

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update November 17, 2017 (28th of Cheshvan, 5778)

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IRAN-IRAQ EARTHQUAKE: DEATH TOLL RISES TO 405: Hundreds of people have been killed and over 7000 injured in Iran and Iraq after a magnitude 7.3 earthquake hit the border region between the two countries, sending tremors that were felt hundreds of miles away in both capitals, Tehran and Baghdad. At least 405 people have died - mainly in Iran - according to a toll published on Tues morning 14 Nov. 2017, by the semi-official Isna news agency. The powerful quake struck the country's western provinces at 9.20pm local time on Sunday. Rescuers worked through the night to find people trapped in collapsed buildings in towns affected by the quake, which was felt as far west as Israel and south to Baghdad. The deputy governor of the Iranian border province of Kermanshah told state television that the death toll would rise. Israeli Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz offered his sympathy to the countries. "My condolences to the people of Iran and Iraq over the loss of human life caused by the earthquake," said Katz. (UK Guardian/Times of Israel)

REPORT: IRAN BUILDING MILITARY BASES IN SYRIA: Iran is building a new military facility in Syria, located just south of Damascus. The base is one of many Tehran is believed to oversee in the country and, according to analysts, illustrates the Islamic Republic's goal of establishing a permanent presence in Syria. Tehran has long supported the regime of President Bashar al-Assad through its Lebanese proxy Hizbullah. Iran also has its own "boots on the ground," primarily members of the elite Quds Force, the branch of the Revolutionary Guard Corps that coordinates external military operations. The news is raising further concern in Israel, which has vowed to prevent Iran from maintaining a foothold in Syria after the war there. To this end, Jerusalem has regularly conducted air

strikes in Syria and Lebanon targeting weapons manufacturing sites as well as arms convoys destined for Hizbullah.

Recently, however, the Syrian regime, emboldened by gains on the battlefield, has taken a firmer line against such action, having over the past month targeted Israeli warplanes and deliberately launched rockets into the Israeli side of the Golan Heights. On 11 Nov. 2017, Israel's USA-made Patriot defense system intercepted an incoming unmanned aerial vehicle that was purportedly gathering intelligence for the Syrian regime; this, as forces loyal to Assad waged a major offensive in Quneitra province aimed at removing rebels from the border area. Jerusalem has sought a commitment from Russia, which holds the cards in Syria following its military intervention on behalf of the regime in 2015, to create a 60 kilometer buffer along the frontier in which Iranian-backed forces would be barred from operating. President Vladimir Putin is believed to have countered with an offer of a no-go zone spanning just 10-15 km. (Medialine)

WOMAN INJURED IN STONE-THROWING ATTACK NEAR BEITAR ILLIT: At least one person was injured and multiple cars damaged Sunday night 12 Nov. 2017, in a series of stone-throwing attacks by Palestinian Authority residents on Israeli vehicles outside Beitar Illit south of Jerusalem. A general increase in the number of rock attacks in Israel has been reported with the number reaching at least 25 such murder attempts per day. Rocks hurled at a moving vehicles are murderous weapons, especially on highways, as the deaths of little Adele Bitton, teenager Amitai Kapach and Asher Palmer and his one-year-old son Yonatan prove. All these, and others, were killed because their vehicles went out of control due to a murderous barrage of rocks or a large rock hurled at them while driving. In an attack reported last week, Arabs threw stones at a bus near the town of Tekoa. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged. Besides this, three other attempted murders took place within the space of an hour in Judea and Samaria, including two stone-throwing attacks near the Tapuach junction and another stone-throwing attack in Gush Etzion, near Al Aruv. All attempts miraculously left no Jewish casualties, but damage was caused to a number of vehicles. (Arutz-7)

MK: GOVERNMENT EVADING COMMITMENT TO DISABLED: Chairman Yoel Hasson of the Zionist Union Knesset faction said on Sunday 12 Nov. 2017, "The government continues to evade its obligations to the disabled and continues to abandon the disabled to hunger." He was responding to the decision of the Ministerial Committee on Legislation to postpone a Zionist Union bill to raise the allowances for the disabled by a month. Hasson added, "It is unthinkable that the government would reject the bill, which includes the full outline agreed upon by both the government and representatives of the disabled. PM Binyamin Netanyahu and Coalition Chairman David Bitan promised that the disabled would see the increase in their bank accounts as early as 1 January 2018. The Zionist Union faction will approach the Knesset House Committee to grant the bill an exemption from introduction requirements." (Arutz-7)

ANCIENT HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS TO GO ONLINE IN ISRAEL-RUSSIAN DEAL: One of the most treasured collections of ancient Hebrew manuscripts and books will be digitized and available for public view online under an agreement by the state libraries of Russia and Israel announced last week. The digitization shelve a century-old ownership dispute. The 14,000-item Guenzburg collection of medieval books, rare works of Jewish ritual law and mysticism, prayer books and biblical commentaries was purchased by Zionist activists in 1917 for shipment to Jerusalem. But that was delayed by fighting during World War I and the collection was ultimately seized by Soviet authorities

after the Russian Revolution. Thousands of new high-quality images of the ancient Hebrew texts will be integrated into the National Library of Israel's online Ktiv manuscript site. (Reuters)

NUMBER OF TURKISH JEWS IMMIGRATING TO ISRAEL MORE THAN DOUBLES:

Bucking a slump in Western immigration to Israel under its law of return for Jews, movement from Russia has increased in 2017 and more than doubled from Turkey. In total, the 23,415 immigrants who have come to Israel from 1 Jan. 2017 to 30 Sept. 2017 constituted a 2% increase over the corresponding period last year, an interim report by the Jewish Agency for Israel showed. The 8% rise in immigration from the former Soviet Union, representing 13,192 individuals, helped make up for an 11% decrease from the United States, which brought 2,282 immigrants to Israel. Among the FSU figures, 5,661 immigrants came from Russia, where sanctions and a financial crisis exacerbated by low oil prices have halved the value of the ruble against the dollar since 2014. Ukraine, where the economy crashed following a revolution and territorial disputes with Russia after 2013, provided Israel with nearly 6,000 new comers. Another noticeable increase came from Turkey, where many Jews are exploring immigration options amid political instability and allegations of state-tolerated anti-Semitism under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Islamist Justice and Development Party. This year, more than 350 Turkish Jews came, compared to 164 in the corresponding period last year. (INN)

FIRST PINEAPPLE FARM OPENS IN GAZA:

Pineapples are being harvested in the Gaza Strip for the first time as part of efforts to help the impoverished territory work towards food self-sufficiency. The fruit, for domestic sale, is grown in a 1,000 square meter greenhouse in the southern Gaza Strip town of Khan Yunis as part of a project sponsored by the Dutch government. Mussa al-Jadba, an agricultural engineer who supervised the project, said they had cultivated pineapples "for the first time in the temperate Gaza Strip after we have created the environment and climate for their growth." Two hundred and fifty plants have so far reached maturity with up to 4,000 expected to bear fruit throughout this harvest. The goal is to develop new crops to help Gazan farmers achieve self sufficiency, Jadba added. The Strip has been ruled by the Hamas terrorist organization since 2007. Hamas has diverted funds and aid meant for civilian infrastructure to its military wing, including the construction of terror tunnels into Israel. The Palestinian Authority has accused Hamas of preventing the construction of a desalination plant which would provide clean water for Gaza's residents. (Arutz-7)

ISRAELIS LIVE 10 YEARS LONGER THAN IN 1970:

Thanks to a more healthful lifestyle, better economic situation, improved education and a more advanced medical system, the Israeli life expectancy has increased by 10.3 years since 1970 – from 71.8 years to 82.1 years in 2015. This has just been made public in "Health at a Glance 2017," a comparative report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which Israel joined in 2010. It also pays to get a higher education in Israel: Men with bachelor's degrees lived an average of 7.5 years longer than men with much less formal education, while the gap between better-educated and less-educated women was five years. According to the report, if the rates of smoking and drinking alcohol were 50% lower, life expectancy would have increased by 13 more months. (J.Post)

ISRAELI SHEKEL EMERGES AS WORLDS 2ND STRONGEST CURRENCY:

The Israeli shekel is currently the world's second-strongest currency, according to a new report by the German global banking and financial services company Deutsche Bank. The report ranked China's yuan as the world's strongest currency. Deutsche Bank's strategic foreign currency analyst Dr. Gautam Kalani reported that during the past 12 months, the shekel has appreciated 6.1% against the currencies of

Israel's main trading partners, such as the USA dollar, the British pound, the euro and the yen. (Algemeiner)

NETANYAHU SURPRISES 3 MILLIONTH TOURIST WITH PERSONAL WELCOME TO ISRAEL: Israel has had a record year for tourism. And last week, PM Benjamin Netanyahu showed his appreciation by surprising tourist number 3 million to arrive in 2017 with a personal welcome to the Jewish state. Ioana Isac, 31, and her partner, Mihai Georgescu, suspected nothing as they arrived at Ben Gurion Airport from their native Romania. As the couple passed into the arrivals hall, they were greeted by an incredible scene: flowers, balloons, a red carpet and Tourism Minister Yariv Levin, who promptly whisked them away in a limousine to meet with Netanyahu at the Tower of David museum in the Old City of Jerusalem. Netanyahu gave the couple a personal tour, as well as conveying the appreciation of all Israelis, whose economy leans so heavily on incoming tourism. Isac and Georgescu were also given an upgraded hotel suite, a deluxe visit to the Dead Sea, a helicopter tour of Israel and a private dinner with famed Israeli chef Nir Tzuk. (Israel Today)

ISRAEL RUSHES EMERGENCY AID TO MADAGASCAR, BLACK DEATH CASUALTIES RISE: Israel is rushing to send greatly needed aid to Madagascar after a severe outbreak of the Black Death plague in the African island. The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the South African branch of Magen David Adom have joined forces to head the aid effort. The aid will be delivered to the International Red Cross in Madagascar. Since August 2017, the island has been battling the epidemic of the airborne pneumonic plague but cases have risen by 8% in the past week alone. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the "unusually severe" outbreak has now killed 143 people and infected nearly 2,000. "We expect all packages to be delivered to the International Red Cross in Madagascar in the next few days," Ayellet Black, Deputy Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, told the African News Agency. "Israel has a long-standing tradition of offering humanitarian assistance and coordinating relief to alleviate disease, hunger and poverty," added the Israeli envoy. "We have experience in helping countries going through natural and man-made disasters and will always provide assistance to help those in need." Although currently contained to Madagascar, nine nearby countries and territories have been identified by WHO as priority countries for plague preparedness, with experts fearing that the outbreak, described by WHO as "the worst in 50 years," could reach mainland Africa. (J.Post)

'THERE'S NO MORE LEBANON, THERE'S IRAN': Transportation and Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz last week discussed the latest upheavals in the Middle East, in light of the resignation of Lebanese PM Saad Al-Hariri and Iran's threatening takeover of large areas surrounding the State of Israel. Regarding the nuclear deal with Iran, Minister Katz said that USA President Donald Trump is leading the efforts to change the deal. "I think that with significant international pressure, Iran can be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons," he said, adding, "There is no dispute whatsoever in the State of Israel, at all levels and in the entire security establishment, over the fact that Israel will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, so I hope that the effort will bear fruit but if Iran comes close to acquiring nuclear weapons, Israel itself will have to ensure that this does not happen."

As for the goings on in Lebanon, Minister Katz said, "What happened with Al-Hariri revealed the true face of Hizbullah and what we are claiming and the whole world now sees it: Al-Hariri was merely a fig leaf; in fact Lebanon is Hizbullah and Hizbullah is Iran and we see this as a red line. "Right now the world, in addition to pressuring Iran over the nuclear weapons," he continued, "must also pressure Iran over its support for terrorism and impose heavy sanctions on Hizbullah as well as sanctions on Iran, if it does not stop funding and arming Hizbullah and other terrorist organizations." Asked whether he

would support Israeli countermeasures such as air strikes, Katz replied, "We do not talk about such things, but Israel has military capabilities. At the same time there is openness in the world to understand that after what happened with Al-Hariri there is no Lebanon, there is Hizbullah and therefore the sanctions on Lebanon must be severe in order to disarm Hizbullah." (Arutz-7)

ISRAEL WADES INTO SAUDI-IRANIAN CONFLICT: Israel's Foreign Ministry has instructed its ambassadors to begin a diplomatic campaign against Iran and Hizbullah that includes backing Saudi Arabian claims that the two Shiite allies perpetrated a missile attack on Riyadh International Airport earlier this month. Israel's ministry sent a classified memo to envoys worldwide urging them to contact foreign government officials to plead the case for reining in Tehran and its Lebanese proxy. The directive came the day after Lebanese PM Saad Hariri resigned from his post, citing fears of assassination and blaming the Islamic Republic for attempting to assert control over Beirut. His comments were echoed by the House of Saud, which accused Iran of sowing strife in Lebanon and committing an "act of war" against the kingdom. "The events with Hariri and the missile launched by Yemen's Shiite Houthi rebels, who are supported by Tehran, should cause countries to increase the pressure on Iran and Hizbullah on a range of issues, from ballistic missile production to its efforts at regional subversion," the ministry message reads. While Jerusalem does not have official diplomatic relations with Riyadh, the two countries have forged ties based on a shared concern over Iran's expansionism in the region. (Medialine)

USA JERUSALEM EMBASSY MOVE, 'TAYLOR FORCE ACT' GAIN MOMENTUM: A subcommittee of the USA House of Representatives held a hearing on the potential relocation of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, ahead of a December 2017 deadline for President Donald Trump to decide whether to approve the process. A law passed by Congress in 1995 called for the mission to be moved to what Israel considers its capital -albeit, the city is not recognized as such by the international community - unless the president deems it detrimental to USA national security interests. Since then, sequential American leaders - Clinton, Bush II, and Obama - have every six months signed a waiver that was included in the law in order to postpone the move, citing the potential negative effects on the peace process. During the 2016 election campaign, Candidate Trump vowed to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem but has likewise delayed the initiative amid yet another push to jump-start Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. It comes as USA legislators are debating another controversial bill, known as the Taylor Force Act—named after an American who was killed in a terror attack in Tel Aviv—that would cut off financial aid to the Palestinian Authority if it continues to pay stipends to those jailed in Israel for security offenses as well as to the families of Palestinians killed in confrontations with Israeli forces. An initial reading of the bill slated for 15 Nov. 2017 in the House Foreign Affairs Committee is expected to pass with broad bi-partisan support, paving the way for a full Congressional vote. (Medialine)

INDIAN SPECIAL FORCES IN ISRAEL TO TRAIN WITH THE IDF'S MOST ELITE UNITS: Defense ties between Israel and India have grown in the past few years, with Delhi becoming a major purchaser of Israeli military hardware. A contingent of Indian Garud commandos are in Israel taking part in exercises with elite Israeli special forces as part of the Blue Flag aerial drill. "The roles of the commandos of the two nations are similar. We carry out what others cannot do," wing commander K. Baharat told reporters. "Our aim is to learn and interact with the world's best special forces and share how we operate as well." The 16 Indian commandos are stationed at Nevatim and Palmachim air bases. The commandos will be training with the Israeli Air Force's elite Shaldag unit and Airborne Combat, Search and Rescue Unit 669. Formed in 2004 by the Indian Air Force, Garud's mission is to deploy

behind enemy lines, protect vital installations, carry out counterterrorism operations and conduct hostage rescues operations. According to India's Hindustan Times, Delhi is planning to expand the commando wing with at least 10 more units of 70-80 members to secure additional military bases. (Arutz-7)

SPIDERS TURN JERUSALEM AREA CREEK INTO HAUNTED WONDERLAND: An unusual partnership between human waste and nature has created a treat for arachnophiles and a nightmare for everyone else — a stream near Jerusalem with its banks lined by spiderweb-covered trees filled with lurking spiders waiting for their prey. The scene, which alternates between a haunted house display and a strangely beautiful forest-scape of gossamer curtains draped over the trees and branches, has formed along the Soreq creek outside the capital. Experts explain that treated sewage water pumped into the stream from a treatment plant in the area provides the perfect nutrients for mosquitoes, which in turn became food for long-jawed spiders whose population has exploded. Arachnophile Igor Armicach, a doctoral student at Hebrew University's Arachnid Collection, said it is an exceptional case. Armicach estimated that millions of spiders created the webs in what is a rare occurrence in the Middle East. However, the remarkable drapes and the delicate ecological balance that created them will not last for much longer. With winter approaching, the fall in temperature will kill off the mosquitoes and, deprived of the food, the spiders will soon follow. Long-jawed spiders are of the genus Tetragnatha meaning "four-jawed." The spiders mate at the end of the summer and are usually found in damp, swamp areas and feed on flying insects. Those concerned at the thought of millions of spiders lurking in the woods can perhaps take comfort in the fact that the spiders are barely larger than a finger tip, and they're not poisonous. (Times of Israel)



Robert I. Solomon: Messianic Rabbi, rabbisolomon@yachad.com

Jeffery Blalock: Ministries Coordinator, jeffery@yachad.com

Yachad Ministries, 950 Pine Grove Road, Roswell, Georgia 30075

E-mail: info@yachad.com, Web Page: www.yachad.com

Phone: 770-641-3000 (ext. 6)

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