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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, November 28*

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# News Excerpts

November 28, 2017

## Times of Israel

### **'Netanyahu-Shielding' Police Bill Clears First Vote**

Lawmakers on Monday advanced a contested bill that would restrict police from recommending criminal charges in the Knesset plenary, after hours of heated debate. The bill has widely been seen as an attempt by Likud lawmakers to shield Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the public fallout, should police find sufficient evidence against him in two ongoing corruption probes to warrant criminal charges by prosecutors. The proposed legislation cleared its first reading with 46 lawmakers in favor, 37 opposed. Coalition lawmakers Rachel Azaria (Kulanu) and Benny Begin (Likud) skipped the vote in protest. Netanyahu, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, and Public Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan were also not present. See also, ["Israel pushes on with law seen protecting PM under criminal probe" \(Reuters\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **PM To meet with African Leaders at Kenya Inauguration**

Kenya is a close ally of Israel and the swearing-in of reelected President Uhuru Kenyatta is a "good reason to go to Africa," a senior diplomatic official said Monday, explaining why Prime Minister Netanyahu will fly for a day to Nairobi on Tuesday. Netanyahu's decision to go to the ceremony has raised some eyebrows, since the August results were hotly contested by main opposition candidate Raila Odinga, who boycotted a Supreme Court mandated re-vote in October. The official said that Netanyahu's visit is not only about the inauguration, but that bilateral meetings with other African heads of state have been set up, including with the presidents of Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. See also, ["Netanyahu lifts off for whirlwind Kenya visit to meet 11 African leaders" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **IDF: 'Nasrallah Is a Target' in Next Israel-Hezbollah War**

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah would be a target for assassination in any war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Israeli military's chief spokesman said on Monday. Ronen Manelis also said that the IDF is conducting psychological and media warfare against Hezbollah. Manelis made the remarks during a panel discussion at a conference for journalists in Eilat, in response to a question from another panelist about how the army handled media warfare against its enemies and how it tried to influence the enemy via both mainstream media and social media. See also, ["Hariri warns Hezbollah to respect Lebanon's "neutral" policy" \(Euronews\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **New Naval Iron Dome System Declared Operational**

The maritime Iron Dome missile defense system was declared operational Monday by the IDF's Navy and Air Force after 18 months of rigorous preparations and examinations, and a series of successful interception attempts carried out at sea. The tests included launching Grad rocket-like projectiles to ranges of dozens of kilometers, simulating rockets launched from the Gaza Strip in previous conflicts. According to senior air force and navy officers, the interceptions were successful both when it came to single launches and to barrages of projectiles launched as part of the test. See also, ["IDF conducts successful Naval Iron Dome trial" \(Globes\)](#)

## High Court Postponed Buildings Demolition in E Jerusalem

The Jerusalem District Court issued an order on Thursday, halting the Jerusalem Municipality's demolition of five buildings in Kafr Akab. According to a municipality plan, a public road is to be paved in the east Jerusalem neighborhood next to the nearby security barrier, replacing buildings in which 138 apartments are located, some them uninhabited. Residents have filed an appeal to prevent the planned demolition, to which the court has ordered the municipality to respond by the end of January and scheduled a discussion on the matter for February 28. Kafr Akab is the northernmost neighborhood of Jerusalem and is located behind the security barrier that separates it from the rest of the capital. See also, ["Court Freezes Demolition of Illegal Arab Construction in Jerusalem" \(Algemeiner\)](#)

## Report: Israel's UN Envoy involved in Systematic Corruption

A television report Monday charged that Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon was guilty of widespread political corruption to further his personal career in the years prior to his appointment to the UN post, allegations Danon vehemently denied. Danon, a senior member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, took control of a department of the World Zionist Organization intended to promote Zionism, and appointed cronies and their relatives to highly salaried positions, paid from public funds, in exchange for their support in Likud primary elections, Hadashot news (formerly Channel 2) claimed. See also, ["Israel's UN envoy allegedly gave cushy jobs to cronies for political backing" \(i24 News\)](#)

## Netanyahu urges Rivlin to Reconsider Azaria Pardon Rebuff

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday joined several of his senior cabinet colleagues in signing a letter to Israel's president, urging the reconsideration of an earlier refusal to grant a pardon to Israeli soldier Elor Azaria, convicted of shooting an immobile Palestinian assailant. On November 19 President Reuven Rivlin rebuffed a pardon request from Azaria, [who copped an 18 month prison sentence](#), later shortened to 14 months by Israel's military chief. As of Monday, 54 Knesset members have signed the letter to Rivlin, *Ynet* reported, including the defense, interior, finance, justice and education ministers.

## Three Killed in Building Materials Store Explosion in Jaffa

Three people were killed and four lightly hurt in an explosion at a construction materials store in Jaffa late Monday, which led to the structure's collapse. Two of the casualties were declared dead on the scene while the third, who was critically injured and suffering from burns on his entire body, was declared dead at the Wolfson Medical Center in Holon. Three others were suffering from shock and received treatment on the scene. The huge explosion, which was heard across Tel Aviv, also caused damage to several nearby residential buildings in Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood. Police launched an investigation into the explosion, examining whether negligence on the store owner's part caused the explosion. Fire and Rescue Authority investigators estimated Tuesday morning the explosion was caused by a gas leak. They also found the store was operating without a license. See also, ["3 dead as Jaffa building collapses after powerful explosion, fire" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **No Righteous Individual in Sodom**

By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- If anyone feels shame, affront, sadness, frustration and despair today—there is no way to ease these feelings. These are our ministers and MKs. This is our prime minister and his bureau staff, who despite how it looks [to the public], pushed and pushed the disgraceful bill that passed last night, with one goal in mind: To preserve Netanyahu's hold on power.
- It was not done secretly, not in the dark; we, the Israeli public, were mugged in broad daylight and in full view. We were robbed of our elementary right to know what public figures are accused of. We have been denied the privilege that every citizen in a democratic country has, to know for whom they are voting.
- Despite the cumulative experience that the Israeli public has, we were hard put to believe that this would happen. That our legislature would indeed reach the bottom of the cesspit into which it has fallen, and that such a foul, despicable and anti-democratic bill would be passed into law.
- The “recommendations bill” is a euphemistic, misleading and confusing name. The “Bibi bill” is its correct name. A bill that prevents the publication of the police's recommendations to the State Attorney's Office, so that the public will not know what its prime minister is accused of.
- If everything goes according to the timetable set by Amsalem and Bitan, after the bill passed its first reading last night, it will go into effect within less than a month. This means that the prime minister will be able to initiate early elections without fearing that the public will know the accusations against him. In other words, within a few months we may get Netanyahu once again as prime minister, good as new, while the police allegedly recommend indicting him for bribetaking and fraud.
- Until last night we still hoped that something would happen. That perhaps the police would expedite the interminable investigation and would hurry to submit its recommendations. That the Knesset would raise an outcry over the attempt to pass such an *ad hominem* bill. We also hoped that Moshe Kahlon, the person who joined the government with bombastic statements that he would not permit the rule of law to be undermined, would stop the disgrace at the right moment. So we hoped. None of this materialized. Conversely, what took place over the past two weeks is a shameful display that will yet be talked about for many years. Those taking part in it are MKs, ministers and first and foremost, the prime minister.
- It starts with the bill's sponsor, David Amsalem, who started with a bill that was supposed to help ordinary people and ended with a privileged bill designed to help one person. It continued with the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, which enabled such a bill to emerge from under its hands. It is Coalition Chairman David Bitan, who turned over the bill to the Interior Committee that is headed by Amsalem, despite the fact that it was not supposed to go there. It is Amsalem and Bitan, who made sure to replace the committee member Benny Begin, just because he objected to having the bill apply to investigations that had already begun. And it is Moshe Kahlon, who backed down from his position and his promises and let the bill pass—just as Netanyahu wanted.

- And it is also the justice minister. And the education minister. And the defense minister. And the Likud ministers, who continue to back the prime minister although they comprehend the depth of the corruption. Is there no righteous individual in the government of Sodom who will rise and say, “This is a deal-breaker, I am willing to go because of this bill?” Is there no end to the all systems-collapse that is taking place in this country? Where is the boy to stick his finger in the dike, to say that the emperor has no clothes?

**SUMMARY:** Until last night we still hoped that something would happen. That perhaps the police would expedite the interminable investigation and would hurry to submit its recommendations. That the Knesset would raise an outcry over the attempt to pass such an *ad hominem* bill. We also hoped that Moshe Kahlon, the person who joined the government with bombastic statements that he would not permit the rule of law to be undermined, would stop the disgrace at the right moment. So we hoped. None of this materialized. Conversely, what took place over the past two weeks is a shameful display that will yet be talked about for many years. Those taking part in it are MKs, ministers and first and foremost, the prime minister.

## **What Will Be Remembered About Moshe Kahlon**

By Ben Caspit, columnist at Ma'ariv

- **Moshe Kahlon is an expert in telling each person what he wants to hear. Kahlon is a good finance minister and a master politician. It is almost impossible to come out of a conversation with him dissatisfied. His flexibility is boundless, his amicability is authentic, his maneuverability is legendary and he could sell an igloo to the Eskimos and sand to the Bedouins and everyone would be happy.**
- **All of the above is not written sarcastically. It is all true. And after having written all that, and after Kahlon can tell everyone what they want to hear and stay alive, the question that is asked today is what Kahlon will tell himself. What will he tell the Moshe Kahlon he sees in the mirror when it comes to the recommendations bill. How will he sell himself this abomination? What psychological gimmick and moral acrobatics will he employ to explain to himself, to his record and to history, how yesterday he lent a hand to an act of legislation in Israel's parliament with one sole purpose: To help the prime minister evade justice.**
- **Kahlon is one of the wiliest political foxes on the map today. There is no way that he believes David Amsalem when he says that his bill is intended to save hundreds of thousands of Israelis who are suffering under the yoke of police recommendations that molder for years until their name is cleared, if at all. It is doubtful whether Amsalem himself believes his own version, which crumbled yesterday before our eyes when it became apparent that the recommendations bill would only apply to the investigations of public figures and elected officials. In other times, in another era, in another country, just this fact would have sufficed to bury this contemptible bill in the dustbin of Erdogan-style *ad hominem* legislation.**
- **But we live in 2017 Israel; the prime minister's bureau chief enters and exits Amsalem's room in tandem with the vote on the bill in Amsalem's committee, and the only thing that Kahlon has to say is that he "has faith in the attorney general, who is an honest and upright person." It's the other way around, Kahlon. It is Attorney General Mandelblit who relies on you, the legislators of Israel, to step into the breach, to block delusional bursts of legislation of this kind.**
- **Passing such a bill and having faith that the attorney general will take advantage of the clause enabling him to "request recommendations" in special cases—is that serious? Don't you see the slippery slope that we are sliding down? Today it is the recommendations bill, tomorrow they will move on to the State Attorney's Office and the next day it will be the attorney general, who will be chosen by a search committee whose members will include David Amsalem, Shimon Riklin and the dog Kaiya. Does that sound ridiculous? Well, the recommendations bill sounded even more ridiculous a few weeks ago.**
- **In the past two and a half years, Moshe Kahlon has worked hard to ease the situation of Israel's citizens, mainly those among the underprivileged and young couples who sent him to the Knesset and the government. His achievements have been fairly good, although the battle has not yet been won, the graduation certificate has not been issued and housing prices, despite the huge effort, have not really dropped yet.**

- **Kahlon's problem is that in the current state of affairs, what people will remember about him will not be housing prices or his tax cut plan or even raising the wages for IDF combatants. What the history of these somber times will remember about him is his collapse at the moment of truth in the battle for Israeli democracy. The fact that he chickened out and took flight at the moment that he should have stood up and said "No more." That's enough, we're not playing this insane game anymore. We are not raising a hand against the police, or the State Attorney's Office, or the Supreme Court. We are not cooperating with hysterical, panicky and corrupt *ad hominem* legislation, which is designed to prevent the public from knowing what it is its right to know in any democratic country: What did the police investigation turn up with regard to the affairs of its prime minister. At this moment, Moshe Kahlon, you weren't there.**

**SUMMARY: Passing such a bill and having faith that the attorney general will take advantage of the clause enabling him to "request recommendations" in special cases—is that serious? Don't you see the slippery slope that we are sliding down? Today it is the recommendations bill, tomorrow they will move on to the State Attorney's Office and the next day it will be the attorney general, who will be chosen by a search committee whose members will include David Amsalem, Shimon Riklin and the dog Kaiya. Does that sound ridiculous? Well, the recommendations bill sounded even more ridiculous a few weeks ago. In the past two and a half years, Moshe Kahlon has worked hard to ease the situation of Israel's citizens, mainly those among the underprivileged and young couples who sent him to the Knesset and the government. His achievements have been fairly good, although the battle has not yet been won, the graduation certificate has not been issued and housing prices, despite the huge effort, have not really dropped yet.**