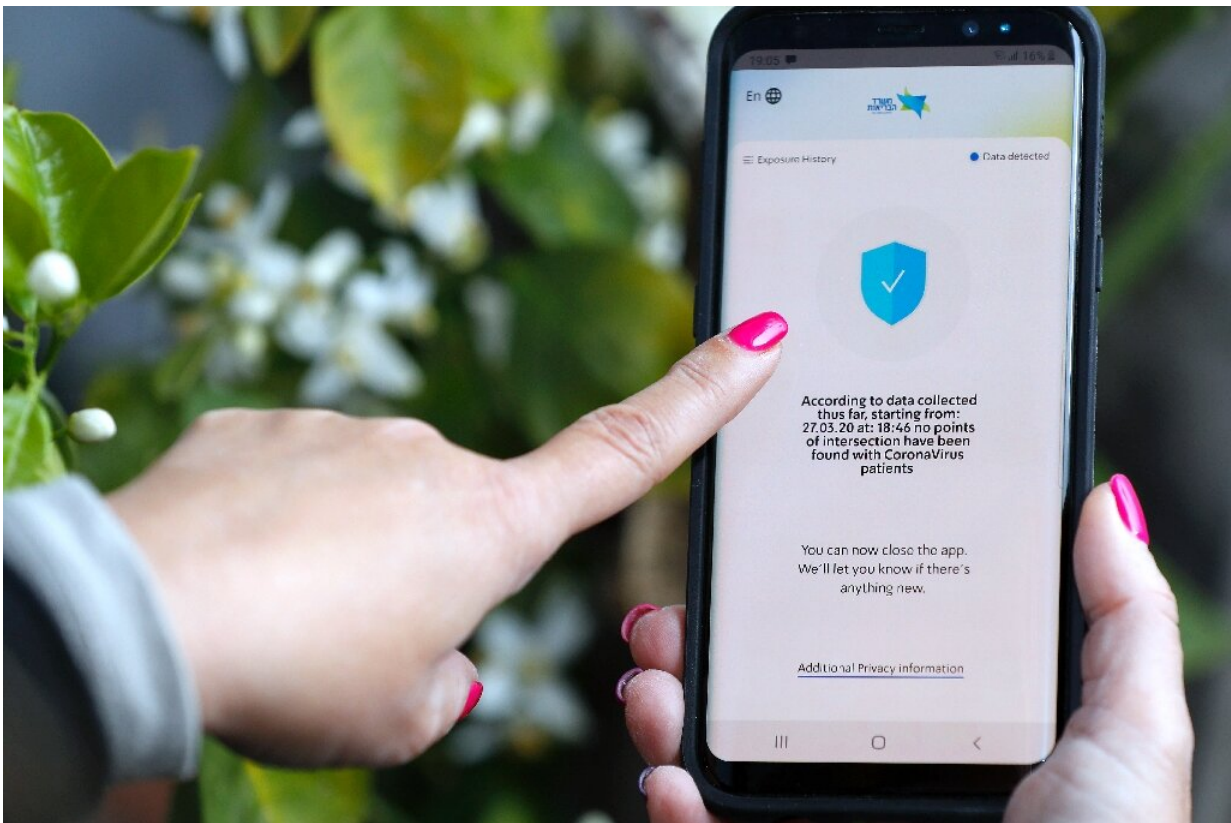


Israel approves personal data collection to combat virus

March 31 2020



An Israeli woman checks a smartphone app that informs users about any points of contact with known COVID-19 cases

An Israeli parliamentary committee on Tuesday approved the collection of personal data on citizens by domestic spy agencies, a controversial

measure enacted for the purpose of battling the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier in March the government authorised the internal security agency Shin Bet to collect information from private cell phones to facilitate Israel's response to the new coronavirus, which has infected more than 4,800 people in the country.

Rights groups challenged the measure and the [supreme court](#) ordered parliament to create an oversight [committee](#) to consider whether to authorise the digital surveillance.

The oversight committee approved the decision "after marathon discussions", allowing "Shin Bet to help in efforts to halt the spread of coronavirus for a month" until April 30, parliament's [foreign affairs](#) and defence committee said in a statement.

With the support of the government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had ordered Shin Bet to collect [personal information](#) after saying he would use every means possible "in the war against an invisible enemy".

According to details leaked to the press, this information could allow carriers of the virus to be unknowingly identified via their phone activity.

An appeal against the measure was lodged by rights groups and the country's third largest political force, the Arab Joint List.

The Blue and White party of former general Benny Gantz had denounced the measure as "a dangerous decision" taken without parliamentary oversight.

A former rival of Netanyahu, Gantz is now in talks with the prime

minister to form an "emergency unity government" to deal with the [coronavirus](#) crisis, following three elections that ended in deadlock.

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