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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Times of Israel

Netanyahu Insists He ‘Won’t Accept’ Harm to LGBT Rights

Incoming prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he would not allow harm to come to LGBT rights in Israel, amid growing concern over his coalition deal with the homophobic Noam party, which granted the faction’s chairman, Avi Maoz, authority over the Education Ministry unit responsible for [informal education](#) at Israeli schools. “I just won’t accept any of that. It’s not something I’m saying now. I have a record now and a record in general of having two hands on the wheel. I ultimately decide policy,” Netanyahu said when asked about Maoz in an interview on “Meet the Press.” The interview was one of three Netanyahu has given in recent days to the American press, whose outlets have highlighted fears over Maoz, slated to take up key positions in Israel’s next government. Netanyahu has yet to give similar interviews to the Israeli press, which has expressed similar fears.

Jerusalem Post

High Court Hints Will Approve Family Reunification Law

The Israeli High Court of Justice appeared ready to approve the family reunification law as constitutional regarding tightening immigration controls, despite the fact that this makes it harder for Palestinians who marry Israeli Arabs to receive citizenship. However, at the same time, the justices had significant criticism for aspects of the law, and it was unclear if they would suffice with publicly airing their critiques or seek to cancel distinct portions of the law. The Shin Bet had campaigned hard for the law purely based on security considerations, saying that sometimes Hamas and other groups could use marriage as a way to sneak their agents into Israel as new citizens. However, the new Jewish and democratic state clause left the High Court in a complex dilemma. [Dig Deeper “Far-Right Party Submits Bill to Hand Politicians Ultimate Power to Appoint Judges” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Arutz Sheva

Smotrich Will Appoint COGAT and Civil Administration Chief

Religious Zionism will appoint the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and the head of the IDF Civil Administration and not the Defense Minister. The coalition agreements with the Likud establish that in addition to control of the Civil Administration and its course of operation, and of the high planning board, Bezalel Smotrich or a minister representing him will appoint the two most powerful men in Judea and Samaria (West Bank), other than the IDF Central Command chief and Defense Minister. Religious Zionism is demanding flash lawmaking, even before the formation of the new government, to anchor into law the ministerial position in the Defense ministry which will be charged with Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). [Dig Deeper “Religious Zionism Gains Increasing Control Over Israel’s Civil Administration in Likud Deal” \(Ha’aretz\)](#)

Hamas Fires at Israeli Jets as IDF Strikes in Gaza

The Israeli military hit [Hamas](#) targets in the Gaza Strip in response to the terrorist group firing a rocket into southern Israel, with the Islamist outfit firing anti-aircraft missiles at Israeli fighter jets. A rocket production site was attacked as well as a terrorist tunnel in the south of the Palestinian enclave, according to an IDF Spokesperson's Unit statement. Following the strikes, Hamas fired anti-aircraft missiles at Israeli fighter jets. The IDF then targeted a Hamas military post. This is the first time rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel in a month. Last month, a rocket launched from Gaza toward Eshkol Regional Council was intercepted by Iron Dome. There were no reports of injuries or damage. This is the most significant escalation since Israel and PIJ clashed for three days in early August in a bout Israel dubbed Operation Breaking Dawn, during which PIJ terrorists fired more than 1,000 rockets into Israeli population centers. [Dig Deeper "Qatar Warns Hamas, PIJ Against Gaza Escalation During World Cup" \(I24 News\)](#)

AI Jazeera Film Claims IDF Deliberately Shot at Abu Akleh

A documentary by the Qatar-based AI Jazeera outlet included video evidence purportedly showing that at least one Israeli soldier intentionally targeted a group of reporters that included Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during clashes in the West Bank in May. The documentary included witness accounts and video footage that it said proved Abu Akleh and other journalists were clearly targeted and that she was not a victim of errant fire during a gun battle between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen, as the Israel Defense Forces has claimed. The footage in the documentary appears to show that there was no gun battle at the specific site at the time, but only IDF troops firing toward the group of Palestinian journalists that, included Abu Akleh. [Dig Deeper "2 Senior UN Envoys Could Face Sanctions for Terror-Sympathizing Remarks" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Herzog Begins Historic Visit to Bahrain Amid Protests

Israeli President [Isaac Herzog](#) began his historic visit to Bahrain when he became the first Israeli head of state to visit the Gulf nation. Herzog was welcomed by Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa and later met with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The President's visit is taking place under intense security following protests against the Israeli leader over the past few days. Israeli officials believe that pro-Iranians are responsible for the protests against the visit. As a result of the protests, Herzog's itinerary was changed at the last minute, though Bahraini officials said they would not allow protests to take place during the visit. Several prominent businessmen are accompanying Herzog and will take part in a meeting with the local economic development council. The Israeli President will also meet with officials from the country's [Jewish community](#). Later today, Herzog will leave Bahrain for a short visit to Abu Dhabi. [Dig Deeper "Bahrain: Netanyahu Believes in Peace, We Look Forward to Working with Him" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Iran Morality Police Status Unclear After ‘Closure’ Comment

An Iranian lawmaker said that Iran’s government is “paying attention to the people’s real demands,” state media reported after a top official suggested that the country’s morality police, whose conduct helped trigger months of protests, has been shut down. The role of the morality police, which enforces veiling laws, came under scrutiny after a detainee, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, died in its custody in mid-September. Amini had been held for allegedly violating the [Islamic Republic’s](#) strict dress codes. Her death unleashed a wave of unrest that has grown into calls for the downfall of Iran’s clerical rulers. Iran’s chief prosecutor Mohamed Jafar Montazeri said the morality police “had been closed,” the semi-official news agency ISNA reported. The agency did not provide details, and state media hasn’t reported such a purported decision. In a report by ISNA, lawmaker Nezamoddin Mousavi signaled a less confrontational approach toward the protests. Since September, there has been a reported decline in the number of morality police officers across Iranian cities and an increase in women walking in public without headscarves, contrary to Iranian law. [Dig Deeper “Iran Says It Has Executed 4 Alleged Mossad Agents Accused of Spying for Israel” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

OPEC+ Keeps Steady Policy Amid Weakening Economy

OPEC+ agreed to stick to its oil output targets as the oil markets struggle to assess the impact of a slowing Chinese economy on demand and a G7 price cap on Russian oil on supply. The decision comes two days after the Group of Seven (G7) nations agreed to a price cap on Russian oil. OPEC+, which comprises the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia, angered the United States and other Western nations in October when it agreed to cut output by 2 million barrels per day, about 2% of world demand, from November until the end of 2023. Washington accused the group and one of its leaders, Saudi Arabia, of siding with Russia despite Moscow's war in Ukraine. OPEC+ argued it had cut output because of a weaker economic outlook. Oil prices have declined since October due to slower Chinese and global growth and higher interest rates, prompting market speculation the group could cut output again. G7 nations and Australia agreed to a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian seaborne crude oil in a move to deprive President Vladimir Putin of revenue while keeping Russian oil flowing to global markets. Moscow said it would not sell its oil under the cap and was analyzing how to respond. Many analysts and OPEC ministers have said the price cap is confusing and probably inefficient as Moscow has been selling most of its oil to countries like China and India, which have refused to condemn the war in Ukraine. [Dig Deeper “Saudi Prince Seeks Mideast Leadership, Independence with Xi’s Visit” \(Reuters\)](#)

Not in Our School

By Tamar Trabelsi-Hadad

- **The protests that began after Noam Party Chairman Avi Maoz was given authority over external curricula in the state-run education system has turned into a veritable flood. “The education of our children must remain outside the political arena,” wrote members of the Forum of 14, a group of female local council heads to Prime Minister-elect Binyamin Netanyahu. The council heads, including Haifa Mayor Einat Kalisch-Rotem, are demanding that Netanyahu reconsider his decision before they take independent steps. The coalition agreement between the Likud and Noam Party Chairman Avi Maoz stipulates that Maoz will oversee the Education Ministry’s unit responsible for external content and partnerships. That clause sparked suspicions and tension the moment it was publicized, given Maoz’s long-standing opposition to the LGBTQ community and in light of his conservative views.**
- **First was the Tel Aviv municipality, which announced it would continue to fund external educational content “in keeping with the spirit of this city.” Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai said, “The message that has been sent from local authorities is strong and clear: We will not allow anyone to play games with the education of our children. I will make sure that in our city, we continue to educate in keeping with our values.” Over the weekend, it became clear that Tel Aviv was not alone, and the protest movement turned into a large-scale movement. Apart from national parents groups on this issue, dozens more mayors expressed their objections to Maoz’s appointment and announced that they would fund educational content themselves. School principals and parents from around the country joined the protest. “Local council leaders are the only ones who decide what content is taught in their schools, and that will remain the case,” said Modiin Mayor Haim Bibas. “We will make sure and ensure that the status quo on this issue does not change.” Mayors associated with the Likud also joined the protests.**
- **For example, Holon Mayor Moti Sasson spoke out strongly against the Maoz appointment. “We have been exposed to worrisome statements on the issue of education. I would like to make it absolutely clear: We will not allow anyone to decide what content makes its way into the municipal education system in Holon.” Bat Yam Mayor Tzvika Brot said, “No party has a monopoly on Judaism, just as no party has a monopoly on pluralism. We will not allow anyone to meddle with our policies or values [in order to] change the status quo in this city.”**
- **Ramat Gan Mayor Carmel Shama Hacoen, a former Likud MK, said, “The city of Ramat Gan will fund two hours of class time on liberalism, inclusiveness, and equality for every hour the government slashes on those topics. Apart from the criminal aspect, there is no difference between the forces of darkness that defaced the community’s flags or defaced synagogue doors or businesses that are open on Shabbat and a person who uses the majority to excise educational materials on liberalism and equality.**

- **The blacker forecasts become a palpable and immediate threat; we will respond appropriately the way we have responded to other dark bullies in the past.” “The path of the Noam Party is not our path, and its values are not our values,” said Yuval Arad, head of the Kochav Yair/Tzur Yigal local council. “Just like I oversaw the introduction of the Israel Gay Youth (IGY) organization to our community two years ago in a respectful and non-defiant way, that is the way we will continue to operate all the educational programming we have planned.” “Removing a central body that is responsible for explaining issues like gender equality, LGBTQ, encouraging military service in the IDF and other values that advance [the cause of] social equality from the Education Ministry and transferring those responsibilities to a party that opposes those very same values on ideological grounds by means of a political agreement is unthinkable,” said Oshrat Gani-Gonen, head of the Southern Sharon Regional Council.**
- **Alongside the mayors and local council heads who protested Maoz’s appointment, other mayors put forward more conciliatory messages. Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon said, “The current petition stems from a place of an important value, but to a large degree, it is not time for that. After the government is formed and ministers are formally appointed and assume their roles, we will keep tabs on things with faith and hope that reality will prevail, together with logic and common sense, and education in Jerusalem will continue to be progressive and excellent, as it always has been.”**
- **Petah Tikva Mayor Rami Greenberg made a similar comment. “Regarding concerns about educational content in the Education Ministry, it is important to stress that no change has yet been implemented. Therefore, we recommend waiting and seeing. To the degree to which things are on the agenda in the future, we will respond accordingly,” said Greenberg. Beer Sheva Mayor Ruvik Danilovich said, “Our city will continue to uphold the values and principles that we have upheld to date without any changes. Things will remain the way things have always been! We have no intention of getting involved with political arguments, especially not with declarations or statements made by anyone. There’s no government yet. No education minister has been appointed. The right thing to do is to wait and see.”**
- **Some 200 school principals sent a letter to the prime minister-elect, Binyamin Netanyahu, saying they would refuse to allow benighted views to dictate the educational agenda in their schools. “We, school principals from across the country, from a range of sectors and [cultural backgrounds] will stand strong to protect our democracy and the basic rights of the citizens of this country when it comes to issues related to the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. “We hereby express our opposition to the removal of the unit responsible for external content and partnerships from the Education Ministry and transferring responsibility for that unit to a department that will be headed by Avi Maoz of the Noam Party, who has openly expressed his racist, homophobic views that are very benighted and very extreme, which cancel, divide, tear apart and hurt entire communities and broad identities in Israeli society. We will not allow benighted views to dictate the agenda in our schools. We call for this decision to be changed immediately,” they said.**

- In addition, more than 660 civics teachers and educators signed a letter over the weekend stating they would not cooperate with education content that contradicts humanistic values or the values of democracy and equality. “We will not quietly accept educational leadership that promotes, via legislation and action, anti-democratic actions that is damaging to human rights,” wrote the teachers, who are members of the Forum for Human Rights Education and the Arab Citizenship Teachers Forum, founded by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.
- One of the first people to speak out about the transfer of authority over external educational materials to Avi Maoz was outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid. The fight began with a letter Lapid sent last Thursday to local council heads and city mayors around the country. “The new government that is being formed in Israel has forsaken the education of our children and transferred it to the most benighted, most extreme actors in Israeli society,” he wrote. Speaking about Noam Party Chairman Avi Maoz specifically, Lapid wrote, “As you know, this is an extremist, racist, homophobic and dangerous party. I call on you not to cooperate with the unit responsible for external content and partnerships in the Ministry of Education as long as it is controlled by Maoz.” The prime minister-elect, Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote a strongly-worded post accusing Lapid of inciting rebellion. “I strongly condemn Lapid’s attempts to encourage IDF officers and mayors to rebel against the elected government under our leadership. This is a dangerous behavior that is damaging to democracy.” Lapid responded to Netanyahu’s criticism: “Mr. Netanyahu, I am not going to be lectured by you on matters of democracy.”

When Netanyahu Quoted Roosevelt

By Nadav Eyal

- **Netanyahu’s Facebook account recommended watching a video recording of a conversation he held with Dr. Micha Goodman to discuss his new book [an autobiography]. Netanyahu is a fascinating conversationalist—and I speak from experience—and that is why I sat down to watch the conversation, which ran on for roughly an hour. The discussion itself was fairly predictable. Goodman flattered Netanyahu and praised sections of his book. In response, the prime minister-elect chose to give lengthy answers that were well-articulated summaries of chapters and/or ideas from his book. The audience applauded enthusiastically. But somewhere around the 12th minute, my jaw dropped. In other words, I heard Netanyahu say something and then rewound to listen again, again, and yet again.**
- **Netanyahu was talking about his father’s Zionist endeavors following Zabotinsky’s death in the United States. He said that Benzion Netanyahu realized that it was imperative to change the position that had been taken by President Roosevelt, “who took a fierce anti-Zionist stance,” as Netanyahu described it. Then Netanyahu said: “It’s a bit more complex, a lot more complex, and I have to say it here. Because when he (Roosevelt—N.E.) was informed about what was happening in the death camps, in Auschwitz, and told him to allocate pilots to bomb the camps, he said, ‘Over my dead body,’ and ‘Not one American airman.’” At that point, Netanyahu addressed someone who was sitting in the first row of the audience—possibly Ron Dermer or some other close adviser—and said, ‘That’s the exact quote. Do you know it?’ He then repeated the quote, “Not one American airman.” The prime minister-elect then added that “Roosevelt was a great leader, and he gets the credit for defeating the Nazis. That can’t be taken away from him, but I want to intensify [sic] the problem facing my father” All of the above was the set-up for the punchline.**
- **What did Benzion Netanyahu do, according to his son, to “undermine” Roosevelt’s “anti-Zionist” policies? “He went to the Republicans!” I’ve read quite extensively on the allies’ failure to bomb the extermination camps, which is a grim and complex matter. There is no doubt that the Zionist Movement asked for that to be done in July 1944; there is no doubt that the American bureaucracy in the War Office did not accede, citing the war’s needs. Those facts are not in dispute. But never ever have I read that President Roosevelt addressed the issue, that it was put before him, that there is any evidence whatsoever that he knew about that request. I certainly never knew that the president of the United States, the man who is considered to be the most lionized figure in the Democratic Party to this day, responded to an explicit request to allocate pilots to bomb Auschwitz with the words, “Over my dead body” and “Not one American airman!” Actually, I’ve never heard that anyone responded that way. Churchill, for example, demanded that the RAF bomb the camps (they didn’t, despite his orders). After all, had the American president uttered those words, we would have learned about that in high school in preparation for the matriculation exams.**

- I'm neither a historian nor the son of a historian. I revisited the research of Professor Yehuda Bauer, one of the greatest contemporary Holocaust scholars, who wrote about the issue [of the allies' stance]. There was no mention of that. I wrote to Bauer. He replied that to the best of his knowledge, the issue had never come before Roosevelt. I reached out to several renowned experts who have written about the subject. The first was Dr. Michael Berenbaum, who was among the founders of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and presently is a professor of Jewish studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He wrote 18 books, most of which were about the Holocaust, including *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*. Berenbaum phoned me back five minutes after I wrote to him. He didn't mince words. There is no evidence that the issue of bombing Auschwitz ever crossed Roosevelt's desk, he said to me. Berenbaum said that the highest-ranking American official to address the issue at the time was the deputy war secretary.
- I asked him about the "over my dead body" quote. He replied, saying: The entire world has reviewed the historical documents. Had that ever happened (either a decision of that kind by Roosevelt or the attributed statements), we would have seen that by now... let me put it this way: I am willing to bet everything I have that Netanyahu can't produce a source for those quotes," said Berenbaum. Berenbaum is just one person. I reached out to Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman, two Jews who wrote the book about Roosevelt and his attitude towards the Jewish community (*FDR and the Jews*). Professor Breitman studied the Holocaust for decades and for two decades was the editor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's academic journal. He swiftly responded by email. His answer was written in a courteous, American style. He wrote: Allan Lichtman and I found no evidence that the proposal to bomb Auschwitz-Birkenau ever reached President Roosevelt. Nor did we find any hearsay evidence of that kind.
- The in-depth study of the War Refugee Board that was done by Rebecca Erbelding in 2018 does not contain any conversation with Roosevelt that mentions the above-cited quotes or any involvement by President Roosevelt in the decision not to bomb. The permanent exhibit at the Holocaust Museum in Washington does not describe any conversation of that kind, and neither does the current exhibit that deals with the Americans and the Holocaust. Simply put, replied Professor Breitman, the quote doesn't exist. Had Roosevelt said something like that, we would have known, and it would have been a front-page headline in the *New York Times*, Berenbaum said to me.
- It simply doesn't exist... we see time and again how Netanyahu takes things like that and politicizes them in the crudest way possible. That was done when he decided that the mufti was the inspiration for the Nazi decision to begin the extermination, said Berenbaum. I asked Netanyahu's office four days ago for a source or a citation. Maybe, I thought to myself; there's a secret protocol that Netanyahu has come across that might change the scholarship about World War II and Roosevelt's legacy. No response has yet been received from Netanyahu's office. The other possibility, obviously, is that the prime minister-elect presented at a public event quotes and ascribed them to one of the most important figures in American history—quotes that incriminate him as being crudely and astonishingly indifferent about the option of preventing the extermination in Europe.

- **Quotes that historians from the field say do not exist. I don't want to write [that he] "invented" [them], but his office has refused thus far to provide a source for them. It is hardly a trifling matter to ascribe quotes of that kind to a great president such as Roosevelt. I'm not sure that that is a good way for Netanyahu to restart his relations with the Democratic Party.**