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Iran outgoing president prepares Raisi, a protégé of Khamenei, to be inaugurated

08.02.21

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08.02.21

Bennett slams Netanyahu government for 'failed' policy on Iran

Speaking to Knesset, PM says previous administration let Hezbollah amass rockets able to reach any part of the country; Defense Minister Gantz promises Israel will act quickly in response to attack on Israeli-operated tanker last week

Ynet| Updated: 08.02.21, 21:19

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Monday said the "failed" policies of Opposition Leader Benjamin Netanyahu's government on Iran caused the need to increase Israel's defense budget.

Speaking in a contentious Knesset session convened by the opposition to discuss "the dangers to Israel's security posed by the government," Bennett listed what he saw as the previous administration's failings.

"Iran is racing ahead with its nuclear program. We will deal with it," he said. "We know what to do, but to fight with every country in the world while Iran proceeds with its military program is irresponsible. But this is the legacy you have left for us."

The premier also slammed the previous government's actions in dealing with the Gaza Strip and for allowing the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah terror group to amass an arsenal of rockets able to reach any part of the country.

Netanyahu in response said that Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid compromised Israel's abilities to act against Iran by promising the U.S. that it would not take military action without informing Washington.

"I never agreed to such a thing, he said. "You've made Israel a protectorate of the U.S.," he told Bennett.

Earlier on Monday, Defense Minister Benny Gantz told Knesset that Israel will act quickly against Iran after the attack on an Israeli-operated oil tanker off the coast of Oman last week, which left two crew members dead.

"Iran's aggression in the region generally and on the maritime front in particular, is intensifying," Gantz said.

"This is the exact reason that we must act right now against Iran, which not only strives for a nuclear military [program] but is also leading to a dangerous arms race and threatening the stability in the Middle East."

Gantz said Iran attacked international shipping at least five times in the past year.

"Iran, under the 'hangman' [Ebrahim] Raisi, who will take office this week, will be more dangerous to the world than it has been so far," the Defense Minister said adding the Islamic Republic will be more destructive to the region, and "will strive to become an existential threat to Israel," he said.

"Israel possesses a variety of tools and options to protect its citizens, and we will hold accountable anyone who seeks to harm us, in the time, place and methods that serve us and our security," Gantz said. First published: 20:19, 08.02.21

08.02.21

Cabinet ministers unanimously approved state budget, now be tabled for the Knesset

08.02.21

Israel advances state budget for first time in 3 years

After a meeting that lasted almost 24 hours, ministers agreed on the final touches in a meeting between Bennett and heads of coalition factions; Health Ministry will get additional NIS 2B after Horowitz conditioned passing of the budget on the increase

Itamar Eichner | Published: 08.02.21, 09:01

Cabinet ministers on Monday unanimously approved its the 2021-2022 state budget, the first fiscal spending package okayed by the government in the past three years.

Due to two years of political stalemate and four elections, Israel has been using a pro-rated version of the 2019 state budget that was passed in March 2018.

The cabinet meeting began on Sunday morning and resumed in the evening following an afternoon break. Shortly after midnight Prime Minister Naftali Bennett convened the heads of factions in the coalition to agree on the final aspects of the budget.

The most contentious point in the draft appeared to be the Health Ministry's share of the budget, which Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz demanded to be higher than what was offered in the original proposal in the wake of the upcoming ministry's overhaul he plans to carry out.

Following nighttime discussions, it was **agreed the Health Ministry will receive an additional two billion** shekels.

On Monday morning, the Health Ministry published the main points of the reform, which include: revamp of the mental health system, increasing the healthcare basket to NIS 600 million, allocation of **six additional MRI machines** to communities in the periphery, allocation of additional NIS 500 million for public hospitals and "immediate" shortening of medical interns' shifts.

Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid on Monday welcomed the approval, saying the country was "getting back on track".

"We're finally getting the country back on track — there is going to be a budget for health, defense, education, welfare, transportation, there will be a budget that will be invested in the citizens of the country," he tweeted.

"Thank you to my government partners who have shown responsibility and determination and worked together for a common goal, for the future of the country's citizens."

Following the cabinet's approval, the budget **will now be tabled for the Knesset plenum**. Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman told reporters ahead of Sunday's cabinet meeting that he was **confident the budget was a good one and** ultimately **would be approved**.

08.01.21

UK, US accuse Iran of drone attack on Israeli-operated tanker off Oman

08.01.21

UK, U.S. accuse Iran of deadly attack on Israeli-operated tanker off Oman

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab says London working with partners on 'concerted response' to July 29 strike on vessel that left British, Romanian seamen dead; U.S. top diplomat Blinken states available information points to **use of explosive UAVs**

News agencies| Updated: **08.01.21**, 21:03

Britain and the United States on Sunday said they believed Iran carried out an attack on an Israeli-managed petroleum product tanker off the coast of Oman on July 29 that killed a Briton and a Romanian.

"The UK condemns the **unlawful and callous attack committed on a merchant vessel** off the **coast of Oman**, which killed a British and a Romanian National," British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

"We believe this attack was **deliberate, targeted**, and a clear violation of international law by Iran."

He said British assessments had concluded it was "highly likely" that **Iran attacked the tanker using one or more drones.**

"The UK is working with our international partners on a concerted response to this unacceptable attack," he said.

In a statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Washington is "confident that Iran conducted the attack" against Israeli-owned warship Mercer Street.

"Upon review of the available information, we are confident that Iran conducted this attack, which **killed two** innocent people, **using one-way explosive (drones)**, a lethal capability it is increasingly employing throughout the region," the statement said. He added that there was "no justification for this attack, which follows a pattern of attacks and other belligerent behavior."

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Sunday accused Tehran of "trying to shirk responsibility" for the attack, blasting its "cowardly" denial of any involvement.

Iran said on Sunday it was not involved in the attack on the Mercer Street tanker that American experts said was likely carried out by a drone.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a weekly news conference that the "Zionist regime has created insecurity, terror and violence... These accusations about Iran's involvement are condemned by Tehran."

"Such accusations are meant by Israel to divert attention from facts and are baseless," Khatibzadeh said.

Speaking during a weekly meeting of his cabinet on Sunday, Bennett said there was no doubt Iran was responsible and warned that Israel would not let the attack go unanswered.

"I declare unequivocally: Iran is the one that carried out the attack on the ship," Bennett said, adding that intelligence supports his claim.

"We, in any case, have our own way to relay the message to Iran," the prime minister said.

Bennett's comments came a day after Foreign Minister Yair Lapid also said the incident merited a harsh response.

The British and Romanian crew members were killed when the Mercer Street, a **Liberian-flagged, Japanese-owned ship managed by Israeli-**owned Zodiac Maritime was attacked. UK-based Zodiac Maritime, which operates the tanker **described the incident as "suspected piracy"** and a source at the Oman Maritime Security Center as an accident that occurred outside Omani territorial waters.

U.S. and European sources familiar with **intelligence** reporting said **Iran was their leading suspect for the incident.** First published: 18:53, 08.01.21

07.29.21

German anti-racism foundation cuts ties with Ben & Jerry's over West Bank boycott

07.29.21

German anti-racism foundation cuts ties with Ben & Jerry's over Israel boycott
Amadeu Antonio Foundation, which engages against far-right-wing policies, says in a letter that boycott movements 'demonize and delegitimize' Israel and spread anti-Semitism; adds boycotters treat Hamas better than Israel
Ynet| Published: 07.29.21, 14:03

A German anti-racism foundation said it has cut ties with ice cream maker Ben & Jerry's over its decision to boycott Israeli settlements.

Ben & Jerry's announced last week its decision to stop selling ice cream in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The ice cream brand - which was acquired by Unilever in 2000 in a deal allowing it to operate with larger autonomy than other subsidiaries - apparently made its decision after pressure from pro-Palestinian groups.

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation said in a letter published on its website Wednesday they are "disappointed" that Ben & Jerry's is "following the line of the anti-Semitic boycott movement BDS".

The foundation was established in 1998 in an effort to fight against far-right-wing parties, racism and anti-Semitism. It is named after Amadeu Antonio Kiowa, one of the first victims of far-right violence after the reunification of Germany in 1990.

"This decision supports the argument that on the one hand there is an 'evil Israel' and on the other hand only 'good, oppressed' Palestinians" said the letter. "Boycott movements demonize and delegitimize Israel and thus spread Israel-related anti-Semitism.

"Although boycotters call themselves human rights-oriented, they apply fundamentally different standards to the democratic State of Israel than, for example, to the terrorist regime of Hamas or the corrupt system of Fatah."

The letter added the boycott will not advance the peace process and will only make the lives of Palestinians living in the West Bank more difficult.

"Hatred is spread under the guise of 'criticism of Israel,' poisoning the climate against Jews ... Under these circumstances, we will therefore halt our cooperation with Ben & Jerry's."

08.01.21

Iran outgoing president prepares Raisi, a protégé of Khamenei, to be inaugurated

08.01.21

Iranian government not always truthful, says departing president

Rouhani's comments, aired on state television, come as officials in his government have appeared rudderless in recent months amid a series of crises ranging from the coronavirus pandemic to parching droughts fueling public protests

Associated Press| Published: 08.01.21, 14:55

Iran's outgoing president on Sunday acknowledged his nation at times "did not tell part of the truth" to its people during his eight-year tenure, as he prepares to leave office with his signature nuclear deal with world powers in tatters and tensions high with the West.

President Hassan Rouhani's comments, aired on state television, come as officials in his government have appeared rudderless in recent months amid a series of crises ranging from the coronavirus pandemic to parching droughts fueling public protests.

After appearing just days earlier to be lectured by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei about their failures in the nuclear negotiations, Rouhani's remarks appeared aimed at acknowledging the problems his government faced in its waning hours. President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Khamenei, will be inaugurated Thursday.

"What we told people was not contrary to reality, but we did not tell part of the truth to people," Rouhani said at his last Cabinet meeting as president. "Because I did not find it useful and I was afraid it would harm national unity."

He did not elaborate on what he meant by his remarks. However, during his tenure, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard mistakenly shot down a commercial airliner and killed 176 people onboard in January 2020, which the government refused for days to acknowledge until Western nations went public with their suspicions.

Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's theocracy, insisted he and his officials did their best.

"If we have a defect, we apologize to the people and ask them for forgiveness and mercy," Rouhani said.

He pointed to the country's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Iran agree to limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. However, that deal now sits in tatters after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in May 2018.

Rouhani blamed many of Iran's current problems on Trump's decision, which saw the value of the Islamic Republic's rial currency crash. The president said that while Iran had plans to upgrade its armed forces after the expiration of a UN arms embargo in October 2020, it couldn't due to its financial woes.

"We did not have the money to buy due to sanctions and not selling oil, but the contract is completely ready," he said.