



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, February 11*

### Headlines:

- **Shin Bet: Teen's Murder Was Act of Terrorism**
- **Lapid Said to Propose Rotation Alliance with Gantz**
- **To Save Labor From Collapse, Some Look to Barak and Livni**
- **Gantz Party: Won't Freeze Settlements, Won't 'Build Wildly'**
- **PA: Israeli Funding Cuts to PA Will Lead to 'Anarchy'**
- **US Report: Little Anti-Israel Bias in UNRWA Textbooks**
- **More Jewish and Arab Students Sharing Israeli Classrooms**
- **Gazan Entrepreneurs: Ambition in a Tough Neighborhood**

### Commentary:

- **AI Monitor: "Can a Centrist Party Win Israel's Elections?"**
  - By Mazal Mualem, Senior Columnist
- **Newsweek: "We Must Acknowledge Arab Heritage of Many Israeli Jews"**
  - By Gila Gamliel, Israeli Minister of Social Equality

# News Excerpts

February 11, 2019

Ynet

## **Shin Bet: Teen's Murder Was Act of Terrorism**

The Shin Bet said Sunday the murder of Israeli teenager Ori Ansbacher in Jerusalem on Thursday night was nationalistically motivated. Arafat Irfayia, a Palestinian man suspected of brutally killing the 19-year-old woman, will be brought in front of a judge for a remand extension on Monday. The Shin Bet said Irfayia left his home in Hebron carrying a knife, saw the victim in the forest, attacked and killed her. Irfayia, a resident of Hebron, is believed to be affiliated with the Hamas terror group and was previously imprisoned for possession of a knife and illegally residing in Israel. He was arrested by Israeli forces on Saturday night in raid near a mosque Ramallah.

Times of Israel

## **Lapid Said to Propose Rotation Alliance with Gantz**

Yesh Atid Chair Yair Lapid is said to have offered former IDF chief Benny Gantz a political merger that would see the two leaders alternating as chair of their alliance, Channel 12 reported on Saturday. However, another report said Gantz would prefer a possible alliance with MK Orly Levy-Abekasis's Geshet party. Chances of that merger appeared to recede Thursday, after she was recorded blasting Gantz and appearing to rule out an alliance.

Ha'aretz

## **To Save Labor From Collapse, Some Look to Barak and Livni**

The Labor Party will select its Knesset slate today, amid polls predicting a poor outcome in the elections. Ten days later, the party will have to officially determine whether it intends to merge with another party. Possible options of teaming up with Benny Gantz's Hosen L'Yisrael or Meretz are not moving ahead at the moment. Labor MKs are trying to work on reconnecting with Tzipi Livni's party, Hatnuah, and with former Labor chair Ehud Barak, to make its Knesset roster more attractive.

Ha'aretz

## **Gantz Party: Won't Freeze Settlements, Won't 'Build Wildly'**

Gantz's party, Hosen L'Yisrael, won't freeze construction in West Bank settlements but will also not build "wildly" to foil diplomatic opportunities, and will strive for peace with states in the region, it said Friday. The statement was issued in response to an interview given by Zvi Hauser, who is number eight on Gantz's slate, where he promised that Gantz "won't build any less than Netanyahu."

## **PA: Israeli Funding Cuts to PA Will Lead to 'Anarchy'**

Israel's decision to deduct money from tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority will lead to anarchy in the West Bank, Palestinian officials warned on Sunday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel will deduct funding which the PA uses to pay prisoners and families of Palestinians who were killed by Israel. Last week, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas informed Israel that the Palestinians will reject any money transfer if Israel deducts "one penny." A PA official said international parties have begun complying with a US request to impose a strict embargo on the PA, preventing the Arab League from processing a \$10 million grant from Iraq to the PA.

## **US Report: Little Anti-Israel Bias in UNRWA Textbooks**

A 2018 State Department report on UNRWA, the UN agency that delivers relief and education to Palestinian refugees, uncovered cases of anti-Israel and other bias in 3 percent of Palestinian textbooks. The report, covering the 2015-17 period, faults the agency and a previous State Department report for saying that UNRWA had successfully disseminated complementary materials and had completed teacher training. The report was declassified at the request of Republican Representatives Scott Perry and Lee Zeldin. The UNRWA review did not find any cases of incitement, the report said.

## **More Jewish and Arab Students Sharing Israeli Classrooms**

The Rayne bilingual school is one of the pioneer schools in Israel in which Jewish and Arab children study together. According to a Knesset study, such education is becoming more popular than before; while in 2013-14 some 1,100 pupils were studying in joint schools, the number has risen to 1,700. The increase is even more pronounced in preschool; five years ago there were only 80 children in the preschools run by Hand in Hand, which runs most of the country's bilingual schools; this year there are 470 children. Though such education is becoming more popular, the Rayne school is the only one in the country that goes beyond primary school, with classes through 12th grade.

## **Gazan Entrepreneurs: Ambition in a Tough Neighborhood**

"My biggest challenge is that I am from Gaza," said Muhammad Fouad, laughing bitterly. Fouad, 21, is a software engineering student and has already launched a start-up company dedicated to developing and maximizing the potential of companies. He intends to expand his operations to include Ramallah and Amman, Jordan. As of now, a young entrepreneur from Gaza seeking to expand his business does not qualify for an exit permit according to Israeli criteria.

## **Can a Centrist Party Win Israel's Elections?**

By Mazal Mualem, Senior Columnist

- Only once in all of Israel's history has a new centrist party managed to win an election and form a government. It happened in 2006, when Kadima under Ehud Olmert won 29 seats. But Olmert waged his campaign from the position of prime minister after replacing Ariel Sharon, who fell into a coma in the heat of the election campaign. Kadima's big advantage was that it rose from within the government as a result of the crisis in the Likud caused by Sharon's plan to disengage from Gaza. Furthermore, it already had infrastructure based on mayors and local authorities who had defected from the Likud. At its peak, polls gave Kadima as many as 40 seats. The leadership it presented to the public consisted of the most senior figures from the right and the left, with sweeping experience in government. They included peace icon late President Shimon Peres, architect of the Oslo Accords, and many ministers from the Likud and Labor parties.
- Kadima rose with the clear diplomatic vision of advancing the peace process on the basis of the permanent borders laid out in the 2003 "Road Map for Peace." On the other hand, when it came to results, the party failed. It went through a series of three leaders (Olmert, Tzipi Livni and Shaul Mofaz) and slowly evaporated. As such, the challenge facing former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, head of the newly established Israel Resilience Party, is nothing less than enormous. He wants to win the elections with a centrist party that didn't even exist two months ago and is built around newcomers from the left and the right. He's trying to dance between the raindrops without getting wet.
- Like Kadima, Gantz claims that he is neither left nor right. He is considered the leading figure of the center and left, yet his top leadership includes former Likud Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, who is clearly aligned with the right; former Cabinet Secretary Zvi Hauser, who worked alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is considered a fervent supporter of the nationality law and of strengthening the settlements; and Netanyahu's former spokesman, right-wing publicist Yoaz Hendel. Kadima had a very clear diplomatic agenda, which involved withdrawing to large settlement blocs in the West Bank while evacuating the more isolated outposts. In contrast, it became quite clear this week that the diplomatic policies presented by Gantz and his party are purposefully vague.
- First, there was the very comprehensive and much talked about interview with Gantz, published in full by Yedioth Aharonot Feb. 8. He faced off against two carefully chosen columnist interviewers. The first was singer Shlomo Artzi, who is identified with the center-left. The second was right-wing publicist Hanoach Daum, who is identified with the New Right party. The combination was appropriate to Gantz' campaign slogan, "There is neither left nor right." While the approach was legitimate, even after a second reading of the interview, there is still no clear answer to critical questions: What are Gantz' plans regarding the peace process? Does he support the evacuation of settlements? Will he support construction in the settlements? Or does

he believe that this is not the time and plan to focus on security matters and healing the rifts in the nation in the post-Netanyahu era?

- Daum insisted on challenging Gantz by stating that Ya'alon, Gantz' partner, thinks the Oslo Accords were a disaster. He opposed the Gaza disengagement and he thinks there is no Palestinian partner to talk to. Daum asked Gantz about his stance on these issues. Gantz said vaguely, "The main question is that of security. It needs to ensure the State of Israel's security. Now, there's a question of interest here. We — and Netanyahu said this in his Bar Ilan speech — are not looking to control anyone else. We need to find a way in which we're not controlling other people." Daum also asked Gantz whether he supported the 2005 disengagement from Gaza. Gantz answered that the decision to implement the disengagement was based on diplomatic ideas and made legally. "So you're not sorry for the fact we uprooted communities from there?" Daum wondered. Gantz responded that the disengagement "was a legal move, a decision made by the Israeli government and carried out by the IDF and the settlers in a painful but good manner. We need to take the lessons learned and implement them elsewhere."
- When selections from the interview were first released Feb. 6, Netanyahu jumped at the opportunity to accuse Gantz of being a leftist, with plans to act unilaterally on the Palestinian issue, though Gantz never explicitly said so. Could it be implied from what he said? It depends on who you ask. At the Israel Resilience headquarters, the staff went into battle mode. Concern that Netanyahu's manipulative remarks would be etched irrevocably into the public consciousness, they responded accordingly: "The disengagement was carried out by a legitimate government led by the Likud. Netanyahu and other leaders of the Likud voted for it, and the spokesperson for it was [current Culture Minister] Miri Regev [who was IDF spokesperson at the time]. The Gantz government will do nothing unilaterally involving the evacuation of settlements." Attached to another defiant text was a photo of Netanyahu shaking hands with former PLO leader Yasser Arafat.
- Haim Ramon, an architect of Kadima and later a minister on its behalf, tweeted, "The disengagement was carried out by Ariel Sharon. Most of the Likud opposed the disengagement. That was why Sharon left the Likud and founded Kadima. Netanyahu, the Likud, Ya'alon, Hendel and Hauser all think that the disengagement was a disaster. I'd love to hear what Benny Gantz thinks about it, with a clear answer, if possible." Hauser then jumped into the fray. He was quoted as saying Friday, "He'll build in the [West Bank] territories no less than Netanyahu." If that's the case, then what's the difference between the Likud and Israel Resilience?
- The most recent polls continue to put Gantz in the spotlight, establishing him as the main challenger to Netanyahu. On the other hand, the history of center parties does not favor him. As the election approaches, he will need to sharpen his positions, while Netanyahu and the New Right will try to manipulate any remarks that he, Ya'alon, or Hauser make. The left will certainly challenge him, too, and even attack him. If he manages to form a government, Gantz will make history. Right now, however, the balance between the two blocs is not in his favor. Despite all

his signals to the right, most of his voters come from the center-left. So far, his Israel Resilience isn't creating the political big bang that he needs to win.

## **We Must Acknowledge Arab Heritage of Many Israeli Jews**

By Gila Gamliel, Israeli Minister of Social Equality

- I am a daughter of a lost civilization. My mother was born in Libya, and my father is from Yemen. Most of the world knows the history of the Jews of Europe, which culminated in the Holocaust, where one-third of the world's Jewish population was wiped out. But less known or spoken about is the other half of world Jewry, which came from North Africa, the Middle East, and Iran. These were the world's oldest Jewish communities outside of Israel—some, like the communities in Iraq and Yemen, dating back thousands of years. This may seem strange in today's war-ravaged Middle East, but for centuries, Jews lived among Arabs in peace and harmony, enriching the region with art, culture and commerce. Like most things, this history has its good and its bad periods; peaceful neighborly relations were followed by economic discrimination and then deadly violence as thousands of Jews were murdered in violent rioting caused by blood libels and false accusations.
- My father Yosef escaped Yemen at the age of 10, and came to Israel as an orphan, where he was adopted by a Polish Jewish family. My mother Aliza came from Libya to Israel at the age of 6, the oldest of 12 brothers and sisters. Aliza and Yosef were just 2 people among the 850,000 other Jews from Arab countries who were forced to leave their homes. For seven decades, the story of the Jews from the Arab countries—both the good and the bad—was left largely untold both in Israel and around the world. Now as a Minister in the Government of Israel, I am working to preserve the rich cultural history of our parents and grandparents from the Arab world.
- We've just launched an app allowing Israeli citizens to document the testimony of family members and friends; we've promoted research on this history by academics and historians, we have marked an annual commemoration of the Jewish communities from the Arab countries; and we've made sure this history is in our classroom schoolbooks. I can say with satisfaction that this important part of history is now with us for good. It is a critical part of the story of the Jewish people who over centuries of steadfast determination managed to maintain their identity and religion, along with the dream of one day returning to the Holy Land. In today's ever-changing Middle East, the descendants of Jews of the Arab world, like myself, can serve as emissaries and ambassadors to a better future with the Arab world. It is rightly said that the past cannot be changed. But we can and should try to use our Jewish Arab heritage to serve as a bridge for a better tomorrow. The future is in our power.