop Netanyahu's rule and form an honest government," Gantz stated.

Meanwhile, the Labor Party announced it will back Lapid for prime minister.

"We will recommend Yair Lapid... we think he can lead a coalition," said Nachman Shai, a former lawmaker and Labor's number eight.

"For us, [Lapid] is the head of the bloc."

Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Liberman also said that his party would recommend Lapid to President Rivlin.

"As promised, we will back the leader of the party that received the most seats in the 'bloc of change' [parties that strive to unseat Prime Minister Netanyahu]," Liberman said. "Anyone who tries to thwart the move and put their ego above the national interest will be held responsible for a fifth election."

03.29.21

Priestly Blessing at Western Wall allows all public members Monday & Tuesday

03.29.21

For first time since pandemic onset, masses attend Priestly Blessing at Western Wall
After last year's Passover was marred by strict COVID restrictions, thousands of religious Jews are expected to attend Birkat Hakohanim, which this year is going to last over the course of 2 days in order to avoid overcrowding
Kobi Nachshoni, Gilad Cohen | Published: 03.29.21 , 11:14

Thousands of religious Jews are expected to attend the Priestly Blessing ceremony, which marks the intermediate days of Passover, at the Western Wall after last year the traditional event was massively scaled down due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year's festivities fell on the tail end of the first COVID-19 lockdown, allowing only 10 worshippers to attend Birkat Hakohanim, special blessing carried out by members of the Jewish priestly caste (known as Kohanim in Hebrew).

With more than half the population of Israel vaccinated against the virus, restrictions were eased earlier this month to allow congregations to gather with social distancing measures in place.

According to the Health Ministry's outline, all members of the general public are allowed to attend the event without almost any restrictions but in accordance with the Western Wall Plaza's allowed capacity. The only restriction appears to be plastic capsules that separate worshippers into small groups.

In order to avoid overcrowding, however, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation decided to allow the ceremony to be carried out over the course of two days - Monday and Tuesday - instead of the traditional one-day blessing.

"In order to meet the challenge of massive crowds coming from all over the country for the traditional Priestly Blessing, it was decided that this year Priestly Blessing will be split into two different events that will be held day after day to prevent overcrowding," Western Wall Heritage Foundation said in a statement.

Israel Police this morning closed off all main roads leading to the Old City for the event, including Ma'ale Hashalom Street, Jaffa Gate, Gat Sheanim-Ophel Street as well as Rockefeller and Sultan Suleiman streets.

Thousands of police and Border Police officers as well as volunteers have been deployed across the Old City to maintain the safety of worshippers and tourists.

Traditionally, attendees come to the ceremony to be blessed at the holy site by the priests, descendants of the tribe of Levi, twice during the prayer services of Shacharit and Mussaf. Opposite the worshippers stand hundreds of priests who cover themselves with their prayer shawls and recite the “triple blessing” which is written in the Torah. “May God bless and protect you, shine his face upon you and educate you and grant peace upon you.”

In Israel, the blessing is said during every morning service in which more than one priest participates. However, the days of Passover enable people to visit the Western Wall and receive a blessing from hundreds of priests simultaneously.

03.25.21

Likud Orthodox party largest of 13 parties in deadlock 52 to 57, needing 61 seats

03.25.21

Final results confirm political deadlock after election

Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party and his allies have won 52 seats, with the array of parties committed to ousting him winning 57 seats; Yamina with 7 seats and Ra’am with 4 seats remain wildcards

Associated Press| Published: 03.25.21 , 21:10

Final election results on Thursday showed Israel in political deadlock once again, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his opponents falling short of a governing majority.

Tuesday’s vote, Israel’s fourth parliamentary elections in two years, was widely seen as a referendum on Netanyahu’s fitness to rule while on trial for corruption. He put Israel’s highly successful vaccination drive at the center of his campaign but was criticized for earlier missteps during the pandemic and for refusing to step down after being indicted.

Israel’s election commission said that with 100% of votes counted, Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party and his natural allies have won 52 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel’s parliament. An ideologically diverse array of parties committed to ousting him won 57 seats.

A right-wing party led by former Netanyahu ally Naftali Bennett won seven seats and an Arab Islamist party led by Mansour Abbas won four. Both are uncommitted, but given the many rivalries in parliament, it is not clear whether either can deliver a required majority.

Party leaders have already begun negotiations that are expected to drag on for weeks. If no one is able to assemble a majority of at least 61 seats, then Israel will go to elections for an unprecedented fifth time in a little over two years.

Deep **divisions between** the various **parties** will make it difficult for either side to assemble a ruling coalition. Israelis vote for party lists rather than candidates in a system that often gives outsized power to small, sectarian factions.

Arab parties have never joined a governing coalition, and **for nationalist parties, such an alliance is anathema**. Bezael Smotrich, a Netanyahu ally and head of the far-right Religious Zionist party, said Thursday that “a right-wing government will not be established with support from Abbas. Period. Not on my watch.”

Gideon **Saar**, a defector from Netanyahu’s Likud who now **heads a six-seat party** committed to ousting him, said “it is clear that Netanyahu does not have a majority to form a government under his leadership. Action must now be taken to realize the possibility of forming a government for change.”

The **Likud, which won the most seats of any party**, fired back, saying such a bloc would be “anti-democratic.” It **compared Netanyahu’s opponents to** the **clerical leadership in** Israel’s arch-enemy **Iran**, which vets candidates for high office.

Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, said that the stalemate is Israel’s “worst political crisis in decades.”

“It’s apparent that our political system finds it very difficult to produce a decisive outcome,” Plesner said. He added that inherent **weaknesses in Israel’s electoral system** are **compounded by “the Netanyahu factor”**: a popular prime minister struggling to stay in power **while under indictment**. “Israelis are split right down the middle on this question.”

Several of Netanyahu’s opponents have started discussing advancement of a bill to disqualify a politician under indictment from being tasked with forming a government, a measure aimed at barring the long-serving prime minister from office. A similar bill was floated after the March 2020 elections, but was never passed.

Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three cases. He has denied any wrongdoing and has dismissed the charges as a witch-hunt by a biased law enforcement and media.

Despite the charges against him, Netanyahu’s **Likud party received around a quarter of the votes, making it the largest party in parliament**. A total of **13 parties** received enough votes to **enter the Knesset** — the most since the 2003 election — and **represent a variety of ultra-Orthodox, Arab, secular, nationalist, and liberal** factions.

03.29.21

Dutch firm Smit Salvage ends Suez Canal jam of Taiwan-Panama Evergreen

03.29.21

Suez Canal jam ends after stranded ship refloated

After **dredging and excavation work over weekend**, rescue teams **succeed** in partially refloating MV 'Ever Given' **using tugboats**; At least **369 vessels await transit** after traffic through global shipping lane **halted for over a week**

Reuters| Published: **03.29.21** , 18:56

Shipping traffic through Egypt's Suez Canal resumed on Monday after a giant container ship that had been blocking the busy waterway for almost a week was refloated, the canal authority said.

The 400-meter (430-yard) long Ever Given became jammed diagonally across a southern section of the canal in high winds early last Tuesday, halting traffic on the shortest shipping route between Europe and Asia.

Live footage on a local television station showed the ship surrounded by tug boats moving slowly in the center of the canal. The station, ExtraNews, said the ship was moving at a speed of 1.5 knots.

"Admiral Osama Rabie, the Chairman of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA), announces the resumption of maritime traffic in the Suez Canal after the Authority successfully rescues and floats the giant Panamanian container ship EVER GIVEN," a statement from the SCA said.

"She's free," an official involved in the salvage operation said.

After dredging and excavation work over the weekend, rescue workers from the SCA and a team from Dutch firm Smit Salvage had succeeded in partially refloating the ship earlier on Monday using tug boats, two marine and shipping sources said.

Evergreen Line, which is leasing the Ever Given, confirmed the ship had been successfully refloated and said it would be repositioned and inspected for seaworthiness. Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM), the technical managers of the container ship, said there were no reports of pollution or cargo damage, and initial reports ruled out any mechanical or engine failure as a cause of the grounding.

At least 369 vessels are waiting to transit the canal, including dozens of container ships, bulk carriers, oil tankers and liquefied natural gas (LNG) or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vessels, the SCA's Rabie said.

The authority said earlier it would be able to accelerate convoys through the canal once the Ever Given was freed. "We will not waste one second," Rabie told Egyptian state television.

He said it could take from two-and-a-half to three days to clear the backlog, and a canal source said more than 100 ships would be able to enter the channel daily. Shipping group Maersk said the knock-on disruptions to global shipping could take weeks or months to unravel.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who had not publicly commented on the blockage, said Egypt had ended the crisis and assured resumption of trade through the canal.

Oil prices were about one percent lower at \$63.95 a barrel. Shares of Taiwan-listed Evergreen Marine Corp - the vessel's lessor - rose 1.75%.

About 15% of world shipping traffic transits the Suez Canal, which is an important source of foreign currency revenue for Egypt. The stoppage is costing the canal \$14-\$15 million a day.

Shipping rates for oil product tankers nearly doubled after the ship became stranded, and the blockage has disrupted global supply chains, threatening costly delays for companies already dealing with COVID-19 restrictions. Maersk was among shippers rerouting cargoes around the Cape of Good Hope, adding up to two weeks to journeys and extra fuel costs.

03.21.21

Lockdowns in Europe, vaccine skeptics, Tokyo Olympics bans overseas fans

03.21.21

New lockdowns in Europe, overseas fans banned at Tokyo Olympics
France, Poland, Ukraine impose new restrictions as new global infections climb 14% in past week, with mass protests against the measures in the UK and Germany; Pakistan PM Imran Khan tests positive; row over AstraZeneca vaccine continues
AFP | Published: 03.21.21, 09:45

Several European countries introduced new lockdown measures Saturday as they battled surging coronavirus infections, while Tokyo Olympics organizers were forced to announce an "unavoidable" ban on overseas fans to keep the Games safe.

Residents in Poland, parts of France and Ukraine's capital Ukraine all faced new restrictions, with most shops shut and people urged to work from home.

Elsewhere in Europe, frustrations with COVID-19 curbs were spilling over, with scuffles breaking out at a large anti-restrictions protest in the German city of Kassel, and thousands joining similar demonstrations in Liestal, Switzerland and London.

"End the lockdown" and "Corona rebels", read signs held by demonstrators at the protest in Kassel, which was organized by a group that has drawn in activists from both the far-left and far-right as well as anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists.

In Africa, Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina reiterated his own vaccine skepticism, adding that it would be an untested herbal remedy he has previously touted "that will protect me and my family".

The pandemic is still speeding up worldwide, with the number of new COVID-19 infections rising globally by 14 percent over the past week, according to AFP data. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan became the latest world leader to test positive -- two days after receiving China's Sinopharm vaccine.

The former cricketing legend is self-isolating with mild symptoms, his spokesman said. France's 'lockdown-lite'

More than a third of France's population is now under a renewed lockdown as the country, along with several European neighbors, battles a third wave of the virus.

But the curbs are lighter than those enforced at the height of the pandemic last year, with schools remaining open and hairdressers, shoemakers and chocolate shops added to an expanded list of businesses allowed to accept customers.

The government has also scrapped the forms once required to justify all trips outside the home, which were widely derided as an example of excessive French bureaucracy.

On the sunny banks of the River Seine, some Parisians questioned whether the restrictions could really be described as a "lockdown" at all.

"I can't see any change, apart from the closed shops," said a resident named Philippe, strolling with his daughter in the midst of cyclists and joggers.

The row over AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine meanwhile shows no signs of abating, with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen threatening to halt exports of the jab if the bloc does not receive its deliveries first.

The Anglo-Swedish pharma giant has delivered only 30 percent of the 90 million vaccine doses it had promised for the first quarter of the year, blaming production delays at its EU plants.

"We have the option of banning a planned export. That's the message to AstraZeneca: you fulfil your contract with Europe first before you start delivering to other countries," von der Leyen told Germany's Funke media group.

European officials are furious that AstraZeneca has fallen short on the continent while fully delivering on its UK commitments -- something that has allowed the recently-departed EU member to give half of its adult population at least one jab as of Saturday.

AstraZeneca has also had to contend with worries that its jab may cause blood clots, with more than a dozen countries pausing its use recently.

Several European countries including Germany and Italy resumed AstraZeneca vaccinations Friday after an all-clear from EU regulators and the World Health Organization.

But Scandinavian nations Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland have all said they want more information before deploying the vaccine again.

Seeking to reassure their populations, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his French counterpart Jean Castex both received a dose of AstraZeneca on Friday.

"I literally did not feel a thing. It was very good, very quick," said Johnson who became seriously ill from COVID-19 last year.

Brazil, meanwhile, said it was in talks with the U.S. to import COVID-19 vaccines that Washington is not currently using and has already vowed to share with Mexico and Canada.

Foreign fans banned from Olympics

With more than 400 million vaccine doses already injected globally, organizers of the Tokyo Olympics had previously billed this summer's Games as a chance to provide "proof of humanity's triumph over the virus".

But on Saturday, Olympics chiefs announced that overseas fans would be banned as it remains too risky to invite large international crowds to Japan.

"We have to ensure a safe and secure environment for all the participants," said Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto. "It was an unavoidable decision." The unprecedented ban will make the Tokyo Games the first ever without overseas spectators.

03.04.21

S.Africa's chief justice ordered to apologize for pledging support for Israel

03.04.21

S.Africa's top judge ordered to apologize for pro-Israeli remarks
Judiciary panel says it found chief justice's remarks 'offending' and 'particularly aggravating' and called to 'unreservedly' retract statements after declaring his love and prayers for Israel

AFP| Published: 03.04.21 , 22:39

South Africa's chief justice was Thursday ordered to apologize and retract comments he made last year seen as pledging support for Israel in a country that is pro-Palestine.

Mogoeng Mogoeng, who is a devout Christian sparked an outcry in June last year declaring his love and prayers for Israel.

He said South Africa was depriving itself "a wonderful opportunity of being a game-changer in the Israeli-Palestinian situation,"

South African openly supports the Palestinian cause and in 2019 it downgraded its embassy in Tel Aviv.

The country's Judiciary Conduct Committee which probed the judge's comments following a complaint, found the remarks "offending" and "particularly aggravating". "It is important that... those utterances must be unreservedly retracted and withdrawn to return and maintain the public image of the judiciary to its rightful place," the committee said in its ruling.

The committee drafted the apology they want him to tender within 10 days.

The controversial judge in December came under heavy criticism when he publicly prayed against "satanic" COVID-19 vaccines, asking God that they be "destroyed by fire".

A local pro-Palestinian rights group #Africa4Palestine presented a formal complaint over his pro-Israel speech during a webinar co-organized by the Jerusalem Post and South Africa's chief rabbi, Warren Goldstein.