

ISRAEL: Orthodox Jewish gender segregation campaign turns violent

Written by Agence France-Presse
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{lang: 'en-GB'}



Extra Israeli police patrolled the streets of a small town near Jerusalem on Monday after a campaign by ultra-Orthodox Jews to segregate men and women erupted into violence.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said that a man from the town of Beit Shemesh was arrested on Monday over an assault on Sunday on a TV crew filming a sign instructing women to cross the street to avoid walking past a synagogue.

Other signs were posted in an ultra-Orthodox neighbourhood telling women to dress “modestly”, meaning long sleeves and calf-length skirts.

The Haaretz newspaper said that the cameraman from commercial station Channel Two was thrown to the ground and his sound recordist grabbed by the throat in the attack by ultra-Orthodox men.

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Media said that other journalists were also attacked and a police car stoned.

“A male was arrested and is being questioned in connection with the incident which took place on the Channel Two team,” Rosenfeld told AFP.

“Municipal inspectors have been working in the street taking down posters... Police have stepped up patrols in Beit Shemesh,” he said.

Israeli media said that images shown on Channel Two last week of an ultra-Orthodox man in Beit Shemesh spitting at a woman led to his arrest on Saturday night.



The Jerusalem Post said that he was freed by magistrates on Sunday after being fined and ordered to stay out of Beit Shemesh for a week.

The violence in the town west of Jerusalem came after a wave of incidents elsewhere in Israel in which women have been compelled to sit at the back of segregated buses serving ultra-Orthodox areas or get off, despite court rulings that women may sit where they please.

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Women's rights activists say that the ultra-Orthodox, who constitute around 10 percent of Israel's population, have become increasingly "radical" on the issue of gender segregation and are winning concessions that harm women.

"Discrimination and violence against women, purportedly motivated by religious sensibilities, have spiralled out of control," the liberal Haaretz said in an editorial on Monday.

"In recent weeks, we have been witness to women attacked for refusing to move to the back of the bus to uphold a policy of gender segregation; women forced out of a venue where elections in a Jerusalem neighbourhood were being held," it said.

It noted that women had also been barred from taking part in a health ministry prize-giving ceremony and prevented from serving in key military positions "due to the opposition of a growing, increasingly vocal group of religious male soldiers and officers."

The Maariv newspaper compared the violence in Beit Shemesh to recent attacks by extremist Jewish settlers on Palestinian property, homes and offices of Israeli peace activists and army bases, in protest against demolitions of wildcat settlement outposts.

"It is the exact same story," it wrote. "Organised gangs, increasing in strength and audacity, of people who do not regard the state laws as the source of authority but rather rely on their various rabbis and peculiar divine voices in their heads.

"This is a culture war, no less."

<http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2011/12/26/jewish-gender-segregation-campaign-turns-violent/>