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Die Themen dieser Ausgabe

1. Schwere Eskalation an mehreren Fronten	1
2. Lapid mit Regierungsbildung beauftragt	3
3. Massenangriff auf dem Berg Meron	6
4. Medienquerschnitt	8

1. Schwere Eskalation an mehreren Fronten

Die jüngste Eskalation im Nahen Osten spielt sich an mehreren Fronten ab. In Jerusalem kämpfen Palästinenser_innen gegen die Evakuierung palästinensischer Familien aus den von ihnen bewohnten Häusern im Stadtbezirk Sheikh Jarrah, gegen Freiheitseinschränkungen und gegen die sozialen Ungleichheiten. In einer Reihe von Ortschaften in Israel, vor allem in gemischt jüdisch-arabischen Städten eskalierten die Spannungen zwischen den zwei Bevölkerungsgruppen und es kam zu massiven gewalttätigen Ausschreitungen von jüdischen und arabischen Bürger_innen, bei denen schwerer Sachschaden entstand, eine große Anzahl von Menschen verletzt und ein jüdischer Bürger getötet wurde. Im Gazastreifen heizt die islamistische Führung der Hamas die Gewalt an und beschießt seit über einer Woche Israel mit Raketen, was vom israelischen Militär mit massiven Luftangriffen und Panzergeschossen auf den Gazastreifen entgegnet wird. In der arabischen Gesellschaft in Israel macht sich der Unmut Luft über diskriminierende Gesetze wie das Nationalstaatsgesetz, die Schlechterstellung der arabischen Bürger_innen sowie die in der arabischen Gesellschaft zu beängstigenden Ausmaßen angestiegene Gewalt und Kriminalität, der die Polizei nichts entgegenzusetzen hat. Die Hamas ist frustriert über das Aussetzen der geplanten Parlamentswahlen, bei denen sie gute Chancen gehabt hätte, als stärkste politische Macht abzuschneiden. Sie nutzte die Unruhen in Jerusalem als Vorwand für

den massiven Raketenbeschuss, der diesmal nicht nur Israels Süden trifft, sondern auch Jerusalem und Tel Aviv. Die meisten Geschosse können mithilfe des Raketenabwehrsystems Eisenkuppel abgefangen werden, dennoch kommt es immer wieder zu Verletzten und auch zu Toten. Noch fataler ist der Schlagabtausch für den Gazastreifen. Innerhalb Israels wirft die blinde Gewalt von jüdischen und arabischen Fanatiker_innen die brüchige Koexistenz der beiden nationalen Bevölkerungsgruppen um Jahrzehnte zurück.

Jerusalem is a volatile cocktail of poor decisions

It is fairly simple to pinpoint the causes of the current outbreak of violence in Jerusalem, which has seen hundreds of Palestinians and dozens of police officers wounded in clashes. On the Palestinian side, the religious unrest that often occurs during the holy month of Ramadan tends to reach a peak towards the end of the weeks-long fast. In addition, the decision by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to indefinitely postpone parliamentary elections - claiming Israel would not facilitate East Jerusalem voting - has inflamed the Hamas terror group that rules Gaza and was on track to make significant gains. (...) The 85-year-old Abbas is the last relic of the Fatah leadership to hold a position of power. (...) his continued reign is criticized by many of his constituents and he has not made any progress towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Israel for its part, added to the already volatile situa-

tion with the decision to barricade off the plaza at the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem - causing Palestinian youths to clash with police. Added to the mix is the possible eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, as settlers claim the land as their own. (...) The legal dispute in the East Jerusalem neighborhood must be resolved on a governmental level. (...)

Nahum Barnea, YED, 09.05.21

How Israel invented its exclusive claim over Jerusalem

As a Palestinian who was born in Israel, I've come to understand that while violence is all too real, its roots, or the 'historical' motives offered, are often invented. The brutal reality of Israel's violence against Palestinians in Jerusalem should not obscure the fact that the centrality of Jerusalem in the Israeli national imagination, let alone the Palestinian imagination, is a relatively recent invention. The sharp irony is that the early Zionists never actually regarded Jerusalem as integral to their national enterprise, but as a spiritual center. Nowhere was Zionist apathy towards Jerusalem more manifest than in the writings of Theodore Herzl, father of political Zionism. (...) "When I remember thee in days to come, O Jerusalem, it will not be with pleasure," he wrote, upon his only visit to Palestine in 1898. (...) In "Altneuland," he wrote that Jerusalem belonged to all nations as a multicultural and spiritual center. He even proposed to turn the Old City into a multinational museum. (...) Tel Aviv became the de facto capital of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. It was in Jaffa, not Jerusalem, where the Zionist Commission built its first offices, where the Zionist leadership convened, and where many Zionist leaders, such as Ahad Haam, preferred to live. As for Palestinians, it was also in Jaffa, not Jerusalem, where their national aspirations were set, it being Palestine's beating urban heart and vibrant economic and cultural center. Neither party wanted Jerusalem (...). The history of the early Zionist movement in Palestine is nearly forgotten today, but its lesson is still alive: Jerusalem "belonged to all of its nations and creeds."

Seraj Assi, HAA, 10.05.21

It's time to stand with Israel against Hamas rockets

No country can tolerate rocket fire on its territory, especially its capital, and Israel had no choice but to respond swiftly and strongly to the Hamas barrage

at the end of Jerusalem Day. But the world does have a choice: this is the time to stand with Israel against Palestinian terrorism. (...) What is required now is for the government to set clear goals, conduct a smart military operation, stop the rocket attacks, and restore security. At the same time, a dialogue must be conducted via international mediators – the UN and US, Egypt and Qatar – to negotiate a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. (...) Israel must now engage in a public relations campaign to present its case effectively to the world. (...) In addition, the Palestinian Authority, regional neighbor Jordan, and Arab citizens of Israel (...) shouldn't be spreading lies that Israel, without provocation, threatened Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount. (...) To help Israel find a way to end this and restore peace and security, world leaders need to convey clearly to Hamas that terrorism is not acceptable under any circumstances. (...) Firing rockets into civilian areas cannot be rewarded. (...)

Editorial, JPO, 11.05.21

A deterring blow is needed

The outrage in Israel over the deaths and the continuous, intense firing of rockets on the center of the country prompts a discussion about the option of military force. There is no doubt that the IDF has the upper hand in achieving this goal (...) when widespread regional flare-ups around the Iranian nuclear crisis can erupt at any time, there are other considerations, no less legitimate, that require prudent and calculated conduct. (...) an extensive ground operation to overthrow Hamas could bring the IDF into a state of continuous rule over a distinctly hostile population, and all that it entails. This is not the time to divert the gaze and center of gravity of Israel's capabilities from the threat on the northern front, and from the need to leave all options open against Iran and its metastases. (...) The IDF blows should be intense and aimed at causing severe damage to the intermediate level of command, infrastructure and weapons. (...) To the same extent, it must be ensured that Hamas does not have the power to channel the dangerous attitudes on the Arab street in Israel for its own political needs.

Eran Lerman, IHY, 12.05.21

Israel's diminished deterrence and political turmoil are recipe for disaster

Hamas has been "surprising" Israel again and again (...) which should worry everyone. The massive salvos of rocket at Tel Aviv (...) are a direct continuation of the terror group's rocket strikes on the

Jerusalem (...). These attacks show that Israel's deterrence against Gaza has become virtually non-existent, an issue that demands immediate attention and that could give Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah ideas. These ideas would be far more deadly than anything Israel has witnessed so far from Hamas. (...) Israel had underestimated Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's capabilities, which they have been building since the end of the 2014 Gaza War. Even more worrying was the precision of the rockets. When these types of missiles were launched in the past, sometimes reaching as far as Hadera, they were vastly inaccurate - with most either landing in the sea or exploding mid-air. The rockets fired Tuesday were not only heavily armed, but accurate to a degree Israel had never imagined. (...) Hamas and Islamic Jihad scored a serious victory in the game of psychological warfare against Israel. (...) One can only hope that Israel will now adopt a more practical and strategic plan for the Palestinian issue in general and Gaza in particular. (...) Another surprise that caught Israel unawares was the rioting in the Arab sector. These protests were not manned by a few dozen hotheads, but by a violent and criminal mass, while those in power – the same ones that did nothing to put out the fires at al-Aqsa – again did not so much as wave a finger. (...) we must ask ourselves: what is the common thread for all these uncomfortable surprises we have witnessed over the past few days? The answer is twofold: Continually growing religious animosity between Muslims and Jews and Israel's lack of proper governance. (...)

Ron Ben-Yishai, YED, 12.05.21

The objective: Make Hamas regret its actions

(...) The heavy barrages launched last night towards Tel Aviv (...) are forcing Israel to intensify its activities, and inevitably also herald an escalation whose ending is unclear.

(...) The success of Hamas (...) of putting millions of residents in shelters and causing anxiety (...) strengthened Hamas' position. (...) Israel will need to press harder on Gaza. (...) the IDF must hit Hamas hard in order to once again differentiate between Jerusalem and Gaza, and in order to repair the significant damage to its deterrence capabilities in recent weeks, while preventing escalation in Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem, and the preservation of international legitimacy for activity. (...) Hamas became the sole leader in the Palestinian arena (Abu Mazen has completely vanished), taking ownership of Jerusalem as well, and worst of all - influ-

encing Israeli Arabs. This is a dangerous trend that needs to be halted immediately. (...) The main purpose of the operation, as mentioned, is to distinguish between Gaza and Jerusalem. To deprive Hamas of owning what is happening in the city, and to prevent the residents of the Gaza envelope from becoming hostages of every incident in Jerusalem. It is amazing, therefore, that of all the names in the world, the IDF chose to give the operation the very name that binds Gaza and Jerusalem together – Guardian of the Walls.

Yoav Limor, IHY, 12.05.21

2. Lapid mit Regierungsbildung beauftragt

Nach dem gescheiterten Versuch einer Regierungsbildung in Israel unter Ministerpräsident Benjamin Netanyahu beauftragte Staatspräsident Reuven Rivlin den Chef der liberalen Zukunftspartei (Yesh Atid) Yair Lapid mit der Regierungsbildung. Der ehemalige Finanzminister habe die Unterstützung von 56 der 120 Parlamentsmitglieder, erklärte Rivlin, der sich nicht allzu optimistisch gab. Es gäbe noch „viele Schwierigkeiten“. Lapid versprach, alles dafür zu tun, rasch eine Einheitsregierung zu bilden. Um eine Mehrheit von 61 Abgeordneten zu erreichen, müsste er jedoch eine Reihe von Parteien und Listen hinter sich vereinen, die im politischen Spektrum weit auseinander liegen. Die jüngsten gewaltvollen Unruhen und in der Folge der Ausstieg von Naftali Bennett, Chef der recht nationalen Partei Yamina, aus den Koalitionsverhandlungen, machen dem 57-Jährigen, der nach einer Karriere als Fernsehmoderator in die Politik eingestiegen war, die Aufgabe nicht leichter. Sollte es Lapid nicht gelingen, eine regierungsfähige Koalition zu bilden, müssten Israels Bürger_innen ein fünftes Mal wählen.

It's Yair Lapid's turn

(...) Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid believes that he is capable of putting together a coalition. At a party caucus meeting (...) he said, "Two days hence we can swear in a new government. It won't be perfect, but it will be a government that will take responsibility and deal with running the country." Currently, 45 Knesset members support Lapid as prime minister. That number does not include Bennett and his Yamina colleagues, who still have to decide whether they are ready for a change, and to say goodbye to Netanyahu. Even if his government is not yet fully baked, and even if he needs more than two days to have it sworn in, Lapid is now the one with the best chance to succeed in this mission. (...)

Out of tricks, Netanyahu again denied a government — because of his own voters

At 10 minutes before midnight on Tuesday night, Benjamin Netanyahu informed President Reuven Rivlin yet again that he had failed to form a government. (...) a political survivor, a gifted leader, and a ruthlessly dishonest campaigner who had broken every norm in his pursuit of a victory that continued to elude him. His failure in the March race (...) is in many ways the most painful, if only because it came in the immediate aftermath of some of his most spectacular successes as prime minister, including four peace agreements with the Arab world and a trailblazing vaccination campaign. It came, too, despite a steep drop in Arab turnout and last year's shattering of the center-left Blue and White coalition. (...) Likud voters stayed home. (...) In so-called "Likud cities" where the party is dominant – Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beersheba, Hadera, Holon and Netanya – turnout fell 4 points. And in settlements (...), it dropped 2.5 points. (...) If Lapid and Bennett manage to cobble together their broad-based unity coalition, Netanyahu will have almost limitless chances to try to destabilize it from the opposition. In a coalition stretching from deep-right Yamina to progressive Meretz, there's hardly a policy issue that won't spark internal opposition from one party or another. If Lapid and Bennett fail to build that coalition, Netanyahu will have another chance by default. (...) Netanyahu failed to win the first three elections because he faced a unified center-left and a mobilized Arab electorate. He failed to win the fourth one because his own voters no longer felt a need to turn out for him. Netanyahu survived the past two years of political deadlock through the simple expedient of forcing a new election each time an opponent appeared set to take the premiership away from him. (...) A fifth election may settle things, yes. Or failing that, a sixth or a seventh. Netanyahu can no longer be sure it will settle things in his favor.

Haviv Rettig Gur, TOI, 05.05.21

Can Yair Lapid pull a rabbit out of a hat?

(...) the tenacious former news anchor and Tel Aviv memorial day master of ceremonies has a lot going for him at the moment. (...) he managed to receive the recommendations of the right-wing New Hope and Yisrael Beytenu, the centrist Blue and White, the left-wing Labor and Meretz, as well as five of the six members of the (Arab) Joint List, bringing his total recommendations to 56; four more than Prime

Minister Netanyahu. He's demonstrated trust and humility when courting Yamina party leader Naftali Bennett. As the leader of the second-largest party in the Knesset, Lapid has every right to serve first as Prime Minister in the coalition he assembles. But he has been vocal in his willingness to forgo the Prime Minister's chair and let Bennett serve first in a rotation agreement if it will mean averting fifth elections and providing Israelis with the hope that 4-5 years of stable governance is possible. He's demanding a 'thin' government of 18 ministers, not the ridiculously overblown 36 that are serving in the current Netanyahu-Gantz government. (...) He's saying all of the right things in his push for change. He describes the government he's attempting to form as a 'national unity government of right, center, and left-wing parties.' It will strive to represent and work for all sectors of Israeli society. There will be no 'radical agenda,' just the formation of a government that represents a wide range of Israeli views, passes a national budget, and ends the endless cycle of elections. (...) His proponents will say that they've already worked it all out. (...) The critics will point to the stark differences in views between the (...) seven different political parties that will need to cooperate in order to make the end of the Netanyahu era a reality (...).

Freeman Poritz, TOI, 06.05.21

Dawn of a new and better era for Israel

For the past six years (...) our country has been forced to go through four indecisive elections, with anyone even daring to voice a modicum of criticism against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu being branded a "leftist" at best and a "traitor" at worst. It is time for a unified and calming leadership, focused on what really matters – the wellbeing of Israel's citizens. This change/unity/emergency government is not a left-wing one, as Netanyahu likes to portray it again and again. Granted, neither is it a right-wing government (...) let us call this coalition by its real name – a coalition of unity. It is not the first in Israel history, but the need for such an arrangement has never been greater. (...) It is really a shame that Naftali Bennett thought he could have his cake and eat it when he tried to walk the tight rope between Netanyahu and the so-called "change bloc." While trying to keep his right-wing voter base and gain the most he could from both sides, he ran the risk of taking himself and his fellow party members down. This became abundantly clear to Bennett when reports started flowing of Netanyahu's efforts to get Yamina lawmakers to go rogue and join him. If Ben-

nett does not take a proactive stance to fend off any Netanyahu trickery, the former defense minister will find himself without the proposed first go at the premiership, reportedly part of his agreement with Lapid. I hope that Yamina does not fall for Netanyahu's lies. I truly believe this the end of an era - and the start of a new and better one for Israel.
Limor Livnat, YED, 07.05.21

Let the 'healing' coalition's bubble burst

(...) Yamina leader Naftali Bennett wrote a new Facebook post on the status of the negotiations, saying that the unbridgeable ideological differences between his would-be government's factions would not stop it from being formed. (...) The ongoing escalation in Jerusalem and the fumes of conflict that are filling the air can provide the necessary reasoning for demanding an explanation for his moves. If he plans to form a government of change, then he is duty-bound to tell us what he would be doing differently. (...) Mr. Bennett, what are your views on the issues at hand, as the presumptive prime minister? (...) With all due respect to helping heal society, there is a reality out there. And the way things stand now, none of our adversaries seems poised to take a year of sabbatical to allow Lapid and Bennett some time to heal our society. Not Syria, not Iran, not Hezbollah, not Hamas, and no other group currently waging aggression toward us. (...) it's also the right thing to do when it comes to Bennett's would-be coalition partners. Doesn't Meretz need to know how the government will deal with the protests in Jerusalem? Doesn't Labor deserve to know what his views are on the Iran nuclear deal? And doesn't Blue and White leader Benny Gantz, who has vowed to protect the courts, deserve to know what his policies on judicial reforms are? But such explanations are unlikely to be shared with the public anytime soon, especially not from Bennett, because as soon as someone in the "coalition of change" will say something, the bubble will burst. That's why they are all observing radio silence now, making sure to disguise their views and muddle their opinions on key matters. Such a bizarre approach is irresponsible. (...) It's best if this bubble bursts now before a government is formed. (...)

Eithan Orkibi, IHY, 09.05.21

Deserting anti-Netanyahu coalition talks, Bennett gave in to pressure

(...) The violence in mixed Jewish-Arab cities smashed the illusion that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sold the public, that the Palestinians in

Israel had renounced their feelings and aspirations and are now only interested in their standard of living. It has once again transpired that the perception of discrimination and deprivation, alongside offenses to their religious sensibilities and the ongoing occupation are continuing to boil under the relative calm prevailing here in recent years(...). Israel needs reconciliation and a process of mending the discrimination and the oppression of the Arab minority. Netanyahu (...) has fostered hatred between the people (...). The current outburst is registered in his name and should serve as an alarm signaling the urgent need to terminate his rule. It's also a signal that Jewish and Arab leaders need to cooperate in creating a more just and egalitarian society. This mission should have been led by Yair Lapid, who holds the mandate to form a government; Naftali Bennett, his partner to the idea of a government of change; and Mansour Abbas, who said he would support such a government. But amid the pressure from the harsh state of current events, Bennett stated (...) that a government of change was no longer on the agenda. Instead of standing in the breach during an emergency, he folded and paved the way for the worst option of all: The continued reign of the person responsible for the horrible state our country is in.

Editorial, HAA, 14.05.21

Bennett should reconsider joining unity coalition, Israel needs change

Yamina leader Naftali Bennett should reconsider his decision to back down from the idea of a unity coalition. (...) Israel witnessed an unprecedented crisis: during an operation in Gaza, in which some 70% of the country's citizens fell under the threat of rockets and needed to stay close to bomb shelters, militias took over certain areas, especially mixed Jewish-Arab cities, and in these areas, the rule of law doesn't apply. In most cases, Arab rioters who stockpiled weapons for years are now using them to terrorize Jewish citizens. In other cases, Jewish vigilantes, who came from all over the country, ostensibly to replace the police in protecting fellow Jews, are using their weapons according to their private judgment. (...) We must put an end to this sickening phenomenon, and the only solution is unity through change. (...) We need to stop applauding politicians who thrive on division and mudslinging and show them that those tactics do not work. The only solution is to have all of our representatives, from far-right to far-left – including the Arab parties – sit together around the same table, which

will be labeled the “restart coalition.” (...) Israel is in desperate need of change.
Editorial, JPO, 15.05.21

3. Massenunglück auf dem Berg Meron

45 Tote ist die schreckliche Bilanz des Unglücks auf dem Berg Meron, wo sich rund 100.000 ultraorthodoxe Pilger anlässlich des jüdischen Feiertags Lag BaOmer zusammenfanden. Die Menschen gerieten aufgrund des großen Gedränges in Panik. Seit Jahren hatte es wiederholt Warnungen vor der Massenveranstaltung an dem Wallfahrtsort im Norden Israels gegeben. Kritiker_innen machen Polizei und Regierung für das Unglück verantwortlich. Über die Hintergründe soll nun eine Untersuchungskommission unter der Leitung des Staatskontrolleurs Klarheit schaffen. Der israelische Staatskontrolleur ist vergleichbar mit dem deutschen Bundesrechnungshof. Außerdem wurden Rufe nach einer unabhängigen Untersuchung laut.

A commission of inquiry into the Mount Meron tragedy is needed

After each multiple-victim civilian disaster in Israel in recent decades, the identity of the people responsible could clearly be noted. The courts did so, convicting those responsible (...). There are also culpable parties in the disaster (...) in which 45 people were crushed to death during the Lag Ba’omer festivities on Mount Meron. In this catastrophe, the list of responsible parties is particularly long, because even though this site attracts over 1.5 million visitors a year, a third of them at Lag Ba’omer, it’s managed by religious nonprofit groups that don’t recognize the state’s right to help manage the site. (...) As early as 13 years ago, the comptroller warned that the site is a safety hazard unsuitable for mass events. Meanwhile, a number of ultra-Orthodox officials have turned to the media, asking for warnings to be issued. But no one was listening. In 2011, it seemed the state realized that it must take over management of the site, and in 2013, the finance minister announced his intention to expropriate the area around the tomb. But in 2020, a compromise was reached at the High Court of Justice, with the state suspending its plan for at least three years. If the authorities including those responsible for public order had heeded the warnings and acted responsibly, the Lag Ba’omer events wouldn’t have been held in their current format. Since these events were held year after year, despite the reports and warnings, a thorough investigation is required. (...) There must be

an investigation into whether political pressure thwarted thorough procedures, with the event being held despite clear safety hazards. Only when a complete picture emerges on those responsible for the ongoing failure will it be possible to prevent the next disaster. Until then, mass events at the site must be suspended.

Editorial, HAA, 01.05.21

Meron tragedy reflects relationship between Israel and the ultra-Orthodox

(...) For many years, warnings were sounded about the dangers of Lag Ba’omer at Meron, the haphazard, makeshift infrastructure and the enormous number of people who flock to the site, far exceeding its capacity. (...) Even though Meron remained a potential death trap every Lag Ba’omer, action to limit the number of pilgrims allowed at the site was never taken (...). The prevailing perspective among haredi politicians, politicians, media and even the haredi public is that any restriction on the community’s way of life is some form of discrimination or attempt to dictate how the haredim live their lives (...). Crucially, the sector’s political heft and its compact with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has given it an outsized ability to get its way, whether over the Western Wall, enlistment to the IDF, coronavirus policy or Meron. (...) The demands of the haredi community, whether from the leadership or the general public, are the preeminent concern, and the politicians will insist that these demands are met on pain of political loss. The tragedy of the catastrophe that befell 45 people (...) should lead to a complete overhaul of everything to do with the mass pilgrimage and celebration at the site in the years to come. But it should also serve more broadly as a catalyst for change to the way the state relates to its haredi minority.

Jeremy Sharon, JPO, 02.05.21

Some disasters are too terrible for words

Some disasters cannot be described in words. (...) Tears blur our vision. Pain cruelly takes over. It is precisely at this time that we must embark on an important task. While the focus has been on the dead and the wounded, there are far more invisible victims that have yet to receive mention - victims who are now suffering from anxiety and panic attacks. (...) Before investigative committees are launched and the blame game begins, we must join hands to help these young people and adults. (...) Let us not forget about collective trauma. The images and voices coming from the scene of the tragedy

prevent any of us from escaping what transpired there. (...) This tragedy has befallen us at the end of a complicated year, at a time when the Israeli public is divided, and we are incapable of coming together with our fellow man. And just like every other event involving too many officials, the temptation is to cast blame and hunt for those at blame. Brothers and Sisters, now is not the time. This tragedy can and should serve as a wake-up call. In one small moment, the imaginary sectoral partitions come tumbling down, the tragic fate uniting us all. (...) Let us reach out to each other in love. (...)

Yossi Erblich, IHY, 02.05.21

How we must investigate Meron

(...) This was the country's worst-ever civilian disaster. It is particularly tragic for many reasons – the numbers of dead and wounded; the horrific nature of their deaths, many of asphyxiation in the stampede at the site, and the sudden switch from a joyous celebration to a scene of death and suffering. Above all, the tragedy is that this could have been prevented. (...) Warnings existed, in print, for more than a decade. (...) Every year, people said that it was a miracle that the event passed safely. This year there was no miracle. (...) Part of the problem is that the event and site falls under the jurisdiction of seven ministries. This, surely, needs to be streamlined. (...) A state commission of inquiry – or a parliamentary committee of inquiry – is needed not to find who is to blame for the disaster but to establish exactly what happened, why and how, in order to prevent the recurrence of a similar catastrophe. (...) Learning from the disaster is essential. Nothing can bring back those who died but the state does have to do everything to make sure (...) that these senseless tragedies don't happen again. (...)

Editorial, JPO, 02.05.21

God is responsible for the Mount Meron disaster

The disaster on Mount Meron is a theological mishap, but the public call to punish those responsible for the failure does not include God, for some reason. The demand is directed at the human ministerial echelon – they want the head of Public Security Minister Amir Ohana. But the supreme responsibility is God's, since it is God who decides what happens in the world in general, and on Mount Meron in particular. (...) Haredi celebrants (...) placed their trust in Him. That is why they have no need for the authorities to enforce safety regulations. God is safeguarding them. (...) There is no need for a commission of inquiry. If Ohana is also responsible, all he

did was to carry out God's plan. (...) The pilgrims to the tomb of Rashbi – Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai – on Lag Ba'omer do so out of a fervent belief that participation in the hillula is a guarantee of good things in their lives. (...) God wants them there. He awaits their arrival, rewarding them for their bonfires, their dancing and their prayers. Just as God is responsible for the good things that happen to pilgrims to Mount Meron on Lag Ba'omer, he is also responsible for their calamity. His responsibility must be given an honorable and important place in the media discussion of the disaster. Who says that there was a failure here? Failures don't happen to God. (...) There were no mistakes there. God doesn't make mistakes. (...) Therefore there is no point in convening a government commission of inquiry without inviting experts on God, who will interpret the event from a theological perspective. (...) What does the bereaved father care what the commission will say? God took his son. The question is "why." (...) Leave Ohana, Interior Minister Arye Dery and the national police commissioner alone. They are small fry. The time has come to speak to the one who is really responsible.

Rogel Alpher, HAA, 03.05.21

Meron disaster probe can't be left to a toothless watchdog

(...) a debate took place in Knesset about who will run the investigation into the Meron disaster. Among the various possibilities is a state commission of inquiry in which everyone (...) will be exposed to investigation, a government inquiry and the state comptroller. (...) Engelman announced that he has decided to investigate the stampede on Mount Meron. Engelman is a toothless watchdog, a clear Netanyahu appointee, who ensured that the role would not be manned by a powerful and authoritative Supreme Court judge as was in years prior. Netanyahu, who saw the state comptroller's office as just another hurdle in his fight to weaken the country's law and audit institutions, cut a deal with Arab lawmakers to make sure Engelman will be appointed. For years, the state comptroller position was manned by those who would give no quarter to the political echelon. Prime ministers, ministers, corrupt politicians, left-wingers, right-wingers, opposition and coalition. All feared the biting and uncensored reports of past state watchdogs. (...) It goes without saying, the Meron disaster deserves to be investigated by an institution or audit body that will not go easy on anyone, politicians included.

Yuval Karni, YED, 04.05.21

Israel on the edge

The loss of life at Meron brings home the wider dangers Israel faces in the absence of a functioning government. The disaster at Meron demonstrated the extreme irresponsibility of the participants, but also the equally extreme irresponsibility of the authorities. This is just another example of the growing dangers involved in the fact that Israel has not had a normally-functioning government for the last two years. (...) Israel's so-called "leaders" continue to play their silly games, toying with the future of the country. I put the word "leaders" in quotes for obvious reasons. The late Rabbi Sacks said that a good leader creates followers; a great leader creates leaders. The present crop does neither. (...) Little is expected and little is delivered. Luckily, the IDF and the intelligence services have continued to operate reasonably well, and do their jobs, even if they can't find competent authorities to authorize their activities. But that in itself is dangerous; dangerous to democracy. All the instruments of government should be answerable to the popularly-elected authorities or democracy is at best a façade and at worst a charade.

Dr. Norman Bailey, GLO, 04.05.21

Who is to blame?

(...) the one group that is most to blame is, unfortunately, the victims themselves. Any glance at the video clips of the masses walking through narrow passageways will clearly illustrate how they demonstrated complete lack of decency and caring. They were pushing and shoving in complete disregard of who was next to them or in front of or in back of them. Their motive was "Me" and "I". I need to get to my destination no matter the obstacles. They showed no semblance of civility or courteousness. This is, unfortunately, how most of them act all the time. They act for themselves but not their fellow man. (...) Ironically, Lag Baomer celebrates, according to tradition, the end of a plague that killed 24,000 students of the famed Rabbi Akiva. The reason given for their deaths is that they had "sin'at chinom" (baseless hatred) of their own people. This was the day that they showed the same traits at Har Meron that caused another tragedy. Will they ever learn?

Uri Hirsch, TOI, 05.05.21

4. Medienquerschnitt

Ein Emirati in Tel Aviv

My first month with the Sabras

The Abraham Accords changed the course of history and established, for the first time, peaceful relations between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel. (...) As we began to build ties, we, the representatives of the UAE and Israel, discovered that we have a lot in common. (...) I was surprised to find out how true this is on a personal level as well. The public in Israel sometimes seems to the outside observer as tough, even sarcastic. A "Sabra", as you say. When I got here, I immediately discovered the softer side of which you speak. Whether it is in a formal meeting or at a falafel stand, you, the citizens of Israel, can make anyone feel at home. The same can be said about the public in the UAE. Tens of thousands of Israelis who have already visited can testify to this. (...) The ability to live together — Jews, Muslims, Christians, and members of other religions — is an amazing quality of the citizens of Israel that not many know about. (...) Israel has another surprising feature that makes it very special: the merging of cultures. (...) Each community came with its own cultural heritage and absorbed from others so that a new and wonderful society and culture were created. Israelis genuinely live together as one nation and one people. The UAE also embodies this fusion in its status as the gateway to the Middle East and a country that combines East and West, modern and traditional. (...) Both peoples have much to gain from the new peace agreements on the economic, cultural, technological, tourism, and people-to-people fronts. (...) Our governments have paved the way for us, and now it is the turn of our peoples. (...)

Mohamed al Khaja, YED, 06.05

HAA = Haaretz

YED = Yedioth Ahronoth / Ynetnews

JPO = Jerusalem Post

IHY = Israel HaYom

TOI = Times of Israel

GLO = Globes

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