

Ynet-News, April 28, 2021 – Wednesday

04.28.21 – We- - - News

Bennett meets with Ra'am Islamist party Abbas in effort to form unity government

04.28.21 – We- - - News Placed in Apr 28 spot – Wednesday

Netanyahu officially appointed Gantz justice minister, for government's approval

04.28.21 – We- - - News Placed in Apr 27 spot – Tuesday

Palestine cars set fire in West Bank after Arabs harass Orthodox during Ramadan

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in Apr 26 spot – Monday

IDF downed by electric pulses Hezbollah intelligence drone on Lebanon border

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News

All buss & train restrictions lifted for mass weekend pilgrimage to Mount Meron

04.27.21 – Tu- - -

Spanish citizen married to Palestinian funding terrorism detained in Israel

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News

Israel must allow votes in Jerusalem or Abbas will postpone May 22 elections

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in Apr 25 spot – Sunday

John Kerry denies treason, giving Iran info in 2018 on Israeli attacks in Syria

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News

Egyptian officials say Palestine will call off elections if no vote in east Jerusalem

04.27.21 – Tu- - - News

Abbas New York group accusing Israel of apartheid crimes against PA

04.26.21 – Mo- - - News

Israel set to deport dozens of Africans that joined a residency established in 2003

04.26.21 – Mo- - - News Placed in Apr 24 spot – Saturday

Defense Minister Gantz to decide responses on Gaza if rocket fire persists

04.26.21 – Mo- - - News

Hamas warns as Israel closes Gaza fishing zone in response to continued rocket fire

04.25.21 – Su- - - News

Iran vows to teach a lesson & repeatedly warned not to entrench on Israel's border

04.26.21 – Mo- - - News

Sensitive tape in March leaked on informer, former US secretary of state John Kerry

04.25.21 – Su- - - News

Israel eased riots & rockets by diplomat message in Egypt, Jordan & UN to Hamas

04.25.21 – Su- - - News Placed in Apr 25 spot – Sunday

Arab attacks, lynchings, riots & 36 rockets from Gaza with IDF airstrikes Friday

04.25.21 – Su- - - News

Scuffles in Jerusalem as Ramadan riot clashed hundreds of police at Damascus Gate

04.24.21 – Sa- - - News

Oil tanker from Iran delivering to Syria refinery catches fire after IDF attack

04.24.21 – Sa- - - News

IDF bolstering Iron Dome & tanks on Gaza border to prepare for escalation

04.24.21 – Sa- - - News

Grand Mufti of Jerusalem & Hamas leader condemned police attack on Palestinians
Without weapons, we cannot liberate our land, protect holy sites, bring back our people

04.24.21 – Sa- - - News

Southern Israel pounded by dozens of rockets in overnight strikes from Gaza

04.22.21 – Th- - - News

United Torah Judaism deliberating on whether to enable Saar and Bennett gov't

04.22.21 – Th- - - News

EU to unveil plan to combat anti-Semitism as part of anti-racism initiative

04.20.21 – Tu- - - News

PM okays unlimited access pilgrimage to Mount Meron on Lag BaOmer

04.28.21

Bennett meets with Ra'am Islamist party Abbas in effort to form unity government

04.28.21

Bennett meets with Ra'am head in effort to form unity government

Despite promising before elections he will never form coalition backed by Islamist party,
Yamina chief meets with Mansour Abbas at his office in the Knesset in an apparent bid to
draft a plan to unseat Netanyahu

Moran Azulay | Published: 04.28.21 , 13:55

Naftali Bennett on Wednesday met with the leader of the Islamist Ra'am party, Mansour Abbas, for the first time as the Yamina leader appears to move forward with his plans to form a unity government.

The meeting was held at Bennett's office in the Knesset.

A political bloc opposing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which includes Bennett, is currently working on a draft for the establishment of a unity government that they aim to present to President Reuven Rivlin. Netanyahu is currently the candidate tasked with forming coalition, but he appears at dead end since he cannot gather 61 seats needed.

"The two discussed the positions of both parties in light of the current political situation, and the meeting went well," a statement from the right-wing party said. Following Bennett's meeting with Abbas, Yamina chairman then met with New Hope leader Gideon Saar.

Bennett and Abbas have never been personally acquainted and held no direct talks or meetings before. Bennett apparently agreed to reach out to Abbas after photos began circulating on social media, showing Ra'am leader hugging Knesset Speaker Yariv Levin and shaking hands with Amir Ohana and Miri Regev during a meeting with Likud officials.

Before March 23 elections, Bennett said he will never form a government backed by the Islamist party and demanded from Netanyahu to do the same.

04.28.21

Netanyahu officially appointed Gantz justice minister, for government's approval

04.28.21

Netanyahu reverses course, votes to appoint Gantz as justice minister

In a dramatic U-turn, PM releases statement, saying he supports Blue & White leader for the position and wants to avoid deadlock; adds he will table cabinet session on Sunday to fill rest of ministerial vacancies

Ynet | Published: 04.28.21 , 12:58

Hours before the High Court of Justice was due to decide on the legality of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's attempts to install a justice minister from his own party, the premier announced Wednesday afternoon he supports the appointment of Blue & White leader Benny Gantz for the position.

The appointment of the minister was at the center of a row between Gantz and Netanyahu over the authority of the two in the current coalition government. Critics accused

Netanyahu of seeking to control the ministry in order to impact his current corruption trial.

"The prime minister has submitted a detailed response to the High Court that completely rejects the argument that yesterday's vote in the cabinet was against the law," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

"However, after the prime minister's proposals for a compromise were also rejected, and in order to get out of the deadlock and allow the necessary activities of the Justice Ministry to resume, the prime minister decided to appoint Benny Gantz as justice minister of the transitional government."

Netanyahu later tabled the appointment for government's approval, making the decision official.

In addition, Netanyahu told the High Court he will schedule a cabinet session on Sunday to fill the rest of ministerial vacancies, which include science, social equality, communications, water and higher education.

On Tuesday, Likud minister Ofir Akunis' appointment as justice minister - after a contentious cabinet vote on his nomination - was disqualified by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit in a heated session.

As a result, the High Court ruled it will hold an urgent hearing, scheduled for 3:30pm on Wednesday, to determine whether the appointment was lawful and how to proceed on the issue further. Netanyahu asked the High Court to cancel the hearing.

The Movement for Quality Government, which was among the groups to bring the petition for justice minister appointment to court, welcomed Netanyahu's decision to appoint Gantz for the post, which he held on an interim basis until April of this year.

"Netanyahu understood that he had made a serious and illegal mistake when he abruptly brought up Akunis as a candidate for justice minister, despite the disagreement in the cabinet," said the statement. "It is a shame that Netanyahu is acting right only when his back is against the wall and he has no choice but to fold. This is how a circus is run and not a government."

Netanyahu's U-turn came amid reports that his conduct during the tumultuous cabinet meeting further united Yamina leader Naftali Bennett and New Hope chief Gideon Saar. In addition, a few moments before Netanyahu announced his decision to back Gantz for the position, he apparently was made aware that Bennett held his first meeting with Mansour Abbas - the leader of the Islamist Ra'am party - in an effort to form a unity government.

04.28.21

Palestine cars set fire in West Bank after Arabs harass Orthodox during Ramadan

04.28.21

Palestinian cars set on fire in West Bank in apparent hate crime attack

Officials say alleged attack took place in a Palestinian village near Jerusalem, with 'Jews, let's win' and 'TikTok' spray-painted on the road; attack apparently comes in response to unrest in the capital, sparked by disturbing social media trend
i24NEWS, Ynet| Published: 04.28.21 , 09:08

Three Palestinian vehicles were set alight late Tuesday in the West Bank in what appears to be a hate crime perpetrated by Jewish extremists.

The alleged attack took place in the Palestinian village of Beit Ikka, northwest of Jerusalem, with "Jews, let's win" and "TikTok" as well as Star of David spray-painted on the road where the cars were located.

Police opened an investigation into the incident, which will be carried out in cooperation with the Shin Bet.

The attack apparently was carried out in revenge for TikTok videos being circulated on the social network, showing Arab youths harassing ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem during Ramadan in a new disturbing trend.

The attack in Beit Ikka, which is located near the capital's Ramot neighborhood, came after weeks of heightened tensions in Jerusalem that culminated in violent clashes on the streets of the Old City.

During the start of the holy month of Ramadan, young Palestinians have clashed with police and harassed Jewish bypassers, with the latter becoming a social media phenomenon.

In response, Israel barricaded a plaza outside of Jerusalem's Old City where Palestinian residents traditionally gather in the evenings during Ramadan. The move sparked immediate wide scale unrest over Palestinian concerns about Israel's control over East Jerusalem, which is home to sacred Jewish and Muslim sites.

04.27.21

IDF downed by electric pulses Hezbollah intelligence drone on Lebanon border

04.27.21

IDF shoots down Hezbollah drone on Lebanon border

Drone was reportedly under surveillance throughout the entire incident; military says troops had also located another drone belonging to the Iranian-backed group that had been intercepted in the same area several weeks ago

Reuters, Ynet| Published: 04.27.21 , 22:14

Israeli forces shot down a drone belonging to the Lebanese Hezbollah terrorist group that crossed into northern Israel from Lebanon on Tuesday, the IDF said.

The drone was reportedly under surveillance throughout the entire incident.

In a statement, the military said that earlier in the day troops had located another Hezbollah drone that had been shot down along the border with Lebanon several weeks ago.

"We will continue to act in order to prevent any attempt to violate Israeli sovereignty," the statement said.

The IDF said that both drones were most likely used for intelligence gathering and were downed by electric pulses as soon as they crossed into Israeli territory and not by direct gunfire.

Israel has acknowledged several incidents in recent years in which its own drones have been lost during missions along the Lebanese frontier, with the Iranian-backed organization claiming to have shot them down.

Hezbollah, which fought a war with Israel in 2006, is the dominant presence in Lebanon's south near the border with Israel. The militant group has vowed to bring down Israeli drones breaching Lebanese airspace.

04.27.21

All buss & train restrictions lifted for mass weekend pilgrimage to Mount Meron

04.27.21

Lag BaOmer pilgrimage to Mount Meron set to cause public transport disruptions
As gov't lifts all virus restrictions from mass transit, reallocation of buses, trains expected to further strain an overburdened system; Transportation Ministry says shuttles will be operated by private contractors

Assaf Zagrizak | Published: 04.27.21 , 21:48

Hundreds of buses and dozens of trains will be used as shuttles to the annual Lag BaOmer pilgrimage to Mount Meron this weekend, which is expected to cause substantial disruptions to public transportation services throughout Israel.

Earlier on Tuesday, the government voted to lift all coronavirus restrictions on public transport starting Thursday — Lag BaOmer eve — a day on which the country's mass transit system is already strained due to many soldiers returning home from base.

Considering many Muslim bus drivers tend to work less during the holy month of Ramadan, the decision to reallocate over 420 buses is expected to only exacerbate the situation and add further burden to Israel's urban transportation system.

Although most train routes nationwide have not been active on weekends for more than 200 days, 24 trains to the northern city of Karmiel — located just 20km (11 miles) from the event's site — will operate this coming weekend, serving some 200,000 people expected to arrive and celebrate the holiday at the gravesite of 2nd-century tannaitic sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The Transportation Ministry failed so far to appropriately notify the public that does not partake in the festivities of the expected changes.

The ministry said in response that the disruptions will only be felt in ultra-Orthodox cities such as Bnei Brak, Elad, and Beit Shemesh, where demand is expected to plummet during the holiday. It also added that the vast majority of shuttles will be operated by private contractors.

04.27.21

Spanish citizen married to Palestinian funding terrorism detained in Israel

04.27.21

Spain demands better conditions for Spanish citizen detained in Israel

Juana Ruiz Sanchez reportedly detained in West Bank city of Bethelem and accused of being involved in terrorist activity and funding terrorism for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Reuters| Published: 04.27.21 , 18:38

Spain has demanded that Israel improve the conditions of Spanish citizen Juana Ruiz Sanchez who was detained there almost two weeks ago without charge, Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya said on Tuesday.

"We are in an intensive dialogue with Israeli authorities" about the case, Laya told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting, adding that her ministry would continue to provide the maximum possible support.

"We hope the investigation concludes soon so this citizen can find out what she is accused of if she is accused of anything," she said.

According to Israeli media, Sanchez was arrested in the West Bank city of Bethelem two weeks ago and is currently being held at Hasharon Prison north of Tel Aviv.

She is reportedly accused of being involved in terrorist activity and funding terrorism for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the group that claimed responsibility for the rocket fire from Gaza over the weekend.

The report said that she has been married to her Palestinian husband for 35 years and works for a medical services NGO.

It is not clear why Sanchez was arrested, the report said, adding that the Shin Bet domestic security service was leading the investigation.

Advertisement

It also said that Sanchez had met with Spanish officials and that Jerusalem and Madrid were in contact on the issue.

04.27.21

Israel must allow votes in Jerusalem or Abbas will postpone May 22 elections

04.27.21

Report: Abbas tells global allies he will postpone Palestinian elections

Palestinian president said blaming delay on Israel's purported refusal to allow East Jerusalem Palestinians to cast ballots as they did in 2006; Israel says it doesn't intend to intervene but is worried about Hamas entrenchment in West Bank

Reuters, TPS| Published: 04.27.21 , 17:40

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has notified the European Union, Jordan and Egypt of his decision to postpone Palestinian parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for May 22, the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar reported on Tuesday.

Abbas' decision to delay the elections is due to Israel's refusal to allow Palestinians living in East Jerusalem to cast a ballot in the first Palestinian legislative elections in 15 years, the report said.

The EU reportedly asked Abbas to delay his announcement until Thursday in order to give the European bloc time to try to pressure Israel into allowing voting to take place in East Jerusalem.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said there has been no formal announcement on whether Israel will allow Palestinian voting in Jerusalem, as it did during the last elections in 2006.

But a Palestinian official close to Abbas, Hussein al-Sheikh, said Israel had officially informed the Palestinians that it would not permit balloting in the capital.

"We will not agree under any circumstances to hold general elections without [East] Jerusalem and its inhabitants," Abbas declared Monday evening at a meeting of the Central Committee of his Fatah movement that controls the West Bank and Palestinian Authority, urging the international community to put pressure on Israel.

Abbas also sent a representative to meet with Qatari officials to convince the Gaza Strip's ruling Islamist group Hamas not to escalate tensions over the cancellation of the elections in May, public broadcaster Kan reported Monday evening.

The veteran Palestinian leader was expected to issue a presidential decree postponing the polls on Thursday after Fatah leaders meet in Ramallah, but without setting a new date. Israel told the Europeans it did not intend to interfere in the elections but was worried about Hamas' projected landslide victory and its implications on the country's stability. The timing of the long-awaited polls was largely seen as a bid to reset relations with Washington under U.S. President Joe Biden. Earlier this month, Biden began to restore U.S. aid to Palestinians that was cut under predecessor Donald Trump.

Wasel Abu Youssef, an Abbas confidant and member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee, confirmed Tuesday that the issue of voting in Jerusalem was a key factor in Abbas' thinking.

"Any prevention or obstruction of holding elections in Jerusalem would entail a postponement," he said.

An Egyptian intelligence official said that the Palestinians informed Cairo that they plan to postpone the elections over the Jerusalem issue and that Abbas would announce the decision at the Fatah meeting on Thursday.

At a meeting on the issue with European ambassadors on Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry's Deputy Director of International Organizations Alon Bar pointed to Hamas' involvement in inciting the recent riots in Jerusalem and the launch of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip at Israeli population centers.

Bar warned of Hamas entrenchment in the West Bank and its implications for stability in the region, promotion of civilian projects in the PA, as well as attempts to promote negotiations between Israel and the PA.

At the end of the meeting, Bar emphasized that Israel was treading carefully and responsibly to prevent the deterioration of the situation and expected the European countries to act in the same fashion.

Fatah infighting, Hamas gains

Palestinian analysts say the Jerusalem dispute offers Abbas an excuse to call off elections he might lose.

After the elections were announced, his own Fatah party split, with internal challengers announcing their own list of candidates that threatens to undermine the official slate.

The split could jeopardize Abbas's long grip on power by allowing the Islamist group Hamas to gain more seats from Fatah's internal divisions - a key reason Fatah lost the previous elections.

"[Abbas] could certainly use [Jerusalem] as a pretext to delay the election," Gaza political analyst Talal Okal said, adding that Abbas's main concern "is Fatah, its separate lists, and fears that Hamas might get higher votes than Fatah."

Hamas and other Palestinian parties have objected to any delay.

"There is no chance [we will] discuss a delay. What we should discuss is how to conduct the election in Jerusalem," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said.

Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 from Abbas's Palestinian Authority, which has limited self-rule in the West Bank. The two have been in a protracted power struggle since.

About 6,300 East Jerusalem Palestinians would need to cast ballots at Israeli post offices in the city, in accordance with past agreements, Palestinian officials say. The rest of the city's 150,000 Palestinians can vote outside the city, they say.

04.27.21

John Kerry denies treason, giving Iran info in 2018 on Israeli attacks in Syria

04.27.21

John Kerry denies giving Iran info on Israeli attacks in Syria

In controversial leaked audio recording of Iran's FM, Zarif is heard claiming the former secretary of state had told Tehran that Israel carried out over 200 strikes in Syria; 'I can tell you these allegations are unequivocally false,' says Kerry

Ynet| Published: 04.27.21 , 11:01

United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry on Monday denied ever giving Iran information about Israeli attacks in Syria, as claimed by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in his recently leaked, explosive audio recording.

The recording was revealed by Iran International, a London-based, Farsi-language satellite news channel on Sunday and it apparently contains a discussion between Zarif and Iranian economist Saeed Leylaz.

In the recording, Zarif is heard saying that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps dictates government decisions and Russia worked with slain Iranian general Qassem Soleimani to thwart the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Iran's foreign minister is also heard expressing his "astonishment" at being informed by Kerry about Israeli attacks on Iranian interests in Syria on at least 200 occasions, which took place during his tenure as Obama's secretary of state.

Since the publication of the leak, several members of the Republican Party have lambasted Kerry, while some are even pressuring U.S. President Joe Biden to fire the former state secretary if the claims turn out to be true.

Kerry issued a statement on Monday via Twitter, vehemently denying Zarif's claims. "I can tell you that this story and these allegations are unequivocally false. This never happened - either when I was Secretary of State or since," said the statement. State Department has not yet directly addressed the claims but said the strikes in question had already been disclosed by a government in the region (i.e. Israel). The comment apparently referred to a speech by Finance Minister Israel Katz in 2018, in which he claimed that "in the last two years, Israel has attacked more than 200 times within Syria itself."

"This is disgusting on many levels. Biden and Kerry have to answer for why Kerry would be tipping off Iran, the number one sponsor of terror, while stabbing one of our greatest partners, Israel, in the back," wrote Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley on her Twitter page.

Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan called on Kerry to resign in a speech to the Senate. "It's unclear why John Kerry would relay such information to the leaders of the largest sponsored terrorism in the world. The secret information was given to one of America's most sworn enemies....undermining the interests of one of our most important allies, the State of Israel. If this is true, John Kerry needs to go," said Sullivan.

The most explosive part of the recording appears to be Zarif's criticism of slain Iranian general Qassem Soleimani - killed in a U.S. strike in January of 2020.

“In the Islamic Republic the military field rules. I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the field servicing diplomacy,” Zarif says on the tape. Zarif also said the Quds Force commander took actions that damaged the country, including working with Russia to scupper the nuclear deal.

The Times quoted former Iranian vice president Mohammad Ali Abtahi as saying that the publication of the comments was “tantamount to Israel stealing the nuclear documents” from Iran in 2018.

04.27.21

Egyptian officials say Palestine will call off elections if no vote in east Jerusalem

04.27.21

Egyptian officials: Palestinians plan to call off elections

Although Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas blames Israel's refusal to allow the vote in East Jerusalem for apparent cancellation, he would benefit from the move since his Fatah party is set to lose power to Hamas

Associated Press | Published: 04.27.21, 10:10

Egyptian officials say the Palestinian Authority plans to call off its first elections in 15 years, citing Israel's refusal to allow voting in East Jerusalem.

The decision would effectively grant Israel a veto over the holding of elections, though Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas could also benefit from the canceling a vote in which his fractured Fatah party is expected to lose power and influence to the Islamic militant group Hamas.

An Egyptian diplomat and an intelligence official said they had been briefed on the decision, which will be announced Thursday at a meeting of Palestinian factions. They said Egypt is in talks with Israel to reach a compromise to allow the vote but those efforts have so far failed.

The two spoke late Monday on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks. The intelligence official said Hamas wants the elections to go ahead but that no faction wants to proceed without guarantees from the international community that voting will be held in east Jerusalem. The official said the factions are discussing the formation of a unity government instead that would include Hamas.

The Palestinian Election Commission says 6,000 voters in East Jerusalem would need to submit their ballots through Israeli post offices in accordance with past agreements while the other 150,000 could vote with or without Israeli permission.

The small number of voters who require Israeli permission are unlikely to have a decisive impact on the vote, but their participation is seen as symbolically important for maintaining Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem. Israel has not said whether it will allow them to vote.

They also provide a pretext for Abbas to cancel a parliamentary election that his Fatah movement is expected to lose badly. Fatah has split into three rival lists, paving the way for Hamas to emerge as the biggest party in parliament.

Israel and the international community, which view Hamas as a terrorist group, would also quietly welcome delaying or canceling the vote.

Israel captured East Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 war. The Palestinians want all three territories for their future state and view east Jerusalem as their capital.

Israel annexed the eastern sector of the city in a move not recognized internationally. It considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital and bars the Palestinian Authority from operating there. The city's fate has been one of the thorniest issues in the peace process, which ground to a halt more than a decade ago.

04.27.21

Abbas New York group accusing Israel of apartheid crimes against PA

04.27.21

Global rights group accuses Israel of 'apartheid' crimes against Palestinians

Foreign Ministry rejects claims by New York-based Human Rights Watch as 'both preposterous and false,' saying the report was initiated by 'a known (BDS) supporter,' referring to Omar Shakir, expelled from Israel in 2019 over propaganda
Reuters| Published: 04.27.21 , 08:41

An international rights watchdog accused Israel on Tuesday of pursuing policies of apartheid and persecution against Palestinians - and against its own Arab minority - that amount to crimes against humanity.

New York-based Human Rights Watch published a 213-page report which, it said, was not aimed at comparing Israel with apartheid-era South Africa but rather at assessing "whether specific acts and policies" constitute apartheid as defined under international law.

Israel's foreign ministry rejected the claims as "both preposterous and false" and accused HRW of harboring an "anti-Israeli agenda," saying the group had sought "for years to promote boycotts against Israel".

Just weeks ago the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced it would investigate war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the Israeli military and armed Palestinian groups such as Hamas named as possible perpetrators.

In its report, HRW pointed to Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement and seizure of Palestinian-owned land for Jewish settlement in territory captured in the 1967 Middle East war as examples of policies it said were crimes of apartheid and persecution.

"Across Israel and the (Palestinian territories), Israeli authorities have pursued an **intent to maintain domination over Palestinians** by **exercising control over land and demographics** for the benefit of Jewish Israelis," the report says.

"On this basis, the report concludes that Israeli officials have committed the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution," as defined under the 1973 Apartheid Convention and the 1998 Rome Statute.

A statement from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said: "It is urgent for the international community to intervene, including by making sure that their states, organizations, and companies are not contributing in any way to the execution of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine."

BOYCOTT ACCUSATIONS

Israeli officials fiercely object to apartheid accusations.

"The purpose of this spurious report is in no way related to human rights, but to an ongoing attempt by HRW to undermine the State of Israel's right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people," Strategic Affairs Minister Michael Biton said.

Israel's foreign ministry said HRW's Israel program was being "led by a known (BDS) supporter, with **no connection to facts or reality on the ground**," referring to the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

The report's author, HRW Israel and Palestine Director Omar Shakir, was expelled from Israel in 2019 over accusations he backs BDS.

Shakir denies that his HRW work and pro-Palestinian statements he made before being appointed to the HRW post in 2016 constitute active support for BDS.

Shakir told Reuters that HRW would send its report to the ICC prosecutor's office, "as we normally do when we reach conclusions about the commissions of crimes that fall within the Court's jurisdiction."

He said HRW also sent the **ICC** its **2018 report about possible crimes against humanity** by President Mahmoud **Abbas's Palestinian Authority** and the Islamist militant Hamas. President Mahmoud Abbas gestures during a meeting with the Palestinian leadership to discuss the United Arab Emirates' deal with Israel to normalize relations, PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Photo: EPA)

ICC PROBE

The International Criminal Court's prosecutor said in March that she would formally investigate war crimes in the Palestinian territories, after ICC judges ruled that the court had jurisdiction there.

The Palestinian Authority welcomed the ruling but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced it as anti-Semitism and said Israel does not recognize the court's authority.

HRW called on the ICC prosecutor to "investigate and prosecute individuals credibly implicated" in apartheid and persecution.

HRW also said **Israel's 2018 "nation state" law - declaring that only Jews have the right of self-determination in the country** - "provides a legal basis to pursue policies that favor Jewish Israelis to the detriment" of the country's 21% Arab minority.

Palestinians seek the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, areas captured in the 1967 conflict, for a future state.

Under interim peace deals with Israel, Palestinians have limited self-rule in the West Bank; Hamas runs Gaza.

04.26.21

Israel set to deport dozens of Africans that joined a residency established in 2003

04.26.21

Israel said set to deport dozens of African Hebrews

Interior Ministry gives notice to at least 46 families that they must leave the country within 60 days; spokesman calls decision 'a shock', says community would appeal

Associated Press| Published: 04.26.21 , 22:50

Dozens of members of a polygamous, vegan sect in Israel have received deportation orders from the government, the group's spokesman said Monday, despite much of the community having received permanent residency under arrangements with Israel.

The community, which numbers around 3,000 people, is comprised of Black Americans whose founders moved to Israel in the 1960s and believe they are descendants of an ancient Israelite tribe. Most live in the southern desert town of Dimona.

Prince Immanuel Ben-Yehuda, spokesman for the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, said the Interior Ministry had given notice to at least 46 families that they must leave the country within 60 days, calling it a "shock to the system."

The African Hebrew Israelites began arriving in Israel in 1969, following Ben Carter, a Chicago steelworker who renamed himself Ben Ammi Ben Israel and claimed to be God's representative on earth.

But Israel wasn't sure what to make of the newcomers, who arrived on tourist visas, adopted Hebrew names and a West African style of dress. The government was unsure whether they qualified for citizenship under the country's "Law of Return," which is granted to almost any Jew who requests it.

The Interior Ministry granted many members of the community temporary residency in 1992 and permanent residency status in 2003. Many members study in Israeli schools and serve in the military.

"For quite some time, we've had a number of members of the community with different levels of immigration status, some of us have full citizenship, some taken permanent residency, some have temporary residency, and some have no status whatsoever," said Ben-Yehuda. He said the community has been working for years with Israeli authorities to sort out the legal status of those without permanent residency.

The Population and Immigration Authority said in a statement that in 2003, 1,200 African Hebrew Israelites were found eligible for residency and that in the years afterward, the office received other requests from people who were not members of the community.

“All those who were not included in the list of community members and didn’t meet the criteria received a negative reply and in effect are residing illegally in Israel for a long period and must leave according to the law,” the authority said in a statement. It added that those who had received deportation letters were entitled to appeal.

Ben-Yehuda said the community would appeal the decision. “We’re here because we chose to be here to build this country and give our energy to the improvement and the betterment of this nation, so it’s quite a bit disheartening in that respect,” he said.

04.26.21

Defense Minister Gantz to decide responses on Gaza if rocket fire persists

04.26.21

Security Cabinet authorizes IDF strike on Gaza if rocket fire persists

Defense officials say 'the ball is in Hamas' court' as they warn of fierce Israeli retaliation; terror group claims it was not behind recent attacks on the south and shares Israel's reluctance to escalate cross-border violence

Itamar Eichner, Yoav Zitun | Published: 04.26.21, 21:09

The Security Cabinet decided at the end of a Monday evening meeting to approve a substantial air force attack on the Gaza Strip if the launch rocket fire into Israeli territory persists.

The IDF presented various operational scenarios targeting Gaza's ruling Hamas terror group which Israel holds responsible for any cross-border aggression.

Military officials told Cabinet ministers that the Islamic Jihad was apparently behind recent attacks and Hamas relayed messages to Israel through the UN and Egyptian mediators that it was trying to get the rogue faction under control.

The Cabinet authorized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz to decide whether and when should Israel respond.

"The ball is now in Hamas' court," an official said. "We are not interested in seeing violence escalate but are prepared for any event."

Officials added that Israel was relaying messages to that effect to the terror group through diplomatic channels but added that they could not say what Hamas' next move would be. Three projectiles were launched from Gaza towards Israel overnight Sunday. Two were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system and one landed near the border within Gaza, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said early on Monday. Four residents of Gaza border communities suffered slight injuries as they were running for cover and received treatment at a local hospital. Another rocket that was fired earlier landed in an open field.

Over the weekend, at least 36 rockets were launched on Israeli communities in the south. Some defense officials view Hamas' actions along the border as a response to days of clashes between Jerusalem police and Palestinians near the Damascus Gate in the Old City.

The pending elections to the Palestinian parliament which are set to take place next month and are at risk of being suspended indefinitely were also seen as a crucial point of contention.

The officials added that Hamas, at the very least, enabled Gaza's Palestinian factions to target southern Israel. They also opined that by only targeting the border area, it appeared Hamas was seeking to prompt a limited response from Israel that would not spiral out of control and lead to a large-scale conflict.

04.26.21

Hamas warns as Israel closes Gaza fishing zone in response to continued rocket fire

04.26.21

Israel closes Gaza fishing zone in response to continued rocket fire

COGAT announces the move after 3 projectiles were fired at Israel's south overnight for fourth day in a row; at least 4 people were hurt while running for shelter; Hamas warns closure of fishing zone could lead to further escalation

Matan Tzuri | Published: 04.26.21 , 09:09

Israel announced on Monday it has closed the fishing zone of the Gaza Strip coast in response to continued rocket fire, the latest of which saw three projectiles fired at Israeli communities overnight.

Tensions on the southern border have escalated once again over the weekend, with Gaza's rulers Hamas firing over 40 rockets into communities in the south, prompting Israeli military's retaliation.

The latest attack took place on a night between Sunday and Monday and saw Gaza militants fire three projectiles into Israel, triggering rocket alert sirens at kibbutzim Gevim, Nir Am and Erez - all located near the border with the Palestinian enclave.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said two of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome, while the third had landed inside Gaza's territory.

Four people were lightly hurt while running for bomb shelters, including a heavily pregnant woman who was hospitalized for observation.

In response to the rocket launch, Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Maj.-Gen. Ghassan Alian ordered to close the fishing zone starting 6am Monday and until further notice.

" Hamas bears responsibility for everything that is done in and out of the Gaza Strip and it will bear the consequences of the violence perpetrated against the citizens of Israel," said COGAT in a statement.

Hamas for their part said the closure of the fishing zone could further escalate the tensions.

"The closure of the Gaza Strip coast to fishermen is a blatant violation of their rights and an ongoing aggression against our people. Israel's aggressive policy toward Palestinian people will not break its steadfast spirit or weaken its arm and limit its determination. We will not accept restrictions and pressure and Israel will bear the consequences of its aggressive behavior."

Gaza rockets were a Hamas shot across the bow

Opinion: Abbas is trying to use Israel's reluctance to allow East Jerusalem voting as an excuse to call off next month's Palestinian elections, which he's expected to lose; but Hamas, the predicted winner, has no intention of letting that happen

04.25.21

Iran vows to teach a lesson & repeatedly warned not to entrench on Israel's border

04.25.21

Iran military chief vows to 'teach Israel a lesson' in wake of tanker blast

While not directly blaming Israel for attack on vessel off Syrian coast, Mohammed Baqeri says 'Israelis think they can keep hitting Syria and make mischievous moves elsewhere and in the seas and not receive any response'

Ynet| Published: 04.25.21 , 15:31

Iran's military chief on Sunday threatened to teach Israel "a very good lesson," a day after an Iranian oil tanker was attacked off the coast of Syria, killing three people onboard.

"Israelis think they can keep hitting Syria and make mischievous moves elsewhere and in the seas and not receive any response," Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Mohammed Hussein Baqeri said.

"The moves made in the past few days and future moves against their interests will make them be wise," he said.

"We don't announce anything about the incidents that happened recently, nor do we know who did it, but the resistance front will teach a very good lesson to Israel."

Baqeri also vowed that "if Israel's actions against Iran" continue, it's "not clear how Iran will respond, but the Zionist regime will not remain peaceful."

The warning came just one day after the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed an Iranian fuel tanker smuggling oil into Syria was struck in an attack off the port of Baniyas.

The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese news outlet Al-Mayadeen reported that the tanker was attacked by Israeli aircraft.

Jerusalem and Tehran have both been reported to be locked in a covert maritime standoff in recent months amid a host of attacks on Israeli- and Iranian-owned vessels.

Washington recently informed Jerusalem of its displeasure over recent attacks against Iranian targets attributed to Israel, as well as what it called “boasting” by Israeli officials regarding these incidents, sources said.

According to Syria's SANA news agency, the vessel was attacked Saturday with an alleged drone strike purportedly coming from over the Lebanese territorial waters. The three people killed on the ship were said to be Syrian.

Baniyas, which is located roughly halfway between Tartus and Latakia on Syria's Mediterranean shores, is also home to one of the largest oil refineries in the country. Multiple airstrikes targeting Iranian assets in Syria have been attributed to Israel, which has repeatedly warned it would not let the Islamic Republic entrench itself on Israel's northern borders.

Last week, the IDF said it attacked a missile launcher and air-defense systems in Syria after a Syrian surface-to-air missile exploded in the sky near Israel's top-secret nuclear reactor, showering areas near Dimona with debris.

04.26.21

Sensitive tape in March leaked on informer, former US secretary of state John Kerry

04.26.21

Iran's Revolutionary Guard sets policy and Russia tried to thwart nuclear deal, Zarif says in leaked remarks

Former Iranian vice president says comments by FM 'tantamount to Israel stealing nuclear documents,' could impact ongoing efforts to reinstate 2015 pact; Zarif says 'astonished' to discover Israel hit Iranian targets in Syria over 200 times

Ynet, Associated Press | Published: 04.26.21 , 14:05

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps dictates government decisions and Russia worked with slain Iranian general Qassem Soleimani to thwart the 2015 nuclear agreement, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif can be heard to say in a newly leaked audio recording.

“In the Islamic Republic the military field rules. I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the field servicing diplomacy,” Zarif says on the tape of a conversation that took place in March and was initially leaked on Sunday.

According to the New York Times, the comments were made during a discussion between Zarif and Iranian economist Saeed Leylaz.

The Times quoted former Iranian vice president Mohammad Ali Abtahi as saying that the publication of the comments was “tantamount to Israel stealing the nuclear documents” from Iran in 2018.

Portions of the leaked interview were first aired by Iran International, a London-based, Farsi-language satellite news channel once majority owned by a Saudi national. The channel then shared segments of the recording with other news outlets.

On the recording, Zarif says that Soleimani, the Quds Force commander killed by the U.S. in Baghdad last year, took actions that damaged the country, including working with Russia to scupper the nuclear deal.

The comment was apparently so sensitive that he warns the interviewer: "You definitely can never release this part."

According to the sections of the audio received by the Times, Zarif expressed "astonishment" at being informed by former U.S. secretary of state John Kerry that Israel had struck Iranian interests in Syria on at least 200 occasions.

Kerry was the U.S. lead in the negotiations for the nuclear deal during the presidency of Barack Obama.

The release of the audio set off a firestorm within Iran, where officials carefully mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country's supreme leader.

Outside of Iran, Zarif's comments could also affect ongoing talks in Vienna aimed at finding a way for Tehran and the U.S. to both come into compliance with the nuclear deal, which was abandoned by former U.S. president Donald Trump in 2018.

Governor to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mikhail Ulyanov leaves after the Iran nuclear talks on April 6, 2021 in Vienna, Austria

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh did not dispute the leaked tape's authenticity.

He told journalists Monday that the recording represented just a portion of a seven-hour interview Zarif gave to a well-known economist that was to be held for posterity by a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency.

Khatibzadeh called the release of the recording "illegal" and described it as "selectively edited," though he and others did not offer opinions on how it became public.

Tehran has criticized Iran International in the past for its airing of a militant spokesman who praised a 2018 militant attack on a military parade in Ahvaz that killed at least 25 people, including a child. British regulators later rejected an Iranian complaint over the segment.

The Media Line contributed to this report

04.25.21

Israel eased riots & rockets by diplomat message in Egypt, Jordan & UN to Hamas

04.25.21

Calm returns to southern Israel after weekend of Gaza rocket fire

Schools bordering Strip open on schedule, with special session for students to discuss recent violence; Israel passes messages to Hamas that it wants de-escalation; clashes between police and Arab protesters resume in Jerusalem

Ynet| Updated: 04.25.21 , 09:39

Israeli communities close to the Gaza border saw a quiet night Saturday after a weekend of heavy rocket fire from the Strip.

Following security consultations, Israel decided to allow schools in the south to open as usual on Sunday, with a period at the start of the day dedicated to conversations with students about their experiences during the weekend of attacks.

A rocket launched from Gaza at the southern city of Sderot at around 9pm Saturday was intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system. Another rocket launched close to midnight fell just across the border fence and into Israel.

Meanwhile clashes continued Saturday night between police and Arab protesters in Jerusalem, after days of similar confrontations.

The clashes were apparently triggered by a police decision to close off a plaza outside the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City, where Arab residents of the capital traditionally gather during Ramadan.

The IDF did not respond to the latest launches from Gaza, after carrying out airstrikes on Hamas targets in to Saturday in response to the dozens of rockets that were fired overnight Friday.

While the terror group that controls Gaza did not claim responsibility for the rocket fire, on Saturday morning its fighters fired test rockets into the sea, saying they were working on improving military capabilities.

Two people were treated at Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon during the rocket attacks Saturday night, with an 18-year-old young woman hospitalized for trauma and a 21-year-old man for injuries he sustained while running for a bomb shelter.

Throughout Saturday evening, approximately 1,000 Gaza residents protested close to the border fence in support of the protesters in Jerusalem, burning tires and throwing stones.

Israeli officials attempted to ease tensions with Hamas over the weekend, using diplomatic channels in Egypt, Jordan and the UN to deliver the message that the country is committed to allowing freedom of worship in Jerusalem and does not want an escalation in violence.

Hamas also indicated that it too prefers to see the tensions ease.

Tensions were still high in Jerusalem on Saturday night, where hundreds of young people clashed with police forces in the area of the Damascus Gate.

The clashes led to the arrests of 17 people for alleged offences including assaulting police officers, throwing stones and hurling Molotov cocktails.

Police responded by firing stun grenades and using mounted officers to disperse the crowds.

Similar clashes took place in other parts of the West Bank, including Hebron and the village of Hawara near Nablus.

Several police officers were wounded in the riots.

04.25.21

Arab attacks, lynchings, riots & 36 rockets from Gaza with IDF airstrikes Friday

04.25.21

Key Netanyahu ally says 'maybe time to replace PM'

Religious Zionist Party leader attacks premier amid Jerusalem riots and Gaza rocket salvos; Likud whip calls Smotrich 'ungrateful' and urges him to 'show a little humility'

i24NEWS| Published: 04.25.21 , 09:02

Amid violent riots in Jerusalem and a volley of rocket fire emanating from the Gaza Strip, a key ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested on Saturday evening that the time may have come for the country to pick a new leader.

"Maybe it's time to replace Netanyahu," leader of the far-right Religious Zionist Party, Bezalel Smotrich, wrote on Twitter.

Attached to the tweet was also a video of what appeared to be Arab youths attacking a Jewish man in Jerusalem.

"Tell me, after countless terror attacks and lynchings from the Arab enemy in the last few days and after a barrage of [rockets] from Gaza at the communities in the South, Netanyahu wants us to 'calm down' on both sides?"

Likud whip Miki Zohar was first to respond to the post, calling the Religious Zionist Party leader "ungrateful."

"You only passed the [electoral] threshold because Likud gave you three seats [in the election]," Zohar charged. "A little humility wouldn't hurt."

Fresh clashes broke out later Saturday between Palestinians and police after Netanyahu called for "calm on all sides" after several nights of unrest in East Jerusalem.

But the premier also warned that Israel remains "prepared for all scenarios" after dozens of rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, prompting Israeli retaliatory airstrikes.

Thirty-six rockets were launched overnight Friday, the Israeli army said, the most in a single night this year after Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas voiced support for the East Jerusalem riots.

"First of all we want to ensure that law and order are respected... now we demand compliance with the law and I call for calm on all sides," Netanyahu said in a statement after holding security talks with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi.

04.25.21

Scuffles in Jerusalem as Ramadan riot clashed hundreds of police at Damascus Gate

04.25.21

Scuffles in Jerusalem after Israeli-Palestinian Ramadan night clashes
Nightly clashes occur since start of holy month of Ramadan spreading to other locations on West Bank and prompting rocket fire from Gaza; approximately 40 rockets launched from enclave over weekend causing minor injuries
Reuters| Published: 04.25.21 , 07:51

Israeli police and Palestinians scuffled outside Jerusalem's Old City walls overnight into Sunday as tensions flared during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appealed for calm.

Hundreds of police officers in riot gear deployed around the Old City after nightly clashes spilled into the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank. Some Palestinians threw stones and bottles as police on horseback dispersed the crowds, though the violence appeared less intense than on previous nights.

The protests spread to several cities in the West Bank and along the Israel-Gaza border. The Israeli military said it dispersed hundreds of Palestinians, some throwing rocks and burning tires.

Clashes and violent incidents have occurred almost nightly in Jerusalem - a city holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews - since the start of Ramadan on April 13.

They center on Damascus Gate in the Old City's walls - and have flared in recent days as thousands pour out of the historic gateway after leaving the nearby Al-Aqsa Mosque following Ramadan nightly prayers.

Palestinians say police have tried to prevent them from holding their usual Ramadan evening gatherings outside the gate, where metal barriers have been put up in its amphitheater-style plaza. Israelis have been angered by videos on social media showing Palestinians assaulting religious Jews in the city.

"The police are causing the problems. People want to sit down here at Damascus Gate in Ramadan," Fares, 22, a Palestinian from East Jerusalem said outside Damascus Gate. He did not want to give his full name. "Everywhere else is closed because of coronavirus, everybody is at home. Damascus Gate is very important to Palestinians, it's in the name and it's the way to our holy places."

Violence spilled over to Gaza overnight between Friday and Saturday, when Palestinian militants fired 36 rockets at Israel soon after Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas and other armed groups issued a joint call for Palestinian resistance in Jerusalem. Israel retaliated with air strikes. No casualties were reported on either side of the border. Militant rocket fire resumed on Saturday after night fell. Netanyahu said he had instructed security forces to prepare for "any scenario" in Gaza.

"We are maintaining the freedom of worship for all residents and all visitors to Jerusalem as we do every year," he said in a statement on Saturday night. "I call for calm on all sides."

Jerusalem is at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel claims the whole city, including its eastern sector captured in a 1967 S, as its capital. Palestinians seek to make East Jerusalem the capital of a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

A few minutes walk from Damascus Gate, about 150 Israeli peace activists held a rally. "We want to send a message both to the (Israeli) government and to our Palestinian neighbors that we won't stay silent in front of the violence and the incitement and the racism. We will defend the right of everybody to live in Jerusalem peacefully," said Shaqued Morag, head of the Peace Now group.

04.24.21

Oil tanker from Iran delivering to Syria refinery catches fire after IDF attack

04.24.21

Syria oil tanker catches fire after alleged Israeli attack
UK-based monitor says vessel came from Iran; Hezbollah-linked outlet reports tanker hit by IAF while near Baniyas terminal; Syria state media identifies attacking craft as drone coming from direction of Lebanese territorial waters
Ynet, Reuters | Published: 04.24.21 , 20:35

Syria's oil ministry said on Saturday that firefighting teams managed to extinguish a fire in one of the tanks of an oil tanker off the oil terminal of Baniyas after a suspected drone attack from the direction of Lebanese territorial waters, state media reported.

The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese news outlet Al-Mayadeen reported that the tanker was attacked by Israeli aircraft.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Syrian opposition group based in the UK, said that the tanker came from Iran.

Despite the reports, Syria has not blamed anyone for the attack so far.

Jerusalem and Tehran have both been reported to be locked in a covert maritime standoff in recent months amid a host of attacks on Israeli- and Iranian-owned vessels.

Washington recently informed Jerusalem of its displeasure over recent attacks against Iranian targets attributed to Israel, as well as what it called “boasting” by Israeli officials regarding these incidents, sources said.

The coastal town of Baniyas houses a refinery, which along with another in Homs, covers a significant part of Syrian demand for diesel, heating fuel, gasoline and other petroleum products, according to industry experts.

The sanctions-hit, war-torn country has over the past year faced gasoline and fuel shortages, rationing supplies in government-held areas and hiking prices.

Syria has in recent years grown more dependent on Iranian oil shipments but tightening Western sanctions on Iran, Syria and their allies, as well as a foreign currency crunch, have made it more difficult to get enough supplies.

04.24.21

IDF bolstering Iron Dome & tanks on Gaza border to prepare for escalation

04.24.21

Bolstering Iron Dome, IDF threatens harsh response to Gaza rockets

Security cabinet meets after south battered by multiple barrages overnight and Jerusalem clashes resume; army chief cancels U.S. trip to monitor situation; 'I have ordered preparations for any scenario,' says Netanyahu

Yoav Zitun, Itamar Eichner | Updated: 04.24.21, 20:02

The IDF decided Saturday to reinforce the Iron Dome missile defense system located across southern Israel, after the communities close to the Gaza Strip border were pounded by dozens of rockets from the Palestinian enclave overnight.

A source in Jerusalem, meanwhile, warned that "Israel will respond severely to rocket fire from Gaza."

While the Hamas terror group that controls Gaza has refrained from allowing rocket fire on communities that are not adjacent to the Strip, the IDF fears that if the rocket barrages continue, they could target areas further away from the border.

Despite the concerns over further escalation, the IDF decided not to reinforce the Gaza Division, whose troops secure the area of the Gaza-Israel border fence.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had convened the security cabinet for a rare Saturday meeting, after the nightlong barrages and as clashes between Arab protesters and police continued in Jerusalem.

The meeting at the Defense Ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv included Defense Minister Benny Gantz, Public Security Minister Amir Ohana, IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, Shin Bet Director Nadav Argaman, National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and Israel Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai.

"I have ordered preparations for any scenario," Netanyahu said at the end of the meeting.

Kochavi, who earlier held a situation assessment with the IDF General Staff, has ordered security forces to **prepare for a possible escalation** and has cancelled his trip to the U.S. next week.

Ynet analyst Ron Ben-Yishai comments that Kochavi's decision to **cancel his key trip to the U.S.**, during which he was expected to discuss the Iran nuclear deal, is an indication that the **IDF does believe that tensions will continue** and **may** even **escalate**. While it did not claim responsibility for the overnight rocket fire, Hamas test-fired four rockets into the sea of the **Gaza** coast on Saturday morning, saying it was an exercise aimed at **improving its capabilities**.

Palestinian terrorists fired at least **36 rockets from Gaza** into Israeli communities overnight Friday, in one of the worst rounds of cross-border violence in months, setting off sirens across the south and sending residents scrambling for bomb shelters. The rocket sirens blared throughout the night in the Eshkol, Sha'ar Haneguv, Sdot Negev and Hof Ashkelon regional councils and on Saturday morning they sounded in the city of Ashkelon as well.

The **IDF** said its **aircraft and tanks retaliated** by **striking** multiple targets belonging to **Hamas**, the terror group that rules **Gaza**, including rocket **launchers**, unspecified **underground** infrastructure **and a military base**.

On Saturday morning, the IDF lifted security restrictions and said that residents of the south could return to their normal routine.

Hamas said the rockets were fired in response to the recent clashes between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem.

The terrorist group did not claim responsibility for any of the rocket fire, a small paramilitary group affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said it fired some of the projectiles.

Throughout Friday night, thousands marched across the Gaza Strip to call on the militant groups in the Strip to continue firing the rockets.

In Jerusalem, **tensions** have been **higher than usual during** the Muslim holy month of **Ramadan**. Protests **turned violent on Thursday** with scores of arrests and injuries.

The unrest resumed on Friday night, when **Arab youths** gathered **outside** the **walled Old City** and scuffled with **hundreds of Israeli police in riot gear**.

The protesters **pelted stones at police** firing water cannons while others **hurled rocks** at an Israeli court building and **smashed security cameras**.

Dozens of protesters were arrested and some **20 officers injured**.

04.24.21

Grand Mufti of Jerusalem & Hamas leader condemned police attack on Palestinians
Without weapons, we cannot liberate our land, protect holy sites, bring back our people

04.24.21

Dozens arrested in night of chaos and clashes in Jerusalem

44 detained, 20 officers hurt as security forces separately confront Muslims angry about Ramadan restrictions and Jewish extremists at anti-Arab march nearby; U.S. Embassy expresses 'deep concern,' calls for calm

Associated Press | Published: 04.24.21, 13:15

The Israel Police said 44 people were arrested and 20 officers were wounded in a night of chaos in Jerusalem, where security forces separately clashed with Palestinians angry about Ramadan restrictions and Jewish extremists who held an anti-Arab march nearby.

Tensions have spiked in recent days in Jerusalem, which has long been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and is home to holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Residents braced for possible further unrest as police stepped up security and the U.S. Embassy appealed for calm.

In what seemed a retaliation for the incidents in Jerusalem, Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip fired at least 36 rockets at Israeli communities late Friday and early Saturday in the worst cross-border flare-up in months.

Some of the missiles were intercepted by Israeli air defenses and others fell near the Gaza frontier. The Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for some of the rocket fire which began after the Hamas armed wing warned Israel "not to test" its patience.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people challenged nightly curfews imposed by Gaza's Hamas rulers to curb the coronavirus outbreak and took to the streets in an act of solidarity with fellow Palestinians in Jerusalem.

There were concerns the violence could reignite following Friday prayers at a major holy site in Jerusalem, but thousands of worshippers dispersed peacefully after Muslim religious leaders called for restraint.

The Islamic terror group Hamas meanwhile staged demonstrations across Gaza reiterating its support for armed struggle.

But late Friday, dozens of Palestinians marched toward the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem and clashed with Israeli police, which said the protesters had thrown stones and other items at officers. Six Palestinians were injured with two hospitalized.

Palestinians have clashed with Israeli police on a nightly basis since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The tensions began when police placed barricades outside the Old City's Damascus Gate, where Muslims traditionally gather to enjoy the evening after the daytime fast.

Late Thursday, hundreds of Palestinians hurled stones and bottles at police, who fired a water cannon and stun grenades to disperse them. Dozens of Palestinians were wounded in the melee.

Meanwhile, an extremist Jewish group known as Lehava led a march of hundreds of protesters chanting "Arabs get out!" toward the Damascus Gate.

The show of force came in response to videos circulated on TikTok showing Palestinians assaulting religious Jews at random. Other videos made in response to them appear to show Jews attacking Arabs.

Police used metal barricades to halt the far-right protesters a few hundred meters from Damascus Gate. Later, they used water cannon, stun grenades and mounted police to push them back toward mostly Jewish west Jerusalem.

Videos circulated online showed smaller clashes and fires elsewhere in the city. One video showed what appeared to be a group of Palestinians beating an ultra-Orthodox Jew near Damascus Gate. They could be seen punching, kicking and throwing him to the ground before police chased them off.

The police statement did not specify whether those arrested were Palestinian or Jewish and did not refer to any specific instances of violence. The police did not immediately respond to a request for more details.

Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it in a move not recognized by most of the international community. The Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of their future state. Its fate has been one of the most divisive issues in the peace process, which ground to a halt more than a decade ago.

The U.S. Embassy said it was "deeply concerned" about the violence in recent days. "We hope all responsible voices will promote an end to incitement, a return to calm, and respect for the safety and dignity of everyone in Jerusalem," it said in a statement. Tens of thousands of Palestinians attended weekly prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City on Friday. The site is the third holiest in Islam and the holiest for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, condemned the "police and settlers' attack on Palestinians in Jerusalem" in his Friday sermon.

But he called on worshippers to remain calm and not to give the other side an excuse to storm the compound. They dispersed peacefully after prayers and there were no immediate reports of unrest.

The sprawling hilltop compound has seen clashes on a number of occasions over the years and was the epicenter of the 2000 Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

The Palestinian terror group Hamas staged dozens of protests across the territory expressing solidarity with Muslim worshippers in Jerusalem.

Addressing the protesters, senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar condemned the decision of some Arab states to normalize relations with Israel last year and lashed out at the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank for continuing its security coordination with Israel.

"After a long series of protests and demonstrations, we have reached the conclusion that without weapons, we cannot liberate our land, protect our holy sites, bringing back our people to their land or maintain our dignity," Zahar said.

Fatah and Hamas will compete in parliamentary elections set to take place across the Palestinian territories next month, for the first time in 15 years.

04.24.21

Southern Israel pounded by dozens of rockets in overnight strikes from Gaza

04.24.21

Southern Israel pounded by dozens of rockets in overnight strikes from Gaza

At least 36 rockets fired at regular intervals from 11pm to 6am, causing damage but no injuries; IDF attacks several Hamas targets in Strip in response, before announcing return to routine in all border communities on Saturday morning

Reuters, Ynet | Updated: 04.24.21, 10:57

Palestinian terrorists fired at least 36 rockets from Gaza into Israeli communities overnight Friday, in one of the worst rounds of cross-border violence in months, setting off sirens across the south and sending residents scrambling for bomb shelters.

Jerusalem tension triggers Gaza-Israel fire exchange

The rocket sirens blared throughout the night in the Eshkol, Sha'ar HaNegev, Sdot Negev and Hof Ashkelon regional councils and on Saturday morning they sounded in the city of Ashkelon as well.

The IDF said its aircraft and tanks retaliated by striking multiple targets belonging to Hamas, the terror group that rules Gaza, including rocket launchers, unspecified underground infrastructure and a military base.

On Saturday morning, the IDF lifted security restrictions and said that residents of the south could return to their normal routine.

Hamas said the rockets were fired in response to the recent clashes between Arabs and Jews in East Jerusalem.

The Hamas military wing warned Israel "not to test" its patience shortly before the rocket fire began.

"The new Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip is a desperate attempt to break the willpower of our people and its continued resilience," Hamas stated following the IDF strikes in Gaza.

"Our people and its resistance are united with our people in Jerusalem in their campaign against the Zionist occupation and in their defense of the Al-Aqsa Mosque."

The terrorist group did not claim responsibility for any of the rocket fire, a small paramilitary group affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said it fired some of the projectiles.

Throughout Friday night, thousands marched across the Gaza Strip to call on the militant groups in the Strip to continue firing the rockets.

In response to the rocket fire, Shaar HaNegev Regional Council leader Ofir Libstein said: "The rocket fire during the night reminds us that the **peace is temporary and fragile**. This morning we located a strike within the grounds of [a] kibbutz and miraculously there were no casualties."

Gadi Yarkoni, head of Eshkol Regional Council, added that, "as far as we know, the attacks took place in response to the events in Jerusalem. The unbearable ease with which the Gaza organizations permit themselves to fire at adjacent Israeli localities to try to harm civilians is outrageous."

In Jerusalem, tensions have been higher than usual during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Protests turned violent on Thursday with scores of arrests and injuries.

The **unrest resumed on Friday night**, when Arab youths gathered outside the walled Old City and **scuffled with hundreds of Israeli police** in riot gear.

The protesters pelted stones at police firing water cannons while others hurled rocks at an Israeli court building and smashed security cameras.

The Palestine Red Crescent said eight Palestinians were injured. Israeli police said the unrest later extended to a nearby Palestinian neighborhood with Palestinians hurling fire-bombs at officers and throwing stones at Israeli vehicles and homes.

Three Palestinians were arrested and four officers were injured.

In the West Bank, Palestinians clashed with Israeli troops around military checkpoints near West Bank cities. The Border Police said it **dispersed hundreds hurling stones and fire-bombs**.

04.22.21

United Torah Judaism deliberating on whether to enable Saar and Bennett gov't

04.22.21

United Torah Judaism deliberating on whether to enable Bennett-Lapid gov't

As **Netanyahu's government** prospects **diminish**, Haredi party's Lithuanian flank said to eye cooperation with PM's rivals by abstaining in vote on formation of government; UTJ's Hassidic faction strongly opposes move

Kobi Nachshoni | Published: **04.22.21** , 21:59

The Lithuanian faction of the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism (UTJ) party is considering whether to abstain from voting against a government led by Yamina head Naftali Bennett and Yesh Atid chair Yair Lapid, Ynet has learned on Thursday, thus enabling the two to form a government and **avoid a fifth election** round in just two years.

In return, the **Haredi faction** will **demand** that the right-wing flank of such a government would commit itself to maintain the **status quo in state-religion** affairs and **prevent stripping** off **budgets for** the sector's **educational** institutions and **welfare**.

As the chances for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — a long-standing ally of the ultra-Orthodox parties — to form a viable coalition government seem to gradually become slimmer, UTJ head Moshe Gafni and the party's spiritual leader Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky — both members of the Lithuanian faction — were considering abstaining in such a vote and were even actively pushing the move.

UTJ representatives have been holding direct talks with Bennett and New Hope Chairman Gideon Saar on the matter in recent days. Gafni was slated to meet with Lapid next week as well but later called off the meeting for what he called "technical reasons." Such a move is set to serve both sides if it does end up coming to fruition. On one hand, ultra-Orthodox support of a government comprised of Netanyahu's rivals and which relies on the backing of at least one Arab party could whitewash joining such a government for Saar and Bennett's right-wing constituents. On the other hand, UTJ will be able to ensure that a new government without Netanyahu will not harm the interests of the ultra-Orthodox sector.

Responding to Ynet, Gafni categorically denied he was weighing such a move. However, sources in United Torah Judaism's Hassidic faction, led by Construction and Housing Minister Yaakov Litzman, said they were strongly opposed to the move and will work to thwart it.

04.22.21

EU to unveil plan to combat anti-Semitism as part of anti-racism initiative

04.22.21

EU to unveil plan to combat anti-Semitism as part of anti-racism initiative

Initiative aims to encourage member states to prevent and combat anti-Semitism, educate on Holocaust remembrance and foster Jewish life in Europe as continent sees uptick in anti-Semitism during pandemic

i24NEWS| Published: 04.22.21 , 22:13

The European Union announced on Thursday it was planning to release a detailed action plan aimed at combating anti-Semitism, as part of €1.5 billion (\$1.8 billion) anti-racism initiative meant to "support fundamental rights across the bloc."

According to the European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, the initiative "will provide a comprehensive framework to complement and support member states' effort on preventing and combating anti-Semitism, educating on Holocaust remembrance and fostering Jewish life in Europe."

The question of how to tackle these issues came to the forefront of the EU's agenda after a rise in racist and anti-Semitic behavior was noted in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic.

EU leaders signed a declaration in December calling for European governments to enforce harsher punishments for online hate crimes and anti-Semitism.

04.20.21

PM okays unlimited access pilgrimage to Mount Meron on Lag BaOmer

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PM okays curb-free pilgrimage to Mount Meron on Lag BaOmer

Some 200,000 people are expected to partake in the traditional event at the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai after last year's festivities were heavily restricted due to the pandemic

Itamar Eichner, Kobi Nachshoni | Published: 04.20.21, 17:23

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday approved unlimited access to the annual Lag BaOmer festivities on Mount Meron.

Some 200,000 people are expected to arrive and celebrate the holiday at the gravesite of 2nd-century tannaitic sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The outline will, however, restrict gatherings in the lighting areas on the top of the mountain to 10,000 around each bonfire.

It was also agreed that only snacks and drinks will be served around the gravesite while packed meals, as is customary at such Lag BaOmer events, will only be allowed around other areas of the mountain.

Busses and shuttles will operate to and from the area.

Coronavirus Czar Prof. Nachman Ash said that the traditional "visitation tents," where prominent rabbis welcome believers seeking blessings, will not be featured in this year's event as they tend to cause highly crowded mass gatherings.

The outline comes after weeks of rigorous deliberations between health and government officials who sought to allow parishioners to participate in the traditional festivities safely after last year's event was held on a reduced footing due to COVID-19 restrictions at the height of the pandemic, with only 150 worshippers permitted onto the premises. Despite these measures, hundreds of ultra-Orthodox worshippers stormed the site and police made over 300 arrests that night.