

Ynet-News, Jan 18, 2022 – Tuesday

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Police state; use of Pegasus spyware on civilians is done with required legal permits

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Israel police in standoff with Palestinian home evictions to build a school

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Jerusalem orders demolition of Dome of the Rock replica built before 1948

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Texas synagogue attacked, demanding prison release the daughter of al-Qaida Dan 11:17?

01.18.22

Police state use of Pegasus spyware on civilians is done with required legal permits

01.18.22

State comptroller to probe alleged police use of spyware on civilians

Government watchdog says reported misuse of malware raises serious questions about balance between individual liberties and law enforcement's investigative needs; attorney-general also looking into allegations

Nina Fox | Published: 01.18.22, 22:54

State Comptroller Matanyahu Englman said on Tuesday he would launch a probe into alleged police use of controversial spyware on Israeli citizens, first broke out by financial daily Calcalist.

The Ynet sister publication revealed that the use of the malware was authorized by the law enforcement organization's top brass while skipping the required court order.

According to Englman, the report raises serious questions in regards to the balance between individual liberties and the investigative needs of law enforcement while risking data leaks and misuse of databases.

Attorney Gilad Samama, the head of privacy regulator Privacy Protection Authority, spoke to Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai to learn about the scope of law enforcement's use of the Pegasus software, owned by embattled Israeli tech firm NSO Group, and demanded an urgent hearing on the matter.

Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit was also looking into the issue.

The Justice Ministry stressed that hacking a civilian's computer or cellphone without a court order is illegal and any investigation making use of such measures requires special authorization from supervising legal bodies, including the Attorney-General Office's cyber department.

Israel Police denied allegations it made use of the Pegasus malware without legal supervision, particularly against mayors and protesters opposed to former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as alleged by Calcalist.

Shabtai ordered the instances specified in the report to be investigated and noted that some of the incidents mentioned in the report were found to be incorrect.

"When it comes to the use of the software for law enforcement purposes, everything was done with the required legal permits," he said. "Israel Police will not use its technological capabilities against innocent civilians and demonstrators."

01.17.22

Israel police in standoff with Palestinian home evictions to build a school

01.17.22

Israel police in standoff with Palestinians over Sheikh Jarrah eviction

Mohammed Salhiya barricades himself on roof of his home in East Jerusalem, threatening to set himself on fire if municipality doesn't sign papers, promising not to evict him, which is stipulated by an eviction order from 2017

AFP, Ynet | Published: 01.17.22, 13:35

Israeli police were in a standoff Monday with a Palestinian man who carried a gas canister onto the roof of his home in a Jerusalem flashpoint neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah as his family faced eviction.

Media reports said that Mohammed Salhiya had threatened to set himself on fire if the eviction order from the East Jerusalem neighborhood was carried out. Salhiya's family has been facing an eviction threat since 2017, when the **land** where his home sits was **allocated for school construction**.

Public Security Ministry, however, said Salhiya's home is not intended for eviction this week, only the nursery located next to it.

Police and the Jerusalem municipality said in a joint statement delegates went to the home early Monday after the Salhiyas ignored "countless opportunities" to vacate the land as ordered.

"Whoever leaves his house is a traitor," said Salhiya. "We will not be evicted from the house. Either we will die or we will live. I am going to burn myself."

He apparently **agreed** to get down from the roof if he was **presented with a document promising not to evict him** from his home. Police said they did not intend to evict him by force, but the municipality made it clear that they do not intend to sign any document as long as the family members are fortified on the roof.

"We've been in this **home since the 1950s**," said Salhiya family member Abdallah Ikerawi from the roof of the home. "We don't have anywhere to go," he said in quotes provided by the Sheikh Jarrah Committee organization, adding that the family was made up of 15 people, including children.

An 11-day Gaza war between Israel and the Palestinians erupted last year, fueled by anger in Sheikh Jarrah where families battled eviction orders.

Police said their "negotiators" were at the Salhiya home after several residents of the house "began to fortify themselves with a gas canister and other flammable material". Witnesses said that clashes between security forces and locals erupted after the police arrived but later eased.

Hundreds of Palestinians are facing evictions from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and other East Jerusalem neighborhoods.

'Plenty of space'

In some cases, Jewish Israelis have mounted legal challenges to claim the land they say was illegally taken during the war that coincided with Israel's founding in 1948.

Palestinians have rejected these claims, saying their homes were legally purchased from Jordanian authorities who controlled East Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967.

Seven Palestinian **families** in Sheikh Jarrah have taken their legal challenges against their **eviction threats** to Israel's Supreme Court. The Salhiyas are not in that group.

Jerusalem City councilor Laura Wharton, who was at the scene and due to meet the Salhiya family later Monday, criticized the municipality's actions. "They could have built the schools in the same plot without moving the families. There is plenty of space," she said.

"The sad thing is this is the **municipality itself doing this**, it's not some right wing settlers."

01.16.22

Jerusalem orders demolition of Dome of the Rock replica built before 1948

01.16.22

Jerusalem orders demolition of Dome of the Rock replica

Municipality cites safety concerns over parts of **compound built without permit** or approval of certified engineers; nonprofit says **mosque symbolizes lawlessness**
|24NEWS| Published: **01.16.22**, 13:59



The Al-Rahman mosque in Beit Safafa, Jerusalem

The **Jerusalem Municipality ordered the demolition** of a mosque in the Palestinian neighborhood Beit Safafa which is considered to be a replica of one of the country's most recognizable landmarks.

The Al-Rahman Mosque - **built before** Israel's founding in **1948** - reportedly drew criticism from several Israeli NGOs due to its striking similarity to the Temple Mount's Dome of the Rock, an Islamic shrine and UNESCO World Heritage Site sacred to both Jews and Muslims.

According to court documents filed last Wednesday, the **municipality approved the demolition** on the **basis** of a floor to the building that was **built without a permit**.

The municipality further added that 700 square meters of the compound were built without a permit or the approval of certified engineers, and therefore posed a safety risk. “[The mosque] symbolizes the fact that there is no law and no enforcement in the State of Israel,” said Yehuda Sharabanay, Project Director of the Im Tirtzu NGO, which seeks to promote Zionist thinking and Zionist ideology in Israel.

Residents of Beit Safafa and other Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem say that they sometimes have no choice but to build illegally due to the difficulties in obtaining permits. The new golden dome built on top of the Abdul Rachman mosque in Beit Safafa, Jerusalem

“This is a calm and quiet neighborhood, this is a mosque and it should be respected,” said community leader Muhammad Alian.

Aviv Tatarsky of the Ir Amim NGO which seeks to promote peace and equality in Israel, condemned the decision, adding that the municipality was “capitulating to [right-wing] extremists.”

“The Jerusalem Municipality must act to increase trust and prevent unnecessary conflicts between it and the residents,” he said.

01.13.22

AG rejects Netanyahu's terms for plea deal before handing over his office

01.13.22

Attorney General rejects Netanyahu's terms for plea deal

Former PM attorney suggest he will admit to 2 counts of fraud and breach of trust, will be sentenced to community service for less than three months, and will not be barred from running in the next election, Mandelblit claims government corruption must be seen as moral turpitude

Nahum Barnea, Tova Zimuki | Published: 01.13.22, 22:06

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's attorney Boaz Ben Tzur recently approached Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit in an effort to secure a plea deal and end his trial on charges of corruption, according to media reports on Thursday.

Netanyahu is on trial in the Jerusalem District Court on charges of bribery, breach of trust and fraud.

The timing of the talks was linked to the end of the AG's term in office, scheduled for the end of January.

Mandelblit was said to aspire to complete most of the volatile, ongoing cases, before handing over his office to the next attorney general.

In a recent and controversial deal reached with Shas leader Aryeh Deri, Mandelblit did not insist on a moral turpitude clause - which would have seen the disgraced politician

prevented from running for public office for seven years. This would be an outcome Netanyahu hopes to see repeated if a deal is made in his corruption case.

Only four people from the Justice Ministry's prosecution, were in the know, about Netanyahu's attempts to reach a plea deal.

In addition to Mandelblit, and the new State Attorney, Amit Isman, was involved, the prosecutor in the former PMs bribery case and a senior advisor to the AG, who's doctoral thesis was on disgraced public figures and the moral turpitude clause.

Mandelblit was approached a number of weeks ago, by Netanyahu's attorney. The attorney general's office defined the conversation as a "feasibility check" and not a negotiation.

Negotiations will only be conducted with the participation of all the lawyers involved in the corruption cases, so they all could have their say.

Ben Tzur claimed that his client was very sensitive to every news report or any leak, as explanation for his involvement only.

But initial negotiations did take place, and the proposal brought forth by Ben Tzur, was that the charge of bribery, involving legislative favors to communications mogul Shaul Elovitch, be dropped, Netanyahu will admit to two counts of fraud and breach of trust, and be sentenced to community service for less than three months.

He also insisted that the indicted opposition leader would not be charged for acting on the grounds of "moral turpitude," citing the precedence of the Deri's deal.

Ben Tzur said Netanyahu will promise to withdraw from the Knesset and not return for an unspecified time.

But Mandelblit rejected the offer, claiming that the Deri deal involved tax violations, and the case in question deals with governmental corruption.

The moral turpitude clause therefore, cannot be overridden, and the defendant's goodwill cannot be trusted. according to the reports.

These charges can only end with a prison term or with more than three months of community service along with a seven-year exclusion from participating in elections to the Knesset and holding a position in the government.

The failure of the negotiation at this time may not mean that the trial will continue to its end and talks will continue.

01.12.22

Hamas accuses Israel of using spy dolphins equipped with combat gear

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The Gaza-based terror group claims its naval commandos were attacked by an IDF-trained dolphin operative equipped with specialized combat gear

i24NEWS| Published: 01.12.22, 18:03

A Hamas spokesman claimed in a video on Monday that the terror group has discovered dolphins allegedly trained by Israel's military to pursue its naval forces.

The man, identified as a representative of the terrorist group's Al-Qassam Brigade, added that the pursuing dolphin was also equipped with an unknown device. The video later showed the alleged device.

He did not provide any additional details regarding the time of the alleged maritime incident, nor its location or under which circumstances it took place.

The announcement, published by the Jerusalem-based Al-Quds newspaper on Monday, follows a similar story released by the daily back in 2015.

That year, Hamas claimed that it managed to discover such a killer dolphin, which Palestinian media said was "stripped of its will" and trained to be "a murderer" by Israel's military, the BBC reported.

Israel has long been accused by its neighbors of using animals for espionage or other military purposes - in 2013 Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV station alleged that the state was using a bird to spy on the country, which was captured in Lebanon.

"Though dolphins have been used by various militaries... this report likely falls into what is a surprisingly fertile genre of conspiracy theories: the notion that Israeli intelligence routinely uses all manner of birds and other animals as tools of espionage," Elias Groll explained in a 2015 Foreign Policy article.

01.12.22

Israel thwarts alleged Iranian attempt to recruit Israeli women as spies

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Israel thwarts alleged Iranian attempt to recruit Israelis as spies

Shin Bet says five suspects took photographs of significant sites in Israel, including U.S. Consulate in Tel Aviv, at direction of Iranian operative masquerading as Jew living in Tehran and in exchange for money

Yoav Zitun | Published: 01.12.22, 16:31

Israel's domestic security agency announced Wednesday it had thwarted an attempt by Iran to recruit Jewish Israelis to serve as spies and collect intelligence.

The suspects were indicted earlier Wednesday in the Jerusalem District Court. Their names are all barred from publication under a court-issued gag order that was requested by their attorneys.

The investigation by the Shin Bet and Israel Police was launched several weeks ago after it was suspected that a number of Israeli women — all Jewish immigrants from Iran — were in contact with Iranian intelligence.

According to the agency, the Israelis were **contacted via Facebook** by a man named Rambud Namdar, who masqueraded as a Jew residing in Tehran.

Rambud requested from all suspects that they remain in contact with him through Whatsapp, where they video chatted.

He never showed his face to the women, claiming that the camera on his phone was broken.

While some of the women suspected that he was an Iranian intelligence officer, they continued to speak with him and agreed to carry out requests he made and receive money from him, the agency said.

It said a 40-year-old Israeli woman was in touch with him for several years and agreed to photograph the U.S. Embassy when it was in Tel Aviv, as well as an Israeli government office and a shopping mall. The **recruiter asked her to encourage her son to join** military intelligence for his mandatory service and even spoke to him by phone to evaluate his Persian language skills, it said.

Another **woman, 57,** was in touch with the suspected recruiter for four years and **was paid** a total of **\$5,000 for a number of tasks**. She also pressured her son to join military intelligence and sent his military documentation to the recruiter.

She established a club for Israelis of Iranian descent in order to gather information about them and tried to cultivate ties with a member of Israel's parliament, the Shin Bet said, without naming the lawmaker. She was also directed to install a hidden camera in a "massage room in her home.

"With their grave actions, **those involved put themselves, their families and innocent Israeli citizens at risk,** as their **information was transferred to Iranian intelligence,** in addition to the information that was given over about Israeli sites and American sites in Israel, which would be used for terrorist purposes," a senior Shin Bet official said. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett congratulated the Shin Bet, saying that **Iran is trying to "disrupt political stability in Israel."**

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01.13.22

Bedouin protesters clash with security forces over Negev forestation work

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Over 2,000 people take part in unrest over land ownership dispute, blocking roads and hurling rocks at police; 12 protesters reportedly injured, two require medical treatment

Hassan Shaalan, Ilana Curiel | Published: 01.13.22, 17:21

Bedouins clashed with Israeli security forces on Thursday in a violent protest against tree planting on disputed land in the Negev desert.

Over 2,000 people took part in the unrest, blocking Highway 31 near the southern city of Be'er Sheva and hurling rocks at police.

Police used riot control measures to push the protesters back to the neighboring Bedouin al-Atrash tribe. Twelve people were reportedly injured during the clashes, including two who were taken by ambulance to Soroka Medical Center in fair to moderate condition.

Members of the crowd claimed that the police demanded they disperse after ten minutes, infringing on their right to protest.

"This is unacceptable. The cry of the Bedouins must be heard. The behavior of the police and arrests will not deter anyone. We will continue to fight to the end and without hesitation, even if we die as martyrs," said one protester.

Meanwhile, other Bedouin communities across Israel also called to raise a hue and a cry. The Bedouins are a historically nomadic Arab minority that numbers around 230,000 individuals in Israel.

The protests have broken out on Tuesday due to a dispute between the al-Atrash Bedouin tribe and Israel. The Jewish National Fund (JNF) — a contractor on behalf of Israel — sought to plant trees on land claimed by tribesman Soliman Atrash. The group has been doing forestation work all across Israel, and in the Negev in particular, for over a century. Soliman Atrash, a tribesman, appealed in November 2020 to the Be'er Sheva District Court for a declarative judgment that he owns the land. In Atrash's appeal, he demands to claim some 105 dunams (26 acres) on which Israel asked to plant the trees.

According to the Atrash filing, a claim prosecution memo to the settlement clerk in southern Israel is enough to stop the work. Israel argued, "a claim memo is merely a claim that does not establish a right of ownership."

During the protests that broke out Tuesday evening, protesters hurled stones at vehicles on a highway near Be'er Sheva, blocked the railway line, and torched a journalist's car. Police said two officers were injured in the violence and at least 18 people were arrested.

The JNF continued to plant trees on Wednesday near the Bedouin village Mulada under heavy police protection.

The unrest subsided when Welfare Minister Meir Cohen, who oversees Bedouin affairs in the government, brokered a temporary agreement that saw planting halted as the parties involved entered negotiations. Authorities withdrew heavy machinery from the area as the tensions appeared to ease.

The issue sent shock waves across Israel's fragile governing coalition as the Islamist Ra'am party, which enjoys strong support among Bedouin Israelis, said it will boycott votes in the Knesset in protest until the issue is resolved. Party leader Mansour Abbas wrote on Twitter that "a tree is not more important than a person."

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid called to halt planting and reassess the situation. In July 2020, then-economy minister Amir Peretz ordered to stop forestation work near Yatir Forest due to a similar dispute with Bedouin citizens.

01.16.22

Texas synagogue attacked, demanding prison release the daughter of al-Qaida Dan 11:17?

01.16.22

UK confirms Texas synagogue attacker was a British citizen

Foreign Office spokesperson says staff 'aware of the death of a British man in Texas' and are in contact with local authorities; man said to have demanded release of Pakistani woman imprisoned nearby for trying to kill U.S. service members in Afghanistan
Ynet, AP | Published: 01.16.22, 15:30

A gunman who was killed after taking hostages at a Texas synagogue over the weekend was a British citizen, a spokesperson for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office confirmed on Sunday.

The spokesperson said office staff were "aware of the death of a British man in Texas and are in contact with the local authorities."

U.S. authorities say the man demanded the release of a Pakistani woman who is imprisoned nearby on charges of trying to kill American service members in Afghanistan.

The hostage incident in the Lone Star State's Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville ended Saturday night with the hostages safe and the man holding them dead. The woman whose freedom was sought, Aafia Siddiqui, is serving an 86-year prison sentence after being convicted in Manhattan in 2010 on charges that she sought to shoot U.S. military officers while being detained in Afghanistan two years earlier. For the Justice Department, which had accused Siddiqui of being an al-Qaida operative, it was a significant conviction in the fight against international extremism. But to her supporters, many of whom believed in her innocence, the case embodied what they saw as an overzealous post-Sept. 11-American judicial system.

Who is Aafia Siddiqui?

She's a Pakistani neuroscientist who studied in the United States at prestigious institutions — Brandeis University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

She attracted the attention of American law enforcement in the years after the Sept. 11 attacks. Top FBI and Justice Department described her as an “al-Qaida operative and facilitator” at a May 2004 news conference in which they warned of intelligence showing al-Qaida planned an attack in the coming months.

In 2008, she was detained by authorities in Afghanistan. American officials said they found in her possession handwritten notes that discussed the construction of so-called dirty bombs and that listed various locations in the U.S. that could be targeted in a “mass casualty attack.”

Inside an interview room at an Afghan police compound, authorities say, she grabbed the M-4 rifle of a U.S. Army officer and opened fire on members of the U.S. team assigned to interrogate her.

She was convicted in 2010 on charges including attempting to kill U.S. nationals outside the United States. At her sentencing hearing, she gave rambling statements in which she delivered a message of world peace — and also forgave the judge. She expressed frustration at arguments from her own lawyers who said she deserved leniency because she was mentally ill.

“I’m not paranoid,” she said at one point. “I don’t agree with that.”

What was the reaction?

Pakistani officials immediately decried the punishment, which prompted protests in multiple cities and criticism in the media.

The prime minister at the time, Yousuf Raza Gilani, called her the “daughter of the nation” and vowed to campaign for her release from jail.

In the years since, Pakistani leaders have openly floated the idea of swaps or deals that could result in her release.

Faizan Syed, executive director of the Dallas-Fort Worth chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said the group considers Siddiqui to have been “caught in the war on terror” as well as a political prisoner who was wrongly accused through flawed evidence. He nonetheless strongly condemned the hostage-taking, calling it wrong, heinous and “something that is completely undermining our efforts to get Dr. Aaifa released.”

She has also garnered support from accused militants in the United States. An Ohio man who admitted he plotted to kill U.S. military members after receiving training in Syria also planned to fly to Texas and attack the federal prison where Siddiqui is being held in an attempt to free her. The man, Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, was sentenced in 2018 to 22 years in prison.

What's the latest on Siddiqui's imprisonment?

Siddiqui is being held at a federal prison in Fort Worth. She was attacked in July by another inmate at the facility and suffered serious injuries, according to court documents.

In a lawsuit against the federal Bureau of Prisons, Siddiqui's lawyers said another inmate “smashed a coffee mug filled with scalding hot liquid” into her face. When Siddiqui curled herself into a fetal position, the other woman began to punch and kick her, leaving her with injuries so severe that she needed to be taken by wheelchair to the prison's medical unit, the suit says.

Siddiqui was left with burns around her eyes and a three-inch scar near her left eye, the lawsuit says. She also suffered bruises on her arms and legs and an injury to her cheek. The attack prompted protests by human rights activists and religious groups and calls for improved prison conditions. The activists have also called on the Pakistani government to fight for her release from U.S. custody.