

Israel's security agencies hold emergency meeting as earthquakes rock north



Shoygu, Liberman, Eizenkot **Ariel Hermoni, Israel Ministry of Defense**

Liberman blamed Cabinet for stalling a five-year plan formulated by the Home Front Command

Israel's security establishments called an emergency meeting Monday on earthquake preparedness and response, as an uptick in seismic activity in the region sparked concern over a larger quake striking imminently.

An earthquake of 3.2 magnitude struck Monday evening, another in a series of minor quakes in recent days in Israel's northern Galilee region, which have triggered several evacuations.

Experts estimate a large one may be on its way in the near future.

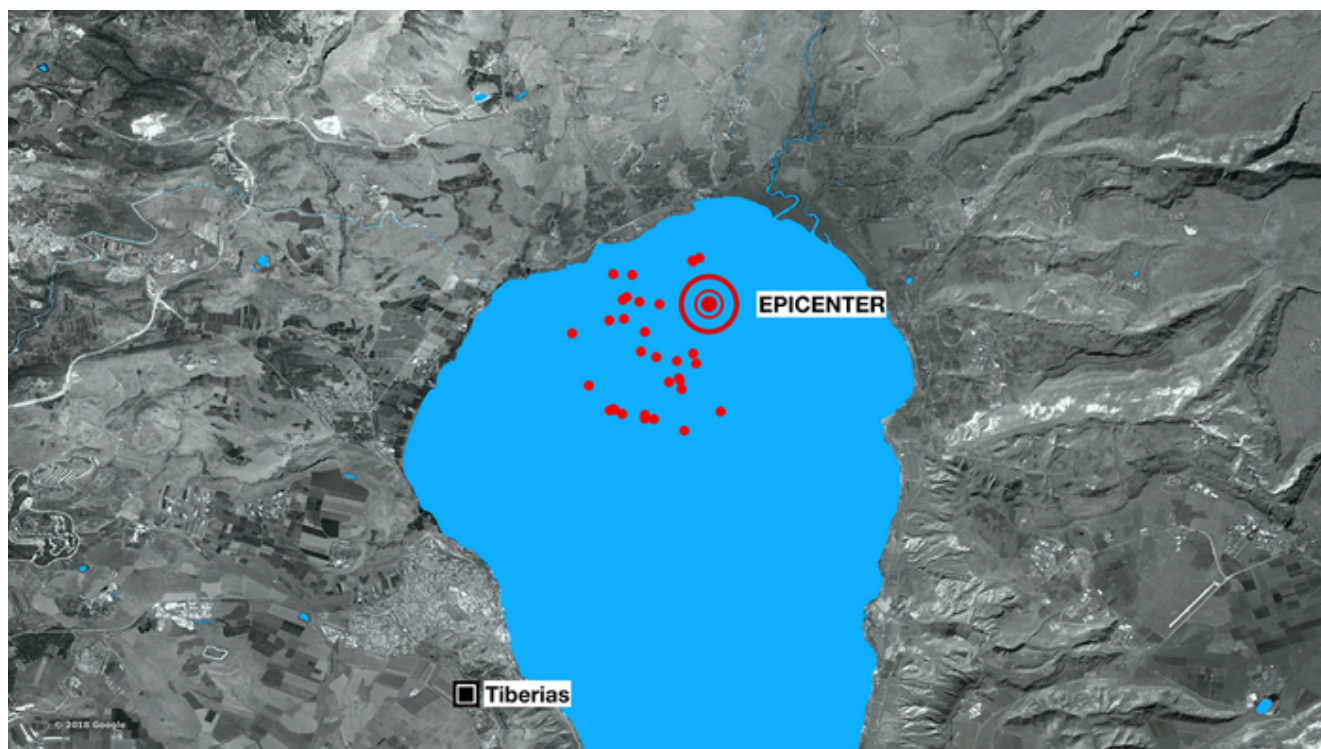
Israel is situated along the Syrian-African fault line which runs along the border

between Israel and Jordan. It is a part of the Great Rift Valley, encompassing the area from northern Syria to Mozambique.

The meeting Monday was initiated by the Defense Ministry with the security establishment and the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), the army's Home Front Command, police, firefighters, the Magen David Adom ambulance service and municipal authorities.

The region has seen at least ten minor earthquakes over the past week accompanied by a series of aftershocks, putting renewed focus on Israel's preparedness for potentially more devastating quakes in the future.

A 3.1 magnitude quake struck around 11:00 p.m. local time on Sunday, and was followed by a 3.3 magnitude tremor an hour later. Those quakes followed a 3.2 magnitude trembler in the same area on Sunday afternoon.



Locations of recent earthquakes to have struck in Israel's northern Galilee region **i24NEWS**

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman tried to quell concerns on Monday, opining that "we forgot about history a little, and in June 2017, the biggest earthquakes exercise ever carried out in Israel took place on June 11-14."

But Liberman explained that conclusions from the 2017 trials were left in the hands of the Cabinet, which he blamed for the stalling of a five-year plan

formulated by the Home Front Command.

“After we formulated the multi-year plan, it was transferred to the Cabinet for approval. There two weeks ago and was canceled at the last minute. We are still waiting for that cabinet meeting to approve plan for dealing with earthquakes and improving the home front preparedness,” he said at the opening of his Yisrael Beiteinu party meeting.

“The ball is in the field of the National Security Council who is responsible for convening the security cabinet and I hope that we are indeed clean hearing and make a decision as soon as possible,” he concluded.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred on Monday to the multi-year plan when he addressed parliament.

“Along with the Finance Minister and the Defense Minister we are preparing a package consisting of a multi-year plan with many resources to deal with the question of earthquakes,” he told the Knesset.

“We already took an important action with the TAMA 38 construction plan, but there is a need, of course, for additional measures,” he said referring to permits that enable buildings to add renovations otherwise prohibited under zoning laws, in order to brace structures against natural disasters.

“This will cost a lot of money and will have to be spread over years, but it will be brought to the Cabinet in the coming days,” he stated.



*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, sits next to Israeli Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan during the weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, Sunday, April 10, 2016. **Gali Tibbon/Pool Photo via AP***

On Thursday afternoon, a weak 3.1 magnitude quake sent tremors across the Galilee region, hours after two separate 3.2 magnitude quakes struck north of the city of Tiberias.

Those tremors came hours after another slightly more powerful quake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale hit around the same area Wednesday evening, with tremors reportedly felt across the country from the Dead Sea to Tel Aviv, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon.

Earlier Wednesday morning, another 4.1 magnitude earthquake struck four kilometers deep in the northern Sea of Galilee at around 04:50 a.m. local time (0150 GMT), the Israeli Geophysical Institute said, with tremors felt in northern Israel and the coastal Haifa region.

Bezalel Treiber, former head of the National Emergency Management Authority, told Army Radio on Monday that more significant funding is needed to protect ““Tens of thousands of apartment [that] are not reinforced and there is a high

danger they will be damaged.”

“It needs NIS 5 billion in order to make a revolution in the matter. The weaker apartments are exactly in the most dangerous place — on the Great Rift Valley,” he said.

Tremors from earthquakes in the region have periodically been felt in Israel, but the country has largely avoided major disaster.

The last major earthquake in Israel was in 1927, when a 6.2 magnitude earthquake rocked the region, killing 500 people and injuring 700 others.

The Israeli government has begun funding earthquake preparedness projects in anticipation of the possibility of a larger earthquake in the future. Various studies and projections have suggested that Israeli is highly unprepared, raising concerns that a strong earthquake could tens of thousands.

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman announced Thursday that a new multi-year earthquake plan would be presented to the cabinet this month.

“Last year, we carried out the biggest earthquake exercise in years,” the minister said in a statement. “We learned many lessons, one of which was the need for a multi-year home front defense plan, especially for the north. This month, we’ll present it to the cabinet and I’m sure we’ll get the green light and budget to get started.”

In 2016, disaster experts warned a parliamentary panel that Israel is not prepared to absorb the amount of human casualties and monetary damages that a major disaster could incur.

Researchers from the school of Emergency & Disaster Management at Tel Aviv University’s Sackler Medical School found that the average Israeli is also unprepared for natural disaster, especially in terms of personal and workplace preparedness, and the acquisition of essential equipment.

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/179069-180709-security-agencies-meeting-on-earthquakes-amid-uptick-in-seismic-activity>

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