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China ends vulgar & sissy men from TV, games & media as lost morality

09.03.21

Damascus anti-aircraft missile exploded near Tel Aviv, fired following IDF strike

09.03.21

IDF says Syrian anti-aircraft missile exploded over central Israel

Military says remains of the missile were located in Tel Aviv, where no sirens sounded; incident occurred shortly after Syria had reported about alleged IDF strike near Damascus, which apparently targeted weapons development centers

Ynet| Published: 09.03.21, 09:46

The IDF said on Friday that explosions heard over central Israel overnight were caused by a Syrian anti-aircraft missile that exploded off the coast.

No sirens sounded and there were no reports of injuries or damage in Israel. The remains of the missile were located in Tel Aviv.

The projectile was fired following reports from Syria that its air defenses shot down missiles fired by Israel in the skies over the capital Damascus.

"The Israeli enemy carried out an air aggression from the direction southeast of Beirut, targeting some points in the vicinity of the city of Damascus," a Syrian military source was quoted as saying in a statement published on state television.

Syrian TV showed scenes of air defenses shooting at targets over the city.

"Our air defense confronted the aggressor's missiles and shot down most of them, and the losses were limited to materiel," the statement said.

The Israeli military declined to comment on the reported strike in Syria.

The Britain-based Observatory for Human Rights reported that weapons development centers near Damascus used by Iran-backed militias had been targeted in the alleged Israeli strikes.

On August 20, Syrian surface-to-air missile systems (SAM) fired against alleged Israeli airstrikes that killed four pro-Iranian fighters in Damascus. Russian military sources claim that 22 Israeli missiles were shot down during the attack.

09.02.21

Knesset gives 2021–22 state budget preliminary nod, with billions to Ra'am coalition

09.02.21

Knesset gives 2021–22 state budget preliminary nod

Coalition registers big win, pushing through spending package with 59–54 majority on 2021 budget and 59–53 for 2022; votes for final approval are due in November

Reuters| Published: 09.02.21, 22:54

Knesset gave preliminary approval on Thursday to a 2021–2022 state budget, the country's first ratified spending package in more than three years.

Lawmakers passed the 14-month budget bill in first reading, voting 59–54 on the 2021 budget and 59–53 for 2022. Votes for final approval are due in November.

The Knesset session was a fresh test for the cross-partisan coalition government of Naftali Bennett, who took over in mid-June after unseating veteran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Bennett wields a razor-thin majority in parliament.

The budget earmarked NIS 432.3 billion (\$134.85 billion) in 2021 spending and NIS 452.5 billion shekels for 2022 — including funds to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

The budget deficit was projected at 6.8% of gross domestic product in 2021 and 3.9% in 2022, after hitting 11.6% in 2020.

Bennett and Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman had come under pressure from ministers and lawmakers upset at some planned reforms, while others sought higher funding. Two years of political stalemate and four elections had left Israel still using a pro-rated version of the 2019 state budget passed in March 2018.

A refusal by Netanyahu last year to agree to a two-year budget for 2020 and 2021 helped bring down his coalition.

Earlier Thursday, Knesset voted for the state budget Arrangements Law in its first parliamentary reading, per a Channel 12 report.

The Arrangements Law is a government-sponsored bill presented to Knesset each year alongside the State Budget Law. It incorporates government bills and legislative amendments that are needed in order for the government to fulfill its economic policy. The coalition had to amend the bill to appease the left-wing coalition member Meretz who opposed a regulatory reform proposed by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's Yamina party included in the Arrangements Bill for fear it would benefit business and industry at the expense of public health and the environment.

Speaking to the Knesset plenum, Netanyahu rapped the proposed budget outline, which he described as "bad."

"The budget presented today is a bad one. It includes punishments [on the public] and tax hikes in stark contrast to your promises. You are hurting farmers, the weaker populations, the periphery, the middle class," Netanyahu said, behind a glass-enclosed balcony where he is quarantining after returning from abroad.

The Likud chairman has also hit out at the coalition for billions promised to coalition member Ra'am — an Islamist party which supports Palestinian independence — and a deal recently announced by Defense Minister Benny Gantz to give the Palestinian Authority a NIS 500-million (\$155-million) loan in a bid to save its economy as it finds itself in the doldrums.

"You gave a fortune to [Ra'am leader] Mansour Abbas and [Palestinian President] Mahmoud Abbas because you depend on the NIS 53 billion you promised Ra'am."

09.02.21

Gantz stirred two-state confidence into Abbas, Sisi & Abdullah of PA, Egypt & Jordan

09.02.21

Palestinian president says he's ready for confidence-building with Israel

Meeting with Egypt's al-Sisi and Jordan's Abdullah in Cairo, the three leaders pledge 'to work together on vision to activate efforts aimed at resuming negotiations, and work to revive the peace process'

Reuters| Published: 09.02.21, 19:11

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Thursday he was ready to take confidence-building measures and restore calm in the Palestinian territories, though Israel's actions had made a two-state solution impossible.

Abbas spoke as he met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah in Cairo, days after he held talks with Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz in a rare high-level meeting.

Egypt played a leading role in brokering the ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian Islamist faction Hamas after 11 days of conflict in May in the Gaza Strip, and has since been trying to help reinforce the truce amid occasional renewed flare-ups of violence and to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza.

In Cairo, the three leaders pledged "to work together to refine a vision to activate efforts aimed at resuming negotiations, and work with brothers and partners to revive the peace process", according to a statement released by Egypt's presidency. Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians collapsed in 2014 and analysts say there is little prospect of reviving them, partly due to divisions between Abbas' Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. The PA seeks an independent state in Gaza and the West Bank.

In an address at the Cairo talks, Abbas said that although an escalation of Israeli "violations" had made a two-state solution in line with international law unattainable, the PA was committed to peaceful methods.

"We renew our readiness to work in this stage to prepare the atmosphere by the application of confidence-building steps that include achieving comprehensive calm in Palestinian lands," he said, according to a text published by the state-run Palestinian news agency Wafa.

After Abbas met with Gantz, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett quickly played down the idea of any move towards peace negotiations, though Israel also agreed to lend the Palestinian Authority \$150 million.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid cast doubt on Wednesday on the prospects for a two-state solution, saying such a move could destabilize the cross-partisan coalition.

09.02.21

Haifa teacher declines vaccine & mask, holes up in school until police arrive

09.02.21

Unvaccinated teacher declines COVID test, holes up in a kindergarten
Staff call authorities after vaccine hesitant substitute teacher refuses to leave special education kindergarten; local official: educators should be responsible for health and wellbeing of pupils

Lior El-Hai, Tamar Trabelsi Haddad | Published: 09.02.21, 18:05

A teacher who is not vaccinated against coronavirus holed herself up in a preschool in the northern city of Haifa Thursday morning after being asked to leave for refusing to get tested for the pathogen.

The teacher arrived as a substitute at a special education preschool in Haifa's Kiryat Eliezer neighborhood.

The regular teacher had prior knowledge that the substitute is refusing to get tested for coronavirus as required by unvaccinated educators and decided to forgo her day off and arrive at the establishment anyway.

The substitute teacher arrived at the place without wearing a face mask. The regular teacher asked her to put a mask on and stay away from the children, but she refused and even hole herself up in the place.

The regular teacher contacted the Education Ministry and local authorities and then went on to gather the children and take them out to a shaded area in the yard where they waited.

The regional Education Ministry supervisor, the director of the municipal preschool department and the kindergarten staff pleaded the recalcitrant substitute teacher who refused to heed their calls.

After some back and forth between the sides, she ultimately agreed to leave the place and the children were allowed back inside.

In the afternoon, police officers arrived at the establishment to maintain the order. There were no unusual incidents and the police left the scene.

"This is an incident that should not have happened. Educators should be responsible for the health and wellbeing of pupils, especially in special education where children are at a higher risk from the virus," a Haifa education official told Ynet.

"The regular teacher should be commended for taking responsibility and coming to the kindergarten to deal with the issue in a professional manner while preventing any risk to the children and maintaining their safety and health."

09.02.21

Shanghai International Port at Haifa cuts wait times & enables larger cargo ships

Israel opens Chinese-operated port in Haifa to boost regional trade links

The 1.7 billion dollar private port enables larger classes of cargo ships carrying 18,000 containers to dock in Israel after nearly 99% of goods move in and out of Israel over sea; port expected to reduce costs and cut above-average wait times for vessels to unload

Reuters | Published: 09.02.21, 11:39

Israel has opened a **new shipping port** along its Mediterranean coast that will bring much needed competition to a sector plagued by delays and **boost the country's standing as a regional trade hub**.

The 5.5 billion shekel (\$1.7 billion) **Bay Port at Haifa**, which will be **operated by Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG)**, **will enable larger classes of cargo ships**, carrying 18,000 containers or more, to dock in Israel.

The country is selling its state-owned ports and building new private docks in an effort bring down costs and cut above-average wait times for vessels to unload. About 99% of all goods move in and out of Israel over sea and an upgrade is needed to maintain economic growth.

Warming ties with neighboring **Arab** countries are also creating new trade opportunities for Israel and Haifa is well **placed to become a regional hub**.

"I'm sure we can leverage this opportunity not just for local prosperity, but for realizing opportunities and making a real contribution to our neighbors in the Middle East," Transport Minister Merav Michaeli said in a statement after the **port was inaugurated** in a low-key ceremony on **Wednesday**.

09.01.21

NSO Pegasus remote surveillance of smartphones, requires safeguards of misuse

09.01.21

Israel to ensure spy tech 'doesn't fall into wrong hands'

Foreign minister says **Israel not accountable for crimes** and abuse committed **by clients who bought NSO group's Pegasus spyware**; vows to enforce and strengthen **safeguards** to **prevent further abuse** of defensive exports

Associated Press| Published: **09.01.21**, 22:10

Israel on Wednesday played down criticism of the country's regulation of the cyberespionage firm **NSO Group** but **vowed to step up efforts to ensure spyware** exported by the country "doesn't fall into the wrong hands."

Speaking to foreign journalists, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said the government has only **limited control over how** defense exports are used by customers. Yet he said that Israel is committed to enforcing and **strengthening safeguards to prevent abuse** of all types of weapons.

"We are going to look at this again," Lapid said. "We're going to make sure, or try to make sure **to the extent of what is doable and what is not**, that nobody is misusing anything that we sell."

NSO has come under widespread criticism over reports that its flagship spyware product, Pegasus, has been misused by governments to spy on dissidents, journalists, human rights workers and possibly even heads of state. Pegasus is able to stealthily infiltrate a target's mobile phone, giving users access to data, email, contacts and even their cameras and microphones.

NSO has denied wrongdoing. It says it sells Pegasus only to governments and only for the purpose of catching criminals and terrorists. The Defense Ministry regulates all arms exports, including cyber products.

In late July, the ministry said it had sent a team to meet with NSO representatives after France said it was looking into suspicions that President Emmanuel Macron may have been targeted by Moroccan security agents using Pegasus spyware.

Morocco has denied the allegations, and NSO has said Macron's phone was not targeted. Lapid, saying he was aware of the "rumors" about NSO, compared cyber exports to traditional arms sales. He said that despite the many safeguards in place, it is impossible to guarantee what a customer will do with the weapon.

A man reads at a stand of the NSO Group Technologies, an Israeli technology firm known for its Pegasus spyware enabling the remote surveillance of smartphones, at the annual European Police Congress in Berlin

A man reads at a stand of the NSO Group Technologies, at the annual European Police Congress in Berlin (Photo: Reuters)

"Once you have sold the jet, the cannon, the gun or the missile, or Pegasus, it is in the hands of the government who bought it," Lapid said. "So we're trying our best to make sure it doesn't fall into the wrong hands. But no one has an ability to fully protect the other side after it was sold."

But he said Israel was working to make sure that nobody is using Pegasus "against civilians or against dissidents."

08.31.21

Pfizer deal halted Israel vaccine, effective for 4-5 months & fails on Delta variant

08.31.21

Head of Israel's Biological Institute: Our COVID vaccine was sabotaged

Professor Shmuel Shapira says his institute was half way to developing an Israeli made vaccine when the government opted to turn country into Pfizer's experimental laboratory; 'We may not be chosen by the pharma industry next time and must rely on ourselves,' he says

Sarit Rosenblum | Updated: 08.31.21, 19:13

As the chief of Israel's Institute for Biological Research, Prof. Shmuel Shapira has grown accustomed to dealing with the unexpected.

Still, the man who headed one of the country's most secretive and important institutions for the better part of a decade will never forget the phone call he received on February 1, 2020.

On the other side of the line was the office of then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who summoned Shapira to an urgent meeting on the development of an Israeli made COVID vaccine.

A year and a half after that call, over 5 million Israelis had already received the Pfizer vaccine - which many around the country regard as nothing less than an economy-saving lifeline.

Shapira, though, still believes in his institution's own vaccine, the development of which, he claims, was suspended for reasons unknown.

"We are a big enough and important enough country to have our own vaccine," says Shapira.

"Maybe tomorrow we will not have such a good relationship with one country or company and we will not get the vaccines so fast," he added, referring to the deal Netanyahu made with Pfizer's CEO, Albert Bourla, who agreed to send Israel tens of millions of doses of their COVID vaccine in exchange for medical data on its effects on Israel's population.

"Maybe the CEO of the next vaccine developer will decide to conduct its medical experiments on the citizens of Singapore instead. What will we do then?"

According to Shapira, the development of the Israeli vaccine is still ongoing because the pandemic is not over and the Delta variant is spreading rapidly around the country.

"I have documentation that government officials worked to delay us for months on end," says Shapira.

"When senior officials in the Health Ministry say the Israeli vaccine is unnecessary, it is basically a call to shut down the project. When officials in the Finance Ministry hears this, they tend to think to themselves, 'wait a minute, maybe this project is a waste of money'. We saw real malice, in some instances," he said.

Shapira added that in July 2020, his team was on the cusp of a breakthrough, with a real effective vaccine at hand.

"We should have and could have started the regulatory process back then. By my count, four times the Health Ministry rejected our pleas to start the process, for reasons I, and many others, thought were irrelevant."

Shapira is critical of the government's decision to administer a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine to the over 12 population. "There's a lot of problems with that move. The first two shots hit their mark, sort of. I don't think it was an excellent vaccine. It was effective for four to five months and failed very quickly when mutations began to appear," Shapira explains.

"When there is a serious medical problem, you should try to attack the cause from different fronts. Here they chose to attack on the same front, with the same vaccine that is simply not suitable for the current variant."

One of the issues with the third jab, Shapira says, is that Israel once again, became a medical experimental lab for the world.

"We did the same thing with the first and second doses of the vaccine. Now we're doing it again with the third jab," he says, emphasizing that those who received Pfizer's vaccines, willingly participated in the medical trial of a commercial company.

"I myself am in no hurry to get the booster vaccine," Shapira says. "I will wait a bit to see what happens. I hope that in the meantime a serious article may be published. Maybe some reputable world authority will express its opinion on the vaccines."

The full interview will be published on the weekend

First published: 18:55, 08.31.21

09.01.21

Israel opposes US plan to reopen Jerusalem consulate as 'destabilizing'

09.01.21

Israel opposes U.S. plan to reopen Jerusalem consulate as 'destabilizing'

Lapid warns move could send wrong message to Palestinians and others in the region, adding the decision is Israel's to make; says he, like Biden, favors a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Reuters| Updated: 09.01.21, 17:22

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said on Wednesday that a U.S. plan to reopen its consulate in Jerusalem that has traditionally been a base for diplomatic outreach to Palestinians is a "bad idea" and could destabilize Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's new government.

"We think this is a bad idea and told the U.S. as much," he said. "The consulate has been there for 130 years and reopening it after it was closed sends the wrong message."

The prior administration of President Donald Trump signaled support for Israel's claim on Jerusalem as its capital by moving the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv and subsuming the consulate in that mission.

It was among several moves that incensed the Palestinians, who want East Jerusalem as capital of a hoped-for, future state.

President Joe Biden has pledged to restore ties with the Palestinians, back a two-state solution and move forward with reopening the consulate, which has remained shuttered since 2019, with Palestinian affairs handled by the embassy.

"Jerusalem is the sovereign capital of Israel and Israel alone, and therefore we don't think it's a good idea, Lapid said. "We know that the (Biden) administration has a different way of looking at this, but since it is happening in Israel, we are sure they are listening to us very carefully."

Asked for comment, Wasel Abu Youssef, an official with the umbrella Palestine Liberation Organization, said Israel was trying to keep the status quo and block any political solution.

The U.S. embassy had no immediate comment.
Israel deems all of Jerusalem its undivided capital - a status not recognized internationally.

"We have an interesting and yet delicate structure of our government and we think this might destabilize this government and I don't think the American administration wants this to happen," he said.

Divisions among Palestinians also cast doubt about the prospects for diplomacy, Lapid said. "I am a devoted believer in the two-state solution ... but we'll have to admit the fact this is not feasible in the current situation."

First published: 17:12, 09.01.21

09.02.21

China ends vulgar & sissy men from TV, games & media as lost morality

09.02.21

China bans 'insufficiently masculine' men from TV

Regulator says broadcasters must 'resolutely put an end to sissy men and other abnormal esthetics,' using an insulting slang term for effeminate men — 'niang pao,' or literally, 'girlie guns'

Associated Press| Published: 09.02.21, 18:23

China's government banned effeminate men on TV and told broadcasters Thursday to promote "revolutionary culture," broadening a campaign to tighten control over business and society and enforce official morality.

President Xi Jinping has called for a "national rejuvenation," with tighter Communist Party control of business, education, culture and religion. Companies and the public are under increasing pressure to align with its vision for a more powerful China and healthier society.

The party has reduced children's access to online games and is trying to discourage what it sees as unhealthy attention to celebrities.

Broadcasters must "resolutely put an end to sissy men and other abnormal esthetics," the TV regulator said, using an insulting slang term for effeminate men — "niang pao," or literally, "girlie guns."

That reflects official concern that Chinese pop stars, influenced by the sleek, girlish look of some South Korean and Japanese singers and actors, are failing to encourage China's young men to be masculine enough.

Broadcasters should avoid promoting "vulgar internet celebrities" and admiration of wealth and celebrity, the regulator said. Instead, programs should "vigorously promote excellent Chinese traditional culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture."

Xi's government also is **tightening control over Chinese internet** industries.

It has launched anti-monopoly, data security and other enforcement actions at companies including **games and social media** provider Tencent Holding and **e-commerce** giant Alibaba Group that the ruling party worries **are too big and independent.**

Rules that took effect Wednesday **limit anyone under 18 to three hours per week** of online games and **prohibit play on school days.**

Game **developers** already were **required to submit new titles for government approval before** they could be **released.** Officials have **called on them to add nationalistic themes.**

The party also is **tightening control over celebrities.**

Broadcasters should avoid **performers who "violate public order" or have "lost morality,"** the regulator said. Programs about the children of celebrities also are **banned.**

On Saturday, microblog platform Weibo Corp. suspended thousands of accounts for fan clubs and entertainment news.

A popular actress, Zhao Wei, has disappeared from streaming platforms without explanation. Her name has been removed from credits of movies and TV programs.

Thursday's order told broadcasters to **limit pay for performers and to avoid contract terms that might help them evade taxes.**

Another actress, Zheng Shuang, was fined 299 million yuan (\$46 million) last week on tax evasion charges in a **warning to celebrities to be positive role models.**