

Government approves millions to restore archaeological site scorched by blaze

Lapid says repairing Tel Gezer is 'most basic duty' of government after damage caused to several historic elements of national park earlier this month

By **MICHAEL HOROVITZ**

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Image of the Tel Gezer National Park, burnt by fires that broke out on July 4, 2022. (Roy Strauss/Nature and Parks Authority)

The government approved the allocation of millions of funds to rehabilitate the Tel Gezer National Park on Sunday, two weeks after a fire burned through the archaeological site.

Cabinet ministers welcomed the NIS 4 million (\$1.15 million) program — pushed by Prime Minister Yair Lapid, Housing and Construction Minister Ze'ev Elkin and Tourism Minister Yoel Razvozov — which seeks to repair the damage left by the blaze, and expressed hopes that the park would soon reopen to visitors.

“The archaeological site Tel Gezer is of historical and national importance. Its rehabilitation after the fire is our most basic duty as the government of Israel,” Lapid said.

The brush fire on July 4 forced more than 1,000 people at a camp to evacuate and caused extensive damage to Tel Gezer, which hosts artifacts dating back 5,000 years and 26 layers of settlements from the early Bronze Age to the Crusader period.

No injuries were reported in the fire. Despite initial reports, the ancient stone artifacts and constructions withstood the blaze, with most of the damage caused to the surrounding open fields.

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However, the Solomonic Gate, an ancient water plant, and the old city walls of Gezer suffered some minor, reversible damage and will be the focus of the restoration efforts.



Image of the Tel Gezer National Park, burnt by fires that broke out on July 4, 2022. (Roy Strauss/Nature and Parks Authority)

A visit by ministers Elkin and Razvozov to the site last week sought to determine ways to heal the park.

“When I was informed of the fire I arrived immediately to investigate the damage, and this was a difficult and painful scene,” Elkin said, adding that he immediately sought to muster the funds to repair the site.

Additionally, the Nature and Parks Authority will repair the site’s badly mangled infrastructure “in order to return it to full function and reopen it to the public.”

Gezer was a significant city in the region during the Middle Bronze Age, occupying a strategic position along the route from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean sea.

It also features repeatedly in the Old Testament. According to the Bible, the city was rebuilt by King Solomon as one of his great fortress cities, after being leveled by an Egyptian pharaoh.

Conversation

