

Israeli defence chief says he's preparing for consequences of West Bank annexations

Author:

Reuters

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JERUSALEM: Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said on Monday he ordered the military to step up preparations for Israel's pending annexation of parts of the West Bank, a plan that could stoke Palestinian violence.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged to begin cabinet discussions on July 1 on extending Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley in the West Bank, occupied territory that Palestinians seek for a state.

Gantz's directive appeared to indicate that the centrist politician had either signed on to the move, or at least believed it would be inevitable, given right-wing support in the Netanyahu-led coalition cabinet.

In public remarks to legislators of his centrist Blue and White party, Gantz noted a recent uptick in anti-Israeli violence in the West Bank and the Palestinians' declaration last month that they were ending security cooperation with Israel over the annexation issue.

He said he had subsequently ordered the chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Aviv Kochavi, to "examine all the ramifications and the required preparations" stemming from moving ahead with the peace plan US President Donald Trump announced in January, a blueprint that could ease annexation.

In a separate written statement, Gantz said "preparations by the Israel Defence Forces should be stepped up ahead of pending diplomatic moves regarding the Palestinians".

The Palestinians have rejected Trump's proposal, under which the vast majority of West Bank settlements built by Israel on land captured in the 1967 Middle East war would be incorporated into "contiguous Israeli territory".

The Palestinians and most countries consider such settlements illegal. Israel disputes this.

The Trump plan also envisages a Palestinian state under near-complete Israeli security control, creating what Palestinians leaders say would be an unviable country.

Sami Abu Zuhri, an official with militant group Hamas which rules the Gaza Strip, another part of Palestinians' hoped-for future state, told Reuters: "The call of the occupation army to get ready for annexation of the West Bank is a call for war, and the occupation will regret this crime, and soon realise they are committing a grave mistake."



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UAE calls on Israel to halt West Bank annexation plan

[Abu Dhabi bans travel in, out and within emirate to limit coronavirus spread](#)

Sun, 2020-05-31 19:03

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi has banned travel into and out of the emirate and between its three regions from Tuesday. The restrictions, announced by the Abu Dhabi Emergency and Crisis Committee, come into force on Tuesday and last for a week. Both residents and nationals will not be allowed to travel between the areas of Abu Dhabi city, Al-Ain and Al-Dhafrah. The decision is meant to enhance the effectiveness of the “National Screening

Program and reduce the spread of covid-19,” Abu Dhabi Media Office said. Exemptions are available by a special private permit for employees of vital sectors, or chronic disease patients heading to hospitals, and the transportation of goods.



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UAE to shorten COVID-19 prevention curfew by two hours Saudi Arabia's new cases slow down two weeks after reaching peak of 2,840

[Israeli defense minister apologizes for Palestinian's death](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1590934520009158100

Sun, 2020-05-31 13:51

JERUSALEM: Israel's defense minister apologized on Sunday for the Israeli police's deadly shooting of an unarmed Palestinian man who was autistic. The shooting of Iyad Halak, 32, in Jerusalem's Old City on Saturday, drew broad condemnations and revived complaints alleging excessive force by Israeli security forces.

Benny Gantz, who is also Israel's "alternate" prime minister under a power-sharing deal, made the remarks at the weekly meeting of the Israeli Cabinet. He was sat near Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who made no mention of the incident in his opening remarks.

"We are really sorry about the incident in which Iyad Halak was shot to death and we share in the family's grief," Gantz said. "I am sure this subject will be investigated swiftly and conclusions will be reached."

Halak's relatives said he had autism and was heading to a school for students with special needs where he studied each day when he was shot.

In a statement, Israeli police said they spotted a suspect "with a suspicious object that looked like a pistol." When he failed to obey orders to stop, officers opened fire, the statement said. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld later said no weapon was found.

Israeli media reported the officers involved were questioned after the incident as per protocol and a lawyer representing one of them sent his condolences to the family in an interview with Israeli Army Radio.

Lone Palestinian attackers with no clear links to armed groups have carried out a series of stabbings, shootings and car-ramming attacks in recent years. Palestinians and Israeli human rights groups have long accused Israeli security forces of using excessive force in some cases, either by killing individuals who could have been arrested or using lethal force when their lives were not in danger.

Some pro-Palestinian activists compared Saturday's shooting to the recent cases of police violence in the US



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Israeli police kill disabled Palestinian in East Jerusalem

[Iran's Revolutionary Guards](#) ['psychologically torturing' Zaghari-](#) [Ratcliffe by blocking clemency](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1590934350049146800

Sun, 2020-05-31 17:29

LONDON: British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is being subjected to “psychological torture” by the Iranian regime as her hopes of

being granted clemency were dashed yet again, her husband said. Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 41, spent last week having nightmares whilst she waited to discover her fate on Friday, Richard Ratcliffe said. "There's no news today," was all she was told.

"It is fair to say that what Nazanin has gone through amounts to psychological torture," he told the Observer.

"The supreme leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] has granted clemency to everyone who meets certain criteria. Nazanin meets the criteria," Ratcliffe added. However, there is a dispute between the judiciary, who are trying to uphold the law, and the Revolutionary Guard, the aid worker's lawyers told Ratcliffe.

The uncertainty has left Zaghari-Ratcliffe "deflated", "unsettled" and desperate to see her five-year-old daughter, Gabriella, in England, Ratcliffe said.

"The Revolutionary Guard have had no problem making a mockery of Iranian law," he said. "But this is the first time we've had a situation where not only is the Iranian foreign ministry, behind closed doors, trying to solve this for diplomatic purposes, but also the judiciary are trying to solve this case."

In mid-March, Zaghari-Ratcliffe was temporarily released from Tehran's notorious Evin prison for two weeks along with thousands of other prisoners in a bid to contain the rapid spread of coronavirus in Iran. The furlough was extended until May 27.

However, her hopes of being granted clemency were dashed for the second time in a week on Friday when she was informed that a decision had not been made. Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, has served nearly four of her five-year sentence.

She convicted of plotting to overthrow Iran's clerical establishment, a charge her family, the foundation and its news subsidiary Reuters deny. She was arrested in April 2016 at a Tehran airport as she headed back to Britain with her daughter after a family visit.



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UK envoy urged to visit Zaghari-Ratcliffe on furlough
British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe temporarily released from Tehran jail

[Egypt receives more stranded citizens amid coronavirus pandemic](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-05-31 15:19

DUBAI: Egypt continues to repatriate stranded citizens from coronavirus hotspots at the country's Marsa Alam International Airport, local daily Egypt Today reported.

The airport has received over 10,000 citizens and operated more than 60 flights by EgyptAir and Air Cairo airlines since operations began in April. Repatriated Egyptians arrived from more than 36 countries globally after

coordination between ministries and the tourism industry, and provided hotels to host the Egyptians for a one-week quarantine, a source said. Over 8,000 Egyptians left hotels after completing their obligatory quarantine period, and after the duration was lowered to one week, more citizens were discharged, medical sources said. Earlier on Thursday, the airport received a repatriation flight arriving from Abu Dhabi, carrying 245 citizens. Meanwhile, Egypt has prepared plans to reopen churches in the country amid the coronavirus outbreak while following precautionary measures to prevent the virus spread, Head of the Evangelical community in Egypt Andrea Zaki said. The committee is expected to submit its proposal during the council's next available meeting, she added.



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