

Ynet-News, Jun 31, 2021 – Thursday

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PA security assaulted journalists & UN monitors covering West Bank protests

06.30.21 – We- - -
Heat wave believed responsible for massive Haifa blaze at Carmel Mountain

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Gantz ordered evacuation of illegal outpost to create IDF base

06.24.21 – Th- - - News Placed in Jun 25 spot – Friday
Israel to allow Gaza fishing & import materials, contingent upon stability

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PA police arrested journalist at home after deplorable videos, & beat him to death

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99 missing in Florida building collapse as construction being done on the roof

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In face of Florida building tragedy, Jewish community unites

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PA security assaulted journalists & UN monitors covering West Bank protests

06.30.21
Criticism of PA security forces piles pressure on Abbas
As accusations of corruption mount against him, U.S. and UN condemn Palestinian president for dispatching security forces to violently disperse civilian rallies protesting the death of Palestinian Authority critic Nizar Banat in custody
Reuters| Published: 06.30.21 , 22:03

Pressure is mounting on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas over his security forces' handling of protesters demanding his resignation since one of his biggest critics died in custody.

The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem said on Tuesday it was "deeply disturbed" by reports that protesters had been intimidated and beaten by plain-clothes officers, and the United Nations condemned what it called "totally unacceptable" attacks.

The security forces have denied deploying officers in civilian clothing against protesters. But the criticism of the Palestinian Authority (PA) by such important international backers extends the already long list of problems facing Abbas, 85, after 16 years in power.

The PA has declined direct comment on the circumstances of Banat's death but, offering his condolences, Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said on Tuesday the judiciary would "ensure application of the law against all those found guilty".

The death has led to days of protests in the West Bank and clashes between demonstrators and security forces.

"We are deeply disturbed by reports that non-uniformed members of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) harassed and used force against protesters and journalists over the weekend," a spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy said.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Palestinian territory said one of its rights monitors covering protests in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Sunday was among dozens of people who had been attacked in a "totally unacceptable way".

"The attack, by persons in civilian clothes, included punching, the use of pepper spray, and attempts to steal a phone being used to document events," it said on Facebook.

Talal Dweikat, spokesperson for the Palestinian security forces, said such reports were "not true".

"This is dishonorable talk. There were no security personnel in civilian clothes. Why would (they) wear civilian clothes?," he told the Ramallah Mix broadcaster.

His office declined requests by Reuters for comment.

The PA says it has investigated Banat's death, and Shtayyeh has urged Palestinians not to politicize the case.

Abbas's popularity has plummeted since he was elected in 2005, according to opinion polls. He has ruled by decree for over a decade and the PA faces widespread allegations of corruption, which it denies.

Peace talks have been stalled since 2014, and Abbas has faced criticism for continuing to coordinate with Israel on security issues. Opponents say this enables Israel's of West Bank territory that it captured in 1967.

Anger deepened this year when Abbas cancelled planned elections.

Criticism of the security forces' methods has mounted since Banat's death and Abbas's Fatah party has accused Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas and other rival political factions of being behind them.

Aseel AlBajeh, of the rights group Al-Haq, said she was confronted by men in civilian clothing who pushed her and took her phone when she was filming Sunday's protest in Ramallah.

"You feel completely unsafe because you don't know if the person next to you, dressed in completely normal clothing, is going to beat you up or not," AlBajeh, 26, said.

"It is painful. As Palestinians, we have two struggles: one against an occupying power in Israel, and the other against an authoritarian regime."

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said reporters had been "prevented from covering events and threatened by plain-clothes forces."

It demanded the PA "prosecute those who assaulted journalists, and bring them to justice."

06.30.21

Heat wave believed responsible for massive Haifa blaze at Carmel Mountain

06.30.21

Firefighters quell massive Haifa blaze that threatened homes

National Fire and Rescue Authority says four people treated for smoke inhalation and several apartments damaged in buildings evacuated due to the fire; official cause unknown but severe heat wave believed to be responsible

Ahiya Raved | Published: 06.30.21, 17:41

Firefighter teams on Wednesday extinguished a fire that broke out between the slopes of the foliage rich Carmel Mountain and one of the northern city of Haifa's main residential districts, endangering some homes.

According to the National Fire and Rescue Authority, the cause of the fire was not immediately clear, but it may have been the result of a severe heat wave prevalent across Israel.

Four people were treated for smoke inhalation and several apartments were damaged in buildings that had been evacuated due to the fire's rapid spread.

"We managed to stop the fire and it no longer poses a threat to any buildings," said Haifa fire service commander Hezi Levi.

Haifa municipality opened the Aba Hushi Culture Center in the city to serve as a shelter for those who were forced to evacuate due to the fire, with welfare teams providing assistance and response to the residents who made their way to the center.

Israel is in the midst of an extreme heat wave that has already caused a massive brushfire in the city of Afula on Monday. The fire damaged three buildings before it was eventually put out by a team of 30 firefighters and four firefighting planes. The heat wave is not expected to let up until Sunday, with temperatures expected to rise during the weekend. In the coastal plain, temperatures were expected to exceed 30 degrees Celsius, while in Jerusalem temperatures were set to surpass 33 degrees.

06.28.21

Gantz ordered evacuation of illegal outpost to create IDF base

06.28.21

Gantz: Contentious illegal outpost to be evacuated in coming days

Defense minister says Eviatar to be cleared of its residents despite talks on compromise that would see IDF base created at site while status of land ownership is clarified; settler leader says Civil Administration survey on who owns land shows 'no substantive reason' to evacuate outpost

Elisha Ben Kimon, News Agencies | Published: 06.28.21 , 16:50

Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Monday ordered the evacuation of an illegal settlement outpost in the West Bank in the coming days, despite talks with the settlers living there on a compromise for voluntary evacuation.

The Eviatar outpost was set up in early May and quickly became home to 50 settler families who erected huts and tents and brought in trailer caravans in defiance of international and Israeli law.

According to the compromise drafted by Gantz and Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, the majority of the residents will leave the site and the Defense Ministry will establish an interim base there as the government decides on the legal status of the land. Some media reports said that the area was tapped to ultimately become a yeshiva or Jewish religious seminary.

Gantz, who was also defense minister in the previous government, had ordered the outpost be removed but was blocked by then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Civil Administration, the Israeli body that oversees government activity in the West Bank, began looking into the status of the land two weeks ago, at the request of the settlers there.

The administration found that 80% of the land on which the outpost is located is not private land, and could therefore be declared state land. The access road to the outpost was also not built on private land, the Civil Administration found.

The settlers also consulted with Kobi Eliraz, an adviser to four defense ministers including Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who believes that the status of the outpost can be formalized.

Settler leader and head of Samaria Regional Council Yossi Dagan said that the results of the land survey proved that there is "no substantive reason" to prevent the establishment of Eviatar as a settlement.

The arrival of the settlers at Eviatar, which is named for 2013 terror victim Eviatar Borovsky, caused outrage in the nearby small Palestinian town of Beita, where protests over the illegal outpost have repeatedly ended in clashes with Israeli troops. Four Palestinians including a teenager have been killed and more than 300 wounded, the Palestinian Red Crescent says.

"When they set up their base... we thought they would stay a day or two," said Raad, a young man from Beita, who declined to give his second name for fear of arrest. But in less than 48 hours, "they put in place more than 20 caravans - which means that they intend to stay," he said.

06.24.21

Israel to allow Gaza fishing & import materials, contingent upon stability

06.24.21

Israel to expand Gaza fishing zone, allow import of raw materials

IDF liaison to Palestinians says lifting of restrictions contingent on 'continued stability' in region; decision comes after terror groups warn of renewed violence if J'lem fails to provide humanitarian relief

Elior Levy | Published: 06.24.21 , 19:18

Israel will expand the Gaza Strip's fishing zone and allow the importation of raw materials to essential industries in the Hamas-ruled enclave starting Friday, the military's liaison body to the Palestinians announced on Thursday.

The IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said that the decision — which would allow Gaza fisherman to venture nine nautical miles off into sea instead of just six and the opening of the Kerem Shalom border crossing — was made following "this past week's calm security situation."

It was also stated that "the civilian measures approved by the political echelon are contingent upon the continued stability" in the region.

These gestures on the Israeli side came after Gaza's terrorist factions launched a warning to Jerusalem earlier this week that stalling of humanitarian relief to the seaside territory will lead to further violence.

At the end of a meeting at the office of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, the Palestinians presented a list of demands from Israel that included the opening of border crossings,

allowing the transfer of financial aid from Qatar and the reopening of Gaza's fishing zone.

The terrorist groups said that if Israel refuses to comply with their demands, they will resume incendiary balloon attacks into Israeli soil and riots at the border fence, and even issued a veiled threat to renew rocket fire.

"We warn the Israeli enemy and its allies of delaying the lifting of the siege. The enemy will not succeed with its extortion policy and we will not kick back as our people are being pushed over," the groups said in a statement.

Sinwar and Hamas leadership met with UN mediators in the Gaza Strip on Monday to consolidate a ceasefire agreement with Israel but failed to reach an understanding.

06.28.21

PA police arrested journalist at home after deplorable videos, & beat him to death

06.28.21

Palestinian media rally for protection after activist's death

Reporters Without Borders says that 12 Palestinian journalists, including five women, had been assaulted by Palestinian police during weekend protests in the West Bank against corruption within the Palestinian Authority

AFP| Published: 06.28.21 , 21:46

Dozens of Palestinian journalists rallied outside a UN building in Ramallah Monday to demand press freedom following violent clashes with the Palestinian police sparked by an activist's death in custody.

Nizar Banat, a 43-year-old from Hebron known for social media videos deploring alleged corruption within the Palestinian Authority (PA), died last week shortly after security forces stormed his home and violently arrested him, his family said.

Days of clashes between protesters and police have left several journalists injured. Reporters Without Borders said Monday that during weekend unrest in the West Bank 12 Palestinian journalists, including five women, had been assaulted by Palestinian police.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said Monday that those responsible for Banat's death "will be held accountable," according to the official Wafa news agency. According to an autopsy, Banat had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than an hour elapsing between his arrest and his death.

Banat had registered as a candidate in Palestinian parliamentary elections, which had been set for May until Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas postponed them indefinitely.

06.27.21

Egypt, Jordan and Iraq leaders meet in Baghdad to boost Arab ties without US

06.27.21

Sisi makes first Iraq visit by Egyptian leader in decades

Egyptian president, Jordan's King Abdullah and Iraqi leaders meet in Baghdad to discuss strengthening security, economic, trade and investment cooperation between the three nations

Reuters| Published: 06.27.21 , 17:11

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and Jordan's King Abdullah met in Baghdad on Sunday during the first visit by an Egyptian head of state to Iraq since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990.

The conflict ruptured diplomatic relations between Iraq and Egypt but these have improved in recent years with many senior officials from both countries exchanging visits.

The United States has been urging Iraq to boost ties with Arab nations to counter Iran's influence in the country and Sisi's visit is part of a summit between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

In recent years, Iraq had signed cooperation deals in the energy, health and education sectors with both countries.

On Sunday, the three leaders discussed several areas of regional interest, including the recent development on the Palestinian issue, combating terrorism and economic cooperation, an Egypt presidency statement said.

"The leaders stressed the need to intensify consultation and coordination between the three countries on the most important regional issues," it added.

Kadhimi, Sisi and Abdullah held a summit in Amman last year and were due to hold another in Baghdad in April, but this was delayed after a train crash in Egypt that left dozens dead and wounded.

Egypt signed 15 deals and memoranda of understanding in sectors including oil, roads, housing, construction and trade in February after Iraq's cabinet in December approved renewing its contract to supply the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC) with 12 million barrels of Basra light crude for 2021.

Iraq is also planning to build a pipeline that is meant to export 1 million barrels per day of Iraqi crude from the southern city of Basra to Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba.

"There is genuine economic benefits that come from the "Arab Alliance" for all three partners, notably on energy diplomacy," Hafsa Halwa, non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, said, adding that there was an expectation that stronger relationships could reinvigorate U.S. engagement in the region.

"The hope remains that certain aspects of this alliance can pull Iraq slightly out of Iran's orbit of influence, but not by rushing back into U.S. arms and falling into the binary of being stuck between Washington and Tehran," she added.

06.28.21

Iran militia five drone attacks retaliated by US air strikes in Iraq and Syria

06.28.21

U.S. strikes Iran-backed militia in Iraq, Syria

Targets include operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq in second retaliatory strikes against Iran-backed militia since Biden took office five months ago

Reuters| Published: 06.28.21 , 08:56

The United States said on Sunday it carried out another round of air strikes against Iran-backed militia in Iraq and Syria, this time in response to drone attacks by the militia against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq.

In a statement, the U.S. military said it targeted operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq. It did not disclose whether it believed anyone was killed or injured but officials said assessments were ongoing.

The strikes came at the direction of President Joe Biden, the second time he has ordered retaliatory strikes against Iran-backed militia since taking office five months ago. Biden last ordered limited strikes in Syria in February, that time in response to rocket attacks in Iraq.

"As demonstrated by this evening's strikes, President Biden has been clear that he will act to protect U.S. personnel," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The strikes came even as Biden's administration is looking to potentially revive a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. The decision to retaliate appears to show how Biden aims to compartmentalize such defensive strikes, while simultaneously engaging Tehran in diplomacy.

Biden's critics say Iran cannot be trusted and point to the drone attacks as further evidence that Iran and its proxies will never accept a U.S. military presence in Iraq or Syria.

Biden and the White House declined comment on the strikes on Sunday. But Biden will meet outgoing president, Reuven Rivlin, at the White House on Monday for a broad discussion that will include Iran and U.S. efforts to re-enter the Iran nuclear deal. Those efforts have raised serious concerns in Israel, Iran's arch-foe.

U.S. officials believe Iran is behind a ramp-up in increasingly sophisticated drone attacks and periodic rocket fire against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq, where the U.S. military has been helping Baghdad combat the remnants of Islamic State.

Two U.S. officials, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, said Iran-backed militias carried out at least five drone attacks against facilities used by U.S. and coalition personnel in Iraq since April.

The Pentagon said the facilities targeted were used by Iran-backed militia including Kataib Hezbollah and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada.

One of the facilities targeted was used to launch and recover the drones, a defense official said. The U.S. military carried out strikes with F-15 and F-16 aircraft, officials said, adding the pilots made it back from the mission safely.

"We assess each strike hit the intended targets," one of the officials told Reuters. Iraq's government is struggling to deal with militias ideologically aligned with Iran which are accused of rocket fire against U.S. forces and of involvement in killing peaceful pro-democracy activists.

Earlier in June, Iraq released Iran-aligned militia commander Qasim Muslih, who was arrested in May on terrorism-related charges, after authorities found insufficient evidence against him.

06.24.21

99 missing in Florida building collapse as construction being done on the roof

06.24.21

Dozens unaccounted for in Florida beachfront building collapse

Some 20 Jews are said to be among missing in the Miami area high-rise; one person already found as officials say death toll could rise as rescue crews continue to search ruins

Reuters| Published: 06.24.21 , 22:43

Rescue crews near Miami began the daunting task of searching through tons of rubble for victims and anyone who may have survived the collapse of part of an oceanfront residential tower early on Thursday, with at least one person already found dead and nearly 100 unaccounted for.

Sally Heyman, a Miami-Dade County Commissioner, said officials have been unable to make contact with 51 individuals who "supposedly" live in the building, home to a mix of people including families and part-time "snow bird" residents who spend the winter months in Florida.

Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez later told reporters that 99 people were unaccounted for and that 53 others whose whereabouts were initially unknown have since

been located, though he did not make clear whether everyone in the second group was alive.

Officials said the building, built in 1981, was going through a recertification process requiring repairs and that another building was being newly constructed next door, although the cause of the collapse remained unclear.

Jenny Urgelles woke up to the news that her parents' building had collapsed. She called them, but both their phones went straight to voicemail, she told WSVN 7 News.

"I am holding on to hope. I very desperate to know what's happening," she told the local Fox affiliate.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid spoke by phone with Israel's consul general in Miami, Maor Elbaz, who updated him on the state of operations on the ground.

Lapid also spoke with Jacob Solomon, the head of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

"Foreign Ministry staff in Miami and Israel are doing everything they can to help those on the ground, the wounded and the families. It is a difficult and complex event and it will take time to deal with it. We are at their disposal for any assistance they may need," Lapid said.

A fire official said **35 people were rescued from the building** in Surfside, a seaside enclave of 5,700 residents on a barrier island across Biscayne Bay from the city of Miami, including **two** who were **pulled from the rubble** as response teams used trained dogs and drones in a search for survivors.

Footage from WPLG Local 10, a Miami TV station, showed a rescue team pulling a boy from piles of debris and rebar, and firefighters using ladder trucks to rescue residents trapped on balconies.

The search and rescue effort was slowed by at least one fire that burned at the site as firefighters doused the rubble with water, local media reported.

Emergency responders and officials were still looking for people who might be in the rubble, as well as trying to identify residents not home at 1:30am (05:30 GMT), when an entire side of the building pulled away and fell to the ground below.

"We all woke up in the early morning hours to a tragic scene," said Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who toured the scene of the catastrophe on Thursday afternoon. "We still have hope to identify additional survivors."

At least six Paraguayans were among those unaccounted for, Paraguay's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, including the sister of Paraguay's first lady, the sister's husband Luis Pettengill and their three children.

Subject to various inspections

The Champlain Towers South had more than 130 units, about 80 of which were occupied. It had been subject to various inspections recently due to the recertification process and the adjacent construction of a building called 88 Park, Surfside Commissioner Charles Kesl told Local 10.

"There were garage underground issues related to that, to make sure that it was done soundly," Kesl said. "And, to my understanding, there were some cracks from that project - minor cracks - that were just patched up. Nothing, based on my understanding, to the

magnitude that would indicate that there was a structural problem that could result in something so catastrophic."

Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said construction work was being done on the roof of the Champlain Towers South but there was no indication that it caused the collapse. "It's hard to imagine how this could have happened," Burkett told reporters. "Buildings just don't fall down."

Burkett said that part of the building with balconies facing the beach "pancaked" where one floor appears to have fallen atop another, cascading down. "The back of the building, probably a third or more, is totally pancaked," he said.

Resident Barry Cohen and his wife were rescued from the building. "At first it sounded like a flash of lightning or thunder," Cohen, a former vice mayor of Surfside and a resident of the building, told reporters at the scene. "But then it just kept on - steadily for at least 15 to 30 seconds - it just kept on going and going and going." Cohen also said there had been construction for more than a month on the building's roof. The Miami-Dade Police have assumed control of the investigation. More than 80 fire and rescue units responded, the Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue Department wrote in a Twitter message early Thursday. Eyewitness video obtained by Reuters showed neighbors gathering across the street from the rubble.

06.28.21

In face of Florida building tragedy, Jewish community unites

06.28.21

In face of Florida building tragedy, Jewish community unites

Surfside's 2,500-strong Jewish community tries to stay positive but frustration mounts as painstakingly slow search and rescue operation presses on and death toll climbs; 'As Jews, we believe heavily in miracles and never giving up,' says one local resident
AFP| Published: 06.28.21 , 19:28

The partial collapse of a multi-story residential building in the beachfront Florida town of Surfside has hit the area's Jewish community especially hard, but it is united in the face of tragedy, even as frustrations mount over the slow search for survivors.

"We are a very tight community," Zalmi Duchman, a 41-year-old who lives a few blocks away from the disaster scene at the Champlain Towers complex, told AFP. "We know many of the family members who live in the building, or relatives."

Duchman, who has lived in Surfside for 20 years after growing up in nearby Miami Beach, lent a helping hand Friday at a local community center, now a gathering point for those seeking information about 151 people still unaccounted for.

"Something like this is just impossible to expect — you go to sleep at night and then..." Duchman said. "Obviously, it has hit us very hard, but there is still hope. As Jews, we believe heavily in miracles and never giving up, resilience, trying to stay positive in dark times."

In Surfside, there are about 2,500 Jews — about half the town's population — and many of them are members of the Hasidic Chabad-Lubavitch movement, according to Israeli media.