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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, March 1*

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- **Gantz Calls Netanyahu to Resign: 'Won't Sit with Him in Coalition'**
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# News Excerpts

March 1, 2019

## Ha'aretz

### **Netanyahu to Be Charged with Bribery Pending Hearing**

Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit announced on Thursday his decision to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three separate cases, pending a hearing. In Case 4000, Netanyahu is accused of providing regulatory concessions to Shaul Elovitch, the controlling shareholder of Bezeq telecommunications, in exchange for favorable coverage from Bezeq's news website, Walla. The charge: Bribery and breach of trust. In Case 1000, in which the prime minister is alleged to have accepted gifts from wealthy business figures in return for political favors. The charge: Fraud and breach of trust. See also, ["Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu to be indicted on corruption charges, pending hearing" \(CNN\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **Facing Bribery Charges, PM Decries 'Political Plot' to Topple Him**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blasted Thursday evening the decision by Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit to charge him for bribery pending a hearing, blaming it on pressure from the left wing. "They have applied endless pressures on the attorney general in order for him to say that he is recommending to indict me for bribery pending a hearing, even when there is nothing. The left's pressure succeeded," Netanyahu said. "Something terrible has happened here and it is hurting Israeli democracy," Netanyahu charged. "For the first time in the country's history we are going to a hearing before the election, just to topple the right wing and raise the left to the premiership. There is no other explanation." See also, ["'The Left-wing Pressure Has Succeeded': Netanyahu Cries Foul Over Indictment" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Justice Dep. Rejects 'Baseless' PM's Claims Against Prosecutors**

The Justice Ministry on Thursday night rejected claims by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the top prosecutor handling his corruption investigations had a history of unfairly singling out right-wing politicians. State Attorney Shai Nitzan and Tel Aviv state prosecution head of taxation and economic crimes Liat Ben-Ari, the chief prosecutor in Netanyahu's cases, "were the two prosecutors who pushed especially hard to indict me," Netanyahu charged in a televised statement to the press on Thursday evening, after Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit formally announced his intention to indict the premier, pending a hearing. See also, ["Israeli Justice Ministry confirms intention to indict Netanyahu" \(Reuters\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Gantz Calls Netanyahu to Resign: 'Won't Sit with Him in Coalition'**

Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz said for the first time on Thursday night that he would not sit in a government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Gantz had been under pressure from political allies Yair Lapid and Moshe Ya'alon to make such an announcement. But he waited until after Attorney-General Avichai Mendelblit decided to indict the prime minister for bribery, pending a hearing. "After the attorney-general's decision, sitting in a government led by Netanyahu is no longer an option," Gantz said. He called on Netanyahu to conduct his legal battle as a private citizen. "The Netanyahu I know wouldn't compel the nation to be run by a PM working part-time," he said.

## **Sen. Warren Slams Israeli Corruption w. Netanyahu's Indictment**

"Corruption—in Israel, in the US, or anywhere else—is a cancer that threatens democracy," Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Democratic presidential candidate wrote on her Twitter account late Thursday night. Her statement was made in the wake of Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit's announcement on Thursday that he has intent to indict - pending a hearing - Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for bribery. "We need to fight back," her tweet continued. "And we can start by having the courage to call it out wherever it occurs. Even among our allies. Especially here at home." Warren also had choice words specifically directed against Netanyahu: "First embracing right-wing extremism. Now manipulating a free press, accepting bribes, and trading government favors," Warren tweeted. "The allegations against Netanyahu are serious and cut to the heart of a functioning democracy." See also, ["Corruption Threatens Democracy: Elizabeth Warren Slams Netanyahu After Indictment Decision" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **Report: 'Deal of Century' Won't Include Palestinian State**

US President Donald Trump's "deal of the century" to achieve peace in the Middle East will not include establishing a Palestinian state, and instead will propose Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip with political and economic links to the West Bank, the Al-Quds newspaper reported on Thursday. In addition, the Palestinians will hold negotiations with Israel over Area C of the West Bank, which is under Israeli military control. Furthermore, the Jewish settlements will remain under Israel's jurisdiction, but will not be expanded, according to Al-Quds. The deal will also include strengthening cooperation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians over the management of the Al Aqsa mosque. See also, ["Is Trump's 'Deal of the Century' Just the Biggest Bribe in History? \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## **Israel Condemns UN Report on Gaza as 'Blinded by Hatred'**

The report, known as a commission of inquiry, issued earlier Thursday was set up by the U.N.H.R.C. to look into the protests along the Gaza border that began last March. It based its information on the protests through December of 2018 and looked into Israel's response to the protests and its impact on civilians in Gaza and Israel. Known as the "great march of return," thousands of protesters have gathered every Friday since March 2018 along the Israeli/Gaza border in what the Israelis say is violent attempt to enter Israel illegally and cause harm to its civilians. The gatherings have been far from peaceful and have resulted in the deaths of many. Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the U.N., said of the findings: "This council is blinded by hatred of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces, and wastes its resources and time in political attacks and spreading lies." See also, ["UN report on Gaza says Israeli forces may have committed war crimes" \(Washington Post\)](#)

## **After Setback, Israeli Spacecraft Completes Critical Maneuver**

The Beresheet spacecraft successfully carried out a key maneuver Thursday night, following a worrisome computer glitch earlier this week. Ground control activated the spacecraft's main engine for four minutes, putting it into a new orbit which takes it to a distance of 131,000 kilometers from earth. The next maneuver is scheduled for next week. "The maneuver was conducted as expected. All the systems of the spacecraft worked properly," said Ido Anteby, CEO of Spacell. "We are on our way to the moon." See also, ["ISRAEL'S LUNAR SHUTTLE COMPLETES ANOTHER MANEUVER ON WAY TO MOON" \(JPost\)](#)

## **Decision to Indict Netanyahu Exposes Israel's Double Rule**

By Aluf Benn, chief editor at Ha'aretz

- Millions of words have been written and uttered in television broadcasts about Benjamin Netanyahu; entire biographies have been produced and documentary films have been made about the life and rule of the Israeli premier. Not a single one of these oeuvres has described the conduct of the prime minister and his court as transparently as the draft indictment sent to him by Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit on Thursday.
- Reading this document, which one could dub a documentary-like novella, removes the wraps of officiality, statesmanship and security that have been enveloping the symbols of the Israeli rule. The document presents Netanyahu as he really carries himself behind the closed doors of his bureau and official residence on Balfour Street: A greedy miser who is moved by an unstoppable lust for power.
- After reading Mendelblit's document, it seems that the country's textbooks on political sciences and civic life should be rewritten. It appears that there is a double rule in Israel. On stage, we see players like the Knesset, the government, the political parties and media outlets, but the real authority is behind the scenes.
- It is there where those with true power act: Wealthy people can walk into the prime minister's office whenever they like and steer media coverage to fit their interests; clerics defined as public servants act as the big boss' servants; big wigs connect between the money and the power. And everything is covered by false statements and deceiving tricks.
- The conclusion that arises from Mendelblit's draft indictment against the prime minister is simple: Netanyahu survived as premier for longer than the others because he tried harder than they did to tie all the loose ends and control every single detail. He is not willing to let any inhibition or legal constraint get in the way of his goal.
- He rewrites every statement to the media, edits television interviews and pens headlines about himself and his family. No detail is too small for him, and at the same time, the rules on conflict of interest and proper conduct are deemed by the prime minister an inconsequential nuisance, a punishment for suckers. Those who bother him are unseated or neutralized.
- Like his double rule — the one that is visible to the eye and the one that goes on behind closed doors — Netanyahu, too, has two acts. On the one hand, he presents himself as the ideologue who was elected to establish a "strong right-wing government" that won't give up the West Bank, the close friend of world leaders who promises Israel safety and prosperity. But on the other hand there is a political bully who sees anyone who jeopardizes him as a messenger of the "dangerous left" that is plotting to turn the flourishing Israel into a military cemetery.
- Tonight, prosecutors Liat Ben Ari and Shai Nitzan got a taste of this approach when they were marked as "left" by the prime minister only because they recommended that indictments be filed against Netanyahu for bribery. Mendelblit, who softened this recommendation, was presented by the premier as a weakling and a victim of the "left," and it's not so hard to guess why: Now the case is at the hands of the attorney general, who could soften it even further before it reaches

a hearing in court. Therefore, Mendelblit can't be turned into the enemy — he can only be duly insulted.

- The draft indictment shows that it's all an act, that even those who were presented by Netanyahu as dangerous enemies like Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes can actually be recurring partners in political deals, that the real election campaign has been going on in backchannels and that there is no significance to things like principles or an agenda.
- What really matters is for Netanyahu to remain the ruler, like he promised tonight. To accomplish that he will slander and destroy any national institution or value. Netanyahu will be toppled eventually and replaced with a different prime minister, but even after he is gone, it would be very hard to convince the Israeli public that the government ought to act transparently and not in dirty and deceptive ways. This is Netanyahu's true legacy, which Mendelblit partially unveiled with his indictment draft tonight.

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## **Striking a Deal with Netanyahu will Save Israel's Rule of Law**

*Whatever Mandelblit says Tonight, the prime minister has already been judged in the court of public opinion, and many believe the system is corrupt and will do anything to have the PM's head; the right thing to do is send him home without a criminal process that would tear Israel apart.*

By Ben-Dror Yemini, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- **It's a sad day for Israel. For decades now, every prime minister has also been a criminal suspect. The only comfort is that despite corruption, the rule of law presides. No one gets a free pass — not even the most powerful person in the country, and not even the president. But that's hardly any comfort, since whatever Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit says Thursday will be met with public outrage.**
- **It's not that the majority of the public thinks the rule of law in Israel is corrupt. But we do have to admit that most of the participants in both sides of the public debate about Netanyahu's guilt, have made up their mind and taken a stand on the matter, without waiting for the attorney general to share his own conclusions.**
- **A rigid perspective leads many members of the public to believe that some within the law enforcement authorities are acting from personal motivation rather than a desire to get to the truth. This doesn't mean that whatever Mandelblit says is inevitably based on dishonest motives — far from. But it's hard to shake the feeling that the decision about Netanyahu's affairs was influenced by external pressures. Too many activists, journalists and politicians have already decided what the verdict will be. They have preached, they have protested, they have yelled. Every leak has become a headline and every headline has become a conviction. High-ranking judicial figures have been dragged into this media campaign against the PM.**
- **It's important to clarify that even if external pressures and personal motivations have been at work in regards to Netanyahu's cases, it doesn't make him free of corruption. And even if the criminal charges against him cannot be proven — and I do hope that this will be the case— the prime minister's actions are riddled with corruption. Even though he and his supporters do raise some rightful claims about a public campaign of slander, leaks and pressure — there are undeniable facts describing gifts of phenomenal value, dubious decisions that aided his inner circle, unreasonable pressure on the media in the pursuit of positive news coverage, and on and on it goes.**
- **All of this clarifies that Netanyahu has to give up the role of prime minister. The indictments to be announced Thursday don't deal with a one-time glitch, but rather with a grim, ongoing narrative. This is the home stretch in the campaign for Netanyahu's future. Both camps are ready for battle, but no one will be the winner in this fight, and we will all be the losers. If there's still a chance to stop this fight from ripping Israeli society apart irreparably, it's best that Mandelblit reaches a deal with Netanyahu.**

- **The deal should include wiping out the charges against the prime minister in exchange for his resignation. There is no need to seek harsh judgment, but rather let's make a deal to avoid undermining Israel's rule of law. In truth, a deal could be its savior.**

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