

Israeli defense minister heads to Morocco for 'historic' visit

Author:

Wed, 2021-11-24 03:03

RABAT: Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz arrived in Morocco Tuesday on a "historic" visit aimed at bolstering ties between the countries, at a time when Rabat is embroiled in a standoff over Western Sahara.

The two-day trip comes less than a year after Morocco normalized ties with Israel in a deal brokered by former US president Donald Trump's administration.

In return, Washington recognized the North African kingdom's sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

Gantz – the first Israeli defense minister to make an official visit to Morocco – has said he will sign defense "cooperation agreements" with Moroccan counterparts and "continue to strengthen ties."

The former Israeli army chief added it was crucial that the "historic" trip proved "successful."

His chartered El Al flight landed in Rabat late Tuesday, ahead of a day-and-a-half of meetings, including with the Moroccan defense and foreign ministers, and a visit to a synagogue.

The trip aims to "set the foundation for all future security cooperation between Israel and Morocco," a source familiar with the visit told AFP.

"Until now there has been some level of cooperation; this truly formalizes it," the source added.

The visit comes as tensions have recently flared between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony that Rabat considers part of its sovereign territory.

Algeria, which backs Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement, cut diplomatic ties with Morocco in August, citing "hostile actions" – a charge denied by Rabat.

Earlier this month, Algiers accused Rabat of killing three Algerian civilians on a desert highway, raising fears of an escalation.

And Polisario head Brahim Ghali said last week the movement had decided to step up military operations.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, an Israeli expert on Morocco, said the timing of Gantz's visit and the signing of an MOU was not a coincidence.

"It's possible that in the context of the Moroccan-Algerian tensions, the Moroccans were the ones who were keen on this," he said.

"It would seem to me that the Moroccans are the ones who are keen on showing everybody – their own public, their Algerian rivals, the West – that they are deepening their relationship with Israel," said the Tel Aviv University professor.

Morocco and Israel previously set up low-level ties in 1993 but Rabat broke them off at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in 2000.

Rabat normalized ties with the Jewish state last December, shortly after

similar announcements by the UAE and Bahrain.

Last month, Israel's Ratio Petroleum announced an agreement with Rabat on "exploration operations" off the city of Dakhla in Western Sahara.

Israel's defense ministry oversees all security exports, with the Jewish state offering state-of-art products ranging from attack drones to the Iron Dome missile defense system.

One Israeli product, the NSO's Pegasus spyware, has already made its way to Morocco, according to Amnesty International and Paris-based organization Forbidden Stories.

Rabat allegedly used it against French President Emmanuel Macron – a claim denied by Morocco which said it never bought the software and has filed lawsuits against French media and Amnesty International.

A spokeswoman for Gantz would not comment on NSO.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to mobilize civil society, Islamists and the far-left in Morocco, with a call for a November 29 demonstration against "creeping normalization with Israel" and in support of the Palestinians.

There were also calls for a pro-Palestinian demonstration in front of parliament on Wednesday.

According to Maddy-Weitzman, while Rabat has not abandoned the Palestinian cause, "there are too many other interests in play, too many other benefits to be gained by recalibrating."

"Most of the countries in the region just don't want to be held hostage any more on the issue, they want to pursue their interests as they define them, and at this point in time obviously Israel has a lot to offer," he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Morocco](#)

Apple suing Israeli hacker-for-hire company NSO Group
Moroccan Italian festival highlights rights, culture

[Iran taking 'arbitrary measures' against IAEA inspectors, says Saudi representative](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 01:04

LONDON: Iran is taking "arbitrary measures" against International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, Saudi Arabia's governor at the UN watchdog said Tuesday.

He also called on Tuesday for Tehran to fully comply with safeguard agreements under the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal and stop escalation of its nuclear program, adding: "Iran's nuclear commitments should not be mixed with negotiations."

He also said Iran's nuclear policy revolved around "blackmailing the world through its nuclear program."

The watchdog's chief, Rafael Grossi, is in Tehran for talks with the regime and said Tuesday he wanted to deepen cooperation with Iran.

"The agency is seeking to continue and deepen the dialogue with the government of Iran... We agreed to continue our joint work on transparency and this will continue," Grossi, who arrived in the Iranian capital on Monday, told a televised news conference.

The IAEA last week issued reports detailing its conflicts with Iran, from rough treatment of its inspectors to re-installing cameras it deems "essential" for the revival of Tehran's nuclear deal.

Tehran and Washington will resume indirect negotiations on Nov. 29 in Vienna, which have been on hold since June, to find ways to reinstate the nuclear deal that former US President Donald Trump exited three years ago and reimposed harsh sanctions on Iran.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[IAEA](#)

[Saudi Arabia](#)

[UN](#)

[Iran nuclear deal](#)

IAEA's Grossi says in Iran that he wants to deepen cooperation
Iran says IAEA's Grossi to visit Tehran 'probably soon'

[Arab coalition targets locations in Yemen's capital](#)

Author:

Arab News

ID:

1637626259763431500

Tue, 2021-11-23 03:10

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Tuesday that it had carried out airstrikes in Yemen's capital.

The coalition has cautioned civilians in Sanaa from approaching or gathering near the targeted locations.

The operation targeted sites in Dhahban neighborhood storing ballistic missiles.

The coalition said on Monday that the Houthi militia in Yemen have turned [Sanaa airport into a military base](#) for experiments and cross-border attacks.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

Arab coalition: Yemen's Houthis turn Sanaa airport into military base
Yemeni troops make more gains in Taiz, Hodeidah

[Israel starts vaccinating young children as coronavirus cases rise](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-11-23 02:26

JERUSALEM: Israel began rolling out Pfizer/BioNtech COVID-19 vaccinations for 5- to 11-year-olds on Monday hoping to beat down a recent rise in coronavirus

infections.

A fourth wave of infections that hit Israel in June began subsiding in September. But over the past two weeks the "R", or reproduction rate of the virus, that had remained below one for two months began climbing and has now crossed that threshold, indicating the virus could again be spreading exponentially.

Daily cases have also crept up over the past few days, with half the confirmed infections presently among children age 11 and younger.

The children's vaccine drive kicked off on Monday in a Tel Aviv square, where a small number of parents quietly lined up with their children to get shots. The campaign will go nationwide on Tuesday.

"The kids go to school, they (mix) with (other) kids, and they are doing a lot of social activities. We are very excited (to) vaccinate them and get (back) to normal life," said Katy Bai Shalom, whose son and daughter were vaccinated Monday.

Receiving their shots in front of television cameras, some of the children smiled and laughed, while others teared up and held on to their parents. Israel's 9.4 million population is relatively young, with around 1.2 million children in the 5-to-11 age group. By November, that group comprised more than a third of new cases, according to health ministry data. Scientists and officials have been doubtful the country can reach "herd immunity" unless children are vaccinated.

Policy makers also say that the vaccination of younger children is meant first and foremost to protect their individual health and not just to stop the transmission of the virus.

In the past week they have stressed that although COVID-19 is rarely severe among young children and many show no symptoms at all, it can carry risks in the longer term.

Israel's health ministry estimates that one in 3,500 children infected with the coronavirus will later develop Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) in which parts of the body become inflamed, including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin and gastrointestinal organs. Most children who suffer from the condition require intensive care treatment and 1-2% die. Officials have also noted the risk of lingering symptoms, such as sleep disruption, muscle pain, loss of smell and taste, headaches and a cough, commonly known as "long Covid".

A survey by the health ministry of more than 13,000 children showed that around 11% had suffered lingering symptoms, with about 1.8% to 4.6%, depending on their age, continuing to experience symptoms six months after becoming ill.

A poll by Israeli healthcare provider Maccabi found that 41% of parents to children age 5 to 11 were positive they will vaccinate their children, while 21% were still undecided and 38% will not vaccinate their children.

Israel has recorded 1.3 million total confirmed cases and more than 8,000 dead since the start of the pandemic.

Around 57% of Israel's population is fully vaccinated, according to the health ministry, which means they have either received a third shot or it has not yet been five months since they received their second.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

[Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine](#)

Israel combats online misinformation as COVID-19 vaccinations lag
Israel reports subvariant of Delta coronavirus strain

[**Kings of Bahrain, Jordan agree to continue cooperating on Arab causes and regional security**](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-11-23 00:39

LONDON: Bahrain's King Hamad and Jordan's King Abdullah II on Monday stressed the need to continue to coordinate and consult on issues of mutual concern, the foremost of which is the Palestinian cause.

"The two leaders noted the centrality of the Palestinian cause, calling for stepping up efforts to reach a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of

the two-state solution, as a strategic option to end the conflict,” according to a statement issued by Petra, the Jordan News Agency.

King Abdullah, accompanied by Queen Rania, was in Manama for an official visit. The royal couple was greeted on arrival at Sakhir Air Base by King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad.

The Jordanian king praised the strong bilateral ties between the countries and highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation in all sectors. He commended Bahrain’s stances in support of Arab causes and its steadfast efforts to maintain Arab unity.

His Majesty King Abdullah II holds talks with [#Bahrain](#) King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, reaffirms the deep-rooted ties between [#Jordan](#) and Bahrain, and keenness to advance relations and cooperation in service of the mutual interests of the two countries and peoples pic.twitter.com/hEixNw27fa

– RHC (@RHCJO) [November 22, 2021](#)

King Hamad also praised the deep-rooted ties between the nations, the advanced level of cooperation, and the contributions made by the Jordanian community in Bahrain in all sectors. He commended Jordan’s efforts to arrange the safe return of Bahraini students and nationals to their home country during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed the importance of bilateral cooperation in combating the pandemic and limiting the spread of the virus, and thanked King Abdullah for the facilities Jordan provided to the Bahraini embassy in Amman, the Bahrain News Agency reported.

Both leaders said they were satisfied with the levels of bilateral trade and the advanced level of economic and trade ties. They called for continued coordination in efforts to counter terrorism and sustain security and stability.

Their Majesties King Abdullah II and Queen Rania are received by [#Bahrain](#) King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who is also prime minister of Bahrain, upon arrival at Sakhir Air Base [#Jordan](#) pic.twitter.com/LPqdSwqHV0

– RHC (@RHCJO) [November 22, 2021](#)

The talks also covered the latest developments in Syria, with King Abdullah reiterating his country’s support for efforts to preserve the country’s sovereignty, stability, territorial integrity and the unity of its people. In addition the two monarchs stressed the need to work to stop foreign interference in regional affairs, and to enhance bilateral cooperation to stabilize regional security and stability and protect international navigation in the Arabian Gulf from any threats that affect the movement of global trade, BNA said.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Bahrain](#)

[King Hamad](#)

[King Abdullah II](#)

Jordan, Israel, UAE ink energy-for-water agreement Bahrain says it foiled planned attack, confiscated Iranian weapons and explosives