

Ynet-News-Nov-29-2019 – Friday –

11.29.19 – Fr - - - News Placed in Nov 29 spot – Friday

Hamas talks on captives and KIAs in exchange for US field hospital & new power line

11.29.19 – Fr -

Several wounded in London Bridge terror attack; stabber shot dead by police

11.29.19 – Th -

Iraqi PM announces he'll resign amid worsening crisis

11.28.19 – Th -

Dozens killed by Iraq security forces after protestors set fire to Iranian consulate

11.28.19 – Th -

Bolivia replaced President & renews diplomatic relations with Israel after a decade

11.27.19 – We -

Qatar's envoy has Hamas cancel demonstrations & announced monthly stipends

11.27.19 – We -

Israel team assisting international emergency earthquake rescue operations in Albania

11.27.19 – We -

Foreign Minister Katz sharply criticized Sa'ar for disloyalty to Likud leader

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Hamas talks on captives and KIAs in exchange for US field hospital & new power line

11.29.19

Hamas: Fresh talks on agreement for calm in Gaza

Negotiations with external mediators touch on Israel easing closure on Strip, return of Israeli captives, bodies of fallen soldiers; UN envoy also set to meet with Hamas leadership in coming days, following talks with Bennett

Elinor Levy | Updated: 11.29.19 , 15:23

Hamas sources said Friday that contacts have been renewed over the past two days between the organization and various mediators, primarily Egyptian intelligence officials, regarding reaching an agreement with Israel over calm in Gaza.

Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar, which is considered very close to the organization, reported that UN special envoy to the Middle East Nickolay Mladenov is expected to meet in the coming days with the Hamas leadership in order to complete the negotiations on the agreement.

Mladenov and the Hamas leadership will also discuss the possibility of reaching a long-term settlement agreement with Israel, which will include a solution to the most pressing issues - including the two Israeli captives and bodies of two fallen IDF soldiers held by Hamas and easing of the closure on the Strip.

The meeting is expected to take place just days after Mladenov met with Defense Minister Naftali Bennett.

A senior official involved in the negotiations told Ynet that despite the encouraging signs, there is still no breakthroughs on the issue of the Israeli captives and KIAs.

He said, however, that there was an expectation that implementation of the agreement would lead the parties to begin talks on the sensitive issue of a prisoner deal as well.

Since the end of the IDF's Operation Black Belt two weeks ago, which began with the killing of Islamic Jihad commander Baha Abu al_Ata, Israel and Hamas have both indicated a desire to reach a larger agreement on the Gaza Strip.

According to an Israeli demand, this includes the end of the weekly "March of Return" protests along the Gaza border in exchange for significant relief of the closure.

Other steps include a field hospital currently being set up near the Erez Crossing between Gaza and Israel, which is expected to provide very advanced medical services to Gaza's residents.

The hospital was established with Israeli approval and private U.S. funding.

Progress is also being made in connecting the Gaza Strip to a new power line from Israel, also with international funding, which will significantly improve the electricity supply in the Gaza Strip.

Another project underway is the construction of a desalination plant on the Gaza coast.

11.28.19

Bolivia replaced President & renews diplomatic relations with Israel after a decade

11.28.19

Bolivia renews diplomatic relations with Israel

South American country announces end of decade-long political stagnation between two countries after staunch Israel opposer President Morales steps down from office

Itamar Eichner| Updated: 11.28.19 , 20:51

Bolivian Foreign Minister Karen Longaric announced the **renewal of diplomatic relations** with Israel on Thursday for **the first time in a decade**.

The Foreign Ministry held intensive talks recently with Bolivia in an effort to re-establish the ties between the two countries, which were officially severed on January 14, 2009, following Operation Cast Lead – Israel's 2008 military campaign against Palestinian terror factions in the Gaza Strip.

Anti-government protests in Bolivian capital of La Paz

The rekindled relations **were made possible after Bolivian President Evo Morales, who was hostile towards Israel, stepped down from office earlier this month** and his administration was **replaced by a pro-American** interim government.

Brazil's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro were also reportedly involved in the talks with the new Bolivian administration.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz welcomed the revival of the relations between the Jewish state and the South American country.

"This will strengthen Israel's foreign relations and its position around the world," said Katz. "The Foreign Ministry has been long working directly with the Bolivian administration to promote the renewal of relations and also with the help of the Brazilian president and Foreign Minister, with whom I have recently spoken on the issue at the United Nations General Assembly in New York."

The departure of President Morales, who was hostile towards Israel, and his replacement by a government friendly to Israel allowed the process to materialize."

Morales announced the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel in a speech he gave in 2009 in front of diplomats at the presidential palace in Bolivia's de facto capital of La Paz. The Bolivian president claimed that Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza was "a serious threat to world peace" and said that then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert should face criminal charges for his part in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians.

Morales even chided the United Nations Security Council, calling it the "Insecurity Council" for its "lukewarm" response to the crisis in the coastal enclave. He called for the UN to hold an emergency general session to condemn the fighting.

He also said that then-Israeli President Shimon Peres should be stripped of his Nobel Peace Prize for failing to stop the operation.

Despite the lack of diplomatic relations between Israel and Bolivia, thousands of Israeli backpackers continued to visit and travel the Latin American country with the local authorities' full cooperation.

In the absence of an embassy or a consulate in Bolivia, Israel's Honorary Consul in La Paz Roberto Nelkenbaum - a Jewish businessman and a former race driver - was in charge of helping Israeli backpackers who got into trouble.

11.27.19

Qatar's envoy has Hamas cancel demonstrations & announced monthly stipends

11.27.19

Hamas cancels Friday's 'march of return' on Gaza border for third week

Qatar's envoy Khaled al-Hardan traveled between Gaza and Israel where he met with security officials in what a source estimates were discussions on the long awaited understanding between Israel and Hamas

Elior Levy | Updated: 11.27.19, 23:08

Hamas announced Wednesday that it was canceling Friday's "march of return" demonstration on the Israeli – Gaza border fence in what is viewed as a progression in mutual understandings reached between Israel and the terror group.

This will be the third week that demonstrations are called off.

This week's protests were intended to mark the anniversary of the UN resolution on the establishment of the state of Israel.

The announcement was made on behalf of all the Palestinian Gaza factions but Hamas is thought to be behind the decision.

Israeli authorities Wednesday notified Gaza's fisherman that all boats were now allowed to extend their fishing area to up to 15 nautical miles from shore after only certain vessels were given the permission to sail that far until now.

Earlier this week, Qatari deputy envoy Khaled al-Hardan arrived in Gaza for a visit during which his government announced the monthly stipends of \$100 to families in need, will be distributed.

\$100 per each family in need delivered by Qatar to Gaza residents

Ynet has learned that al-Hardan traveled between the Strip and Israel for meetings with Israeli security officials. A source estimates these talks included agreements Israel and Hamas can reach to promote a long-term understanding.

Defense Minister Naftali Bennett met with UN special envoy to the Mideast Nickolay Mladenov. The two discussed the security situation with an emphasis on the northern part of the enclave.

Following Hamas's cancelation of demonstrations last week, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Major General Kamil Abu-Rukun, posted a message in Arabic on his Twitter account, directed at the residents of Gaza.

11.27.19

Israel team assisting international emergency earthquake rescue operations in Albania

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Israel Rescue and Service team assisting emergency operations in Albania

After what is the worst and possibly the **deadliest earthquake in decades**, Albanian and **international teams** including one from Israel, are rushing to locate survivors in collapsed buildings and amid the devastation

Itamar Eichner, Associated Press| Updated: **11.27.19** , 20:29

Israel Rescue and Service team from Mevo'ot HaHermon Regional Council sent to Albania, continue their search for survivors Wednesday, in the city of Durres, following a **6.4 on the Richter Scale earthquake** that shock the Balkan nation on Monday and resulted in at least 26 dead, more than 650 injured and dozens more still missing.

This was the strongest earthquake to hit Albania in decades and it is feared may be the deadliest as well.

The epicenter was 30 Km west of the capital and was felt in the Balkans and Italy.

The quake in Albania Tuesday was followed by a smaller one in nearby southern Bosnia and a **6.1 magnitude temblor** Wednesday **off the coast of the island of Crete in Greece**. No significant damage or injuries were reported from either quake. Rescue teams and other disaster experts arrived from more than a dozen countries including France, Italy, Greece, Romania, Turkey, Serbia, and the United States.

This is not the first time an Israeli mission was dispatched to help in search and rescue or medical assistance in natural disasters.

IDF teams were dispatched to some of the worst earthquakes of the past decades, from Haiti in 2008, Mexico in 2010, Nepal in 2015.

In Durres, Albania's second-largest city, on the Adriatic Sea, **residents slept in tents and cars and at a soccer stadium** as powerful aftershocks from the earthquake continued. **Others spent the night on open ground, huddling around fires to stay warm.**

Rescuers continued to comb the rubble of a four-story villa that housed an extended family, looking for potential survivors. Locals said they believed about six people might still be in the collapsed structure.

Stopping at intervals to listen for sounds of survivors, local and international rescue crews searched through the rubble of collapsed buildings Wednesday, as hopes of finding people alive waned a day after a deadly earthquake in Albania killed at least 28 and injured more than 650.

Those desperate for news included police officer Ajet Peci, who managed to emerge from the ruins of an apartment block that collapsed in the port city of Durres, killing his two adult daughters. His wife was still missing.

“How can I live?” Peci said, sobbing as he was consoled by neighbors, a bandage under his right eye and on a finger of his left hand. “I don’t know what I did to make it out. I wish I had stayed with them.”

Neighbors said only about four or five families were living in the five-story building at the time of the quake, as the owners of some of the apartments had emigrated.

Flags were flying at half-staff on public buildings around the country Wednesday as Albania observed a national day of mourning.
Prime Minister Edi Rama thanked neighbor Greece and other countries offering support.
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11.27.19

Foreign Minister Katz sharply criticized Sa'ar for disloyalty to Likud leader

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Katz raps Sa'ar for disloyalty to Likud leader

Foreign Minister says Netanyahu rival plays right into hands of main opposition Blue and White; Gantz's party takes jibe at Katz and his 2008 call for defamed former PM Olmert to resign

Alexandra Lukash, Moran Azulay | Updated: 11.27.19 , 15:17

Foreign Minister Israel Katz sharply criticized fellow Likud MK Gideon Sa'ar for his call to conduct a snap party leadership primary, labeling Sa'ar's bid for Likud headship a disloyal attempt to oust Likud's acting chairman Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Sa'ar is playing right into Blue and White's hands, all they're trying to do is disqualify Netanyahu and Sa'ar is also allegedly trying to make that happen. This morning, he had said that "it doesn't matter who'll be prime minister first" and called on Netanyahu to give up and he even called him to step down yesterday," Katz told in an interview with Ynet. "These statements are disloyal coming from a legitimate candidate, who asks for the public's trust and to present an alternative [to Netanyahu]. This is full adoption of the invalid statements made by the other side, statements that neither the public nor the heads of Likud accepted."

If Sa'ar wants to collect the 61 signatures (of Knesset members needed for a candidate to form a government) without consulting Likud bodies, that's his own private move. He wants primaries and he wants to get elected now – it's an attempt to hinder Netanyahu's authority."

Katz also spoke about his absence from Tuesday night's support rally for Netanyahu, saying he would not protest state establishments overseen by the government.

"As a minister, I wouldn't attend a protest against state establishments overseen by the government," said Katz. "However, everyone has the right to express their opinion and protest without violence."

A spokesperson on behalf of Gideon Sa'ar denied on Wednesday the allegations made by Katz.

"These are fallacious claims, no one is collecting signatures on behalf of MK Sa'ar. Had Sa'ar wanted to do so, he would've collected the required 61 signatures and even more with ease," said the spokesperson. "Sa'ar reiterates his demand to conduct a swift and democratic vote in Likud to prevent a third round of elections."

Blue and White have issued a response, taking a jibe at Katz and his 2008 demand for former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to step down after he was accused of corruption.

"We remind Katz what he had said on Olmert – 'There's no escape – the prime minister must resign and enable a new round of elections and the formation of a new government.'"

This statement doubles down on a video released by the centrist party last week, depicting the prime minister calling on predecessor Olmert to step down when he faced his own criminal charges.

11.29.19

Several wounded in London Bridge terror attack; stabber shot dead by police

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Several wounded in London Bridge terror attack; stabber shot dead

British police say suspect had fake explosive device strapped to his body; city's mayor praises 'breathtaking heroism' of the members of public who intervened, running toward the suspect in attempt to bring him down

Reuters| Updated: 11.29.19 , 19:52

LONDON - British police on Friday shot dead a man who had strapped a fake bomb to his body and stabbed a number of people in what they said was a terrorism incident in the London Bridge area of the capital.

Police said they had been alerted at just before 2 p.m. to a stabbing at a premises near London Bridge, the scene of a deadly attack by Islamist militants two years ago.

"A male suspect was shot by specialist armed officers from the City of London police and I can confirm that this suspect died at the scene," the United Kingdom's top counter-terrorism officer, Neil Basu, told reporters.

"A number of other people received injuries during this incident," Basu said. "We believe a device that was strapped to the body of the suspect was a hoax explosive device."

A video posted on Twitter showed a group of about half a dozen men wrestling with someone on the ground on the sidewalk of the bridge. One of them backs away from the scene carrying a knife.

As he looks towards the melee, an armed police officer drags another person away from the man on the floor.

Armed police shoot a man following an alleged knife attack on London Bridge, which is being treated as a terror-related incident.

Soon after, what sound like two gunshots ring out, and the man on the ground stops moving. Reuters could not immediately verify the footage.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan commended the "breathtaking heroism" of the members of public who intervened in the incident, running toward the suspect.

He said police were not looking for anyone else in the stabbings.

Khan confirmed that a number of people were wounded in the incident and that some of the injuries are serious.

He did not offer a figure, but said it was important to allow the families of those who were hurt some privacy.

The ambulance service declared a "major incident" in the area and London Bridge station, a busy commuter hub, was closed.

People in buildings around the scene were evacuated to the north side of the River Thames by security services.

PM returns to London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was on his way back to Downing Street and Basu said he would be giving him a full briefing.

"I'm being kept updated on the incident at London Bridge and want to thank the police and all emergency services for their immediate response," Johnson said in a statement.

London Bridge was the scene of an attack in June 2017 when three militants drove a van into pedestrians and then attacked people in the surrounding area, killing eight people and injuring at least 48.

Islamic State said its fighters were responsible.

The month before, a suicide bomber killed 22 children and adults and wounded 59 at a packed concert hall in the northern English city of Manchester, as crowds began leaving a concert by U.S. singer Ariana Grande.

And in March the same year, an attacker stabbed a policeman close to London's parliament buildings after a car ploughed into pedestrians on nearby Westminster Bridge. Six people died, including the assailant and the policeman he stabbed, and at least 20 were injured in what police called a "marauding terrorist attack".

11.29.19

Iraqi PM announces he'll resign amid worsening crisis

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Iraqi PM announces he'll resign amid worsening crisis

Anti-government protesters celebrate in Baghdad's Tahrir Square at statement by Adel Abdul-Mahdi 13 months after he took over as prime minister

Associated Press| Updated: 11.29.19 , 16:53

Iraq's prime minister said Friday he would submit his resignation to parliament, a day after more than 40 people were killed by security forces and following calls by Iraq's top Shiite cleric for lawmakers to withdraw support.

The move by Adel Abdul-Mahdi 13 months after he took over as prime minister triggered celebrations by anti-government protesters who have been camped out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square for nearly two months.

Young men and women broke out in song and dance as news of his imminent resignation reached the square, the capital's largest.

In a statement, Abdul-Mahdi said he had "listened with great concern" to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's sermon and made his decision in response to his call and in order to "facilitate and hasten its fulfillment as soon as possible."

"I will submit to parliament an official memorandum resigning from the current prime ministry so that the parliament can review its choices," he said. Abdul-Mahdi was appointed prime minister just over a year ago as a consensus candidate between political blocs.

Al-Sistani said parliament, which elected the government of Abdul-Mahdi, should "reconsider its options" in his weekly Friday sermon delivered in the holy city of Najaf via a representative.

"We call upon the House of Representatives from which this current government emerged to reconsider its options in that regard," al-Sistani said in the statement -- a clear sign he was withdrawing his support for the prime minister.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Abdul-Mahdi's resignation would placate protesters, who are now calling for the removal of the entire political class that has ruled Iraq since the 2003 downfall of Saddam Hussein.

Nearly 400 people have been killed in the bloody crackdown on protests since Oct. 1, most of them young protesters shot dead or killed by exploding tear gas canisters fired by security forces.

Amira, a 25-year-old protester, said the resignation should have come many weeks ago.

"We will not stop with the prime minister, we still have more fighting to do. We will push forward until our demands are met," she said, declining to give her full name, fearing retaliation.

Forty protesters were shot dead by security forces in Baghdad and the southern cities of Najaf and Nasiriyah on Thursday, in a sharp escalation of violence that continued Friday. Najaf is the headquarters of the country's Shiite religious authority headed by al-Sistani. Three more protesters were shot and eight wounded by security forces in Nasiriyah on Friday when the demonstrators attempted to enter the city center to resume their sit-in, security and hospital officials said.

Security forces had fired live rounds the previous day to disperse protesters from two key bridges, killing 31 people.

Al-Sistani also said protesters should distinguish between peaceful demonstrators and those seeking to turn the movement violent, following the burning of an Iranian consulate building in Najaf on Wednesday that government officials say was perpetrated by saboteurs from outside the protest movement.

The Islamic Dawa party called for parliament to convene immediately and choose an alternative government, in a statement.

A former oil and finance minister and an ex-vice president, the 77-year-old Abdul-Mahdi was seen as a political independent when he took the post in October 2018 and is Iraq's first prime minister from outside the Dawa party in 12 years.

He moved his offices out of Baghdad's highly secure Green Zone on the first day of his term, saying he wanted to bring his government closer to the people, and said he wanted to provide security, water and electricity for all Iraqis during his term.

But reality soon caught up as he faced a raft of challenges including high unemployment, widespread corruption and dilapidated public services. His government and key staffers in his office were also seen to be close to Iran.

In Baghdad, protesters gathered around the historic Rasheed Street near the strategic Ahrar Bridge and burned the Iranian flag, chanting "Iran out!" □

Four people were shot by security forces on the bridge the previous day. Protesters are also occupying parts of the nearby bridges Jumhuriya and Sinar -- all of which lead to the fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq's government.

A spokesman for the UN secretary-general expressed deep concern over the use of live ammunition against protesters on Friday.

"The Secretary-General reiterates his call on the Iraqi authorities to exercise maximum restraint, protect the lives of demonstrators, respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and swiftly to investigate all acts of violence," □ said Stephane Dujarric, in a statement.

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11.28.19

Dozens killed by Iraq security forces after protestors set fire to Iranian consulate

11.28.19

Dozens killed by security forces in Iraq as violence escalates further

Violence intensifies after protestors set fire to Iranian consulate in southern Iraq, leading to harsh response from security forces; at least 350 dead since beginning of unrest
Associated Press| Updated: 11.28.19 , 18:40

Iraqi officials said on Thursday that 27 protesters have been shot dead in the last 24 hours, amid spiraling violence in Baghdad and southern Iraq.

Security and medical officials say 23 protesters were killed Thursday by security forces who used live fire to break a sit-in on the main entrance to the southern city of Nassiriya. Following days of road closures by demonstrators, security forces fired live rounds to disperse crowds and open the street, officials say.

Four protesters were shot dead by security forces and 22 were wounded in Baghdad when demonstrators tried to cross the strategic Ahrar bridge leading to the fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq's government, amid escalating violence.

Security and medical officials say security forces fired live rounds when protesters attempted to climb over barricades on Ahrar Bridge.

Protesters are occupying three key bridges - Jumhuriya, Sinak and Ahrar - in a standoff with security forces, all three bridges lead toward the fortified Green Zone

At least 350 people have died since Oct. 1, when thousands of protesters took to the streets to decry corruption and poor services.

This escalation in violence peaked after anti-government protesters on Wednesday burned the Iranian consulate in southern Iraq in protest of Iran meddling in Iraqi internal affairs, a move acutely condemned by Iran.

Iran's official IRNA news agency said Thursday that Abbas Mousavi, a foreign ministry spokesman, called for a "responsible, strong and effective" response from Iraq's government.

An Iraqi police official had said protesters set fire to the Iranian consulate in the holy city of Najaf late Wednesday. Iranian staff was not harmed, escaping out the back door.

The police official said one protester was killed and 35 wounded when police fired live ammunition to prevent them from entering the building. Demonstrators removed the Iranian flag and replaced it with an Iraqi one.