



### **Netanyahu and Gantz discuss unity government**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz discussed the possibility of setting up an emergency government to tackle the coronavirus, taking a rare step toward a much-touted unity coalition.

Gantz is set to partner Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a unity government, serving initially as foreign minister but then taking over from Netanyahu as prime minister in September 2021, according to a reported deal taking shape amid immense political drama in Israel.

Gantz's decision to join forces with Netanyahu immediately led to the collapse of Blue and White, with the party's No. 2 Yair Lapid rejecting the move and apparently heading into opposition with others from his Yesh Atid component of Blue and White.

Yesh Atid and Moshe Ya'alon's Telem faction both filed a formal request to break away from Blue and White, leaving only Gantz's Israel Resilience Party to join forces with Netanyahu's Likud. Lapid had reportedly told Gantz he preferred that Israel go to fourth elections rather than see Blue and White partner Netanyahu in power.

Gantz was tasked on March 16 with forming a government after 61 lawmakers backed him as prime minister, and given 28 days to do so.

Despite having the backing of 61 MKs as prime minister, Gantz is stuck with no straightforward path to a government, with members of his party objecting to cooperating with the Arab-led Joint List, even in a minority government.

The coalition is likely to constitute 78-79 MKs — Likud, Gantz's Israel Resilience, Labor, Yamina, Shas and United Torah Judaism (some reports indicated that Labor's inclusion was not certain). That would leave Lapid's Yesh Atid, Ya'alon's Telem, Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu, Meretz and the mainly Arab Joint List in opposition. However, various other fluctuations are deemed possible, with Yoaz Hendel and Zvi Hauser from Telem, for instance, said to be weighing joining the coalition.

Gantz offered himself as the sole candidate for the Knesset speaker's job — and was elected to the post on Thursday afternoon — which he is set to hold only for a brief period while the terms of the unity coalition are finalized. He will then serve as foreign minister for the first 18 months of the emergency unity government, under the terms of the reported deal, before succeeding Netanyahu as prime minister.

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### **Israel's health minister has virus, top officials to isolate**

The new coronavirus is forcing more top Israeli officials into isolation after the country's health minister, who has had frequent contact with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, tested positive.

Israeli Health Minister Yaakov Litzman and his wife, who also contracted the virus, are in isolation, feel well and are being treated, the ministry statement said.

Shortly after the announcement, the prime minister's office said Netanyahu returned to self-quarantine because of his contact with Litzman. Netanyahu had previously been in isolation after a top aide tested positive for the virus.

Netanyahu has tested negative.

Israel, which has seen over 6,200 confirmed cases and 29 deaths from the virus, has entered a state of near-lockdown in recent weeks. Litzman is part of the country's large ultra-Orthodox community, which has been particularly affected by the pandemic and early on dismissed many of the government's restrictions on movement.



## Number of new coronavirus cases in Haredi cities skyrockets

The latest statistics reveal the large percentage of new coronavirus cases in Israel in recent days have been recorded in Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, two high-profile ultra-Orthodox cities.

According to the latest data, while in most Israeli cities the number of coronavirus patients over the past 24 hours have increased by less than 15 cases, in Bnei Brak - a center of Haredi Judaism - the number of infected is up by 159 with a total count of 730 diagnoses.

In Jerusalem, meanwhile, the number of new coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours has risen by 131, bringing the total number of infected in the city to 781.

The Haredi community has recently come under scrutiny for failing to comply with the health officials' guidelines meant to prevent the spread of the virus. On Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, evening some 400 people participated in a funeral proceeding in Bnei Brak, which police forces failed to stop.

Netanyahu on Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, ordered ramped-up enforcement in the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak, which has the second-largest number of cases in the nation, instructing police to establish a cordon around the city limits to examine those entering and leaving

## As corona crisis grows, Israelis find a way to help out

Like people in many other countries, Israelis are getting used to a new reality courtesy of COVID-19. People are quarantining themselves at home, as schools, restaurants, culture institutions and businesses have been shuttered.

These challenging times offer many opportunities for kind deeds. Whether making sure hard-working doctors get a hot meal, reaching out to people stuck in quarantine, volunteering to test blood samples or performing living-room concerts – Israelis are coming to one another's aid.

Now that almost everyone is confined to home, social media is a main venue for doing good. One example is the Facebook group Quarantine Aid – Israel, which numbers more than 1,000 members.

"The group is aimed at people who are in quarantine, people in at-risk groups (elderly and immune-compromised), and people who are not in isolation. The idea was to connect those two groups of people, with those not in quarantine assisting those who are,"



In the picture: "Latet" organization - providing packages including food, personal hygiene products and entertainment items directly to the homes of the elderly, with the help of volunteers.



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## Chocolate Mousse for Passover

### Ingredients:

- 6 Eggs
- Half butter stick
- 3 1/2 Dark Chocolate bars
- 1/2 cup milk/water (for Pareve)

### How to make it:

- Melt butter + chocolate + milk and let it cool down
- Separate the yolk from the egg white
- Whisk the egg white in a mixer and slowly add the yolks
- Fold the chocolate mix into the egg mix
- Put in the freezer

**The *Shlichim* in the Greater Washington Area opened a WhatsApp group where we will share articles, news, and government updates from Israel. If you are interested in joining the group, please email Yael.**



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