

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update March 19, 2020 (23rd Adar, 5780)

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Israel Coronavirus Updates; The Ministry of Health announced on Sat. evening 14 March 2020 that the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Israel had risen to almost 200 with three of them in serious condition. The previous day schools and universities were shut down for at least a month until after the Passover holiday. Preschools and daycares were also closed beginning on Sunday 15 March 2020 and gatherings of over ten people have been banned. Following a weekend of meetings and deliberation between government officials to determine further necessary measures against the virus - PM Netanyahu announced that supermarkets, banks, and gas stations would remain open, but that restaurants, malls, and other recreational areas would be closed for the foreseeable future. Calling on all Israel's citizens to cooperate in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus, Netanyahu admitted that the measures were not easy, and required the creation of a new routine. According to the National Health Ministry, since coronavirus first broke out in the country, more than 200,000 Israelis have entered quarantine. Some 40,000 people are presently in quarantine. The IDF ordered all soldiers on leave to return to base on Sunday 15 March 2020 and to prepare to remain on base for at least a month. According to the World Health Organization, as China reports a decrease in new cases, the epicenter of the outbreak has moved to Europe, which – with Israel included in the organization's statistics – has more cases than the rest of the world combined, excluding China.

National Day of Prayer in USA; President Trump declared on Friday 13 March 2020 a National Day of Prayer for Sunday 15 March 2020 shortly after declaring a state of emergency amid the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic. "We are a country that, throughout our history, has looked to God for protection and strength in times like these," Trump tweeted. "No matter where you may be, I encourage you to turn towards prayer in an act of faith. Together, we will PREVAIL!" Trump's announcement came after he declared a national emergency over the coronavirus pandemic. Trump has large support from evangelical Christians voters. As president, he has fought for greater religious freedoms such as strengthening prayer in public schools.

Viruses and Diseases Have no Boundaries; Following the directive of Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) headed by Gen. Kamil Abu Rukun, on

Friday 13 March 2020 transferred approximately 200 coronavirus test kits to the Gaza Strip. This is part of a series of efforts that the unit has been promoting over the past month to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the Palestinian Authority and to prevent an outbreak in the Gaza Strip. Gen. Rukun said, "Viruses and diseases have no boundaries - and therefore preventing the spread of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip and eradicating its outbreak in the territories of Judea and Samaria are of prime Israeli interest. COGAT said it would, along with the Ministry of Health, continue efforts to assist the PA in curbing the spread of the virus in Judea and Samaria, out of Israeli interest and humanitarian thinking.

Viable Vaccine for COVID-19 Being Developed; Medicago, a biopharmaceutical company headquartered in Quebec City, Canada, announced on Thur. 12 March 2020 that they have successfully produced a Virus-Like Particle of the coronavirus just 20 days after obtaining the SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing the COVID-19 disease) gene. Production of the VLP is the first step in developing a vaccine for COVID-19 which will now undergo preclinical testing for safety and efficacy. Once this is completed, Medicago expects to discuss with the appropriate health agencies to initiate human trials of the vaccine by July or August of 2020. The company's CEO, Bruce Clark, said over the weekend that his company could produce as many as 10 million doses a month if regulatory hurdles can be cleared. The vaccine could start to become available in Nov. 2020.

Rouhani Tells Media to Lighten up on Virus Coverage; Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has met with key advisors and officials to coordinate the suppression of media reports on the coronavirus outbreak in the country. Iran's Tasnim reports that the President's office will "track" media reports. They want to push a campaign to highlight the regime's response to the coronavirus. Under the guise of "accurate, clear and transparent information on countering coronavirus," it appears the main goal is to get the public to stop asking questions. "The main need of today's society is to relax the focus," the report notes. Rouhani claims that news updates are currently undermining the mental well-being of society. Rouhani warned the media not to be politically motivated and said it must explain how the health care system capabilities have succeeded despite USA pressure and inhumane sanctions. Meanwhile, the reality in Iran is despair. Media sources report mass graves in Iran, so immense they can be seen from satellites. Qom is a pilgrimage site for Shia Muslims, attracting millions of pilgrims every year. It is also where morgue directors are having trouble handling burials for those who died of the virus, with bodies piling up because the cases are rapidly rising in the country, creating a backlog. Iranian officials reported on Sunday 15 March 2020 that the death toll in Iran has risen to 724 and that 1,200 new patients were diagnosed over the weekend.

Jim Bakker Sued for Selling Fake Coronavirus Cure; It is almost impossible to refrain from judgment in a case like this, and at a time such as this: Truly, televangelist Jim Bakker is on dangerous ground and must be exposed because he is not the man of God he claims to be and the faithful are paying for it. Bakker's proffering of a sham cure for the coronavirus has resulted in a lawsuit from attorneys for the state of Missouri. Attorney General Eric Schmitt filed papers last week in the Circuit Court of Stone County in Galena, Missouri against Bakker and his production company demanding a judge halt his peddling of a "Silver Solution and related products as treatments for coronavirus." Bakker has been hawking the so-called healing liniment for a month on "The Jim Bakker Show". They are "unapproved new drugs" sold in violation of federal food and drug laws. Bakker has also, according to the lawsuit, violated a Missouri merchandising law by "falsely promising to consumers that Silver Solution can cure, eliminate, kill or deactivate coronavirus and boost elderly consumers' immune system." On the contrary, attorneys write, "there is, in fact, no vaccine, pill, potion or other product available to" treat or cure COVID-19." According to show transcripts, Bakker interviewed Sherill Sellman, a "natural health expert" who erroneously boasted her solution could eliminate COVID-19 within 12 hours. He then offered viewers to receive the product by donating \$80 or \$125 to his for-profit ministry.

Netanyahu's Trial on Corruption Charges Postponed; Israeli PM Netanyahu's trial on corruption charges has been postponed until 24 May 2020. The development is the result of a coronavirus-related

decision by Justice Minister Amir Ohana to halt all court activities that do not qualify as an “extraordinary emergency.” The trial was set to begin Tues. 17 March 2020. The move comes at a sensitive time in-light-of three snap-elections in Israel in less than a year with no clear outcomes. Over the past few days, Netanyahu has repeatedly called on his main rival, Blue and White chief Benny Gantz, to put aside any differences and join a unity government to more adequately address and respond to the health crisis. Preliminary talks between Netanyahu and Gantz have taken place. All 15 members of the Joint List a collection of primarily Arab parties on Sunday 15 March 2020 recommended Benny Gantz as their preferred candidate for forming the next government. Following the recommendation of the Joint List, Gantz is expected to win 61 recommendations and will thus receive the mandate to form the government already this week.

A Quiet Purim in Israel This Year; This year, the festival of Purim began on the evening of Mon. 9 March 2020 and ended at sunset the following day. Purim commemorates how the biblical Queen Esther rescued the Jewish people from mass slaughter in ancient Persia. In Israel, the festivities involve colorful costumes and the holiday overflows with flamboyant parades and massive celebrations in which young and old, secular and religious, gather together. But this year was different: The Health Ministry confirmed on Tues. 10 March 2020 over a dozen new cases of Israelis who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, bringing the country's sick count to 75. Close to 100,000 people are under a 14-day home quarantine, with the government on Mon. 9 March 2020 taking the extraordinary step of ordering all citizens returning from abroad, as well as all visitors entering Israel, to join them. Large gatherings are now forbidden. The Health Ministry this week nixed assemblies of more than 100 people – effectively canceling the carnival. Rabbi David Stav said it was decided that Jews do not have to be physically present to listen to the Megillah reading. “Usually if somebody wants to fulfill the commandment of listening to the Megillah reading, he has to hear it directly by ear from the one that is reciting the verses,” Stav said. He emphasized that listening to the Megillah via telephone, radio, online or television was generally not acceptable under strict religious law. Stav wished all Jews in Israel a happy Purim and expressed the hope that the virus would soon be overcome.

Purim Party At The White House; While the Purim moods and activities in Israel were dampened by the coronavirus regulations recently put into place by PM Netanyahu, the White House on Tue. 10 March hosted a Purim celebration and megillah (Scroll of Esther) reading for senior staff members. Following the megillah reading, guests were treated to Purim treats, as well as traditional hamantaschen and "mishloach manot" - gifts of food packages traditionally given to friends and family on Purim. The event was attended by senior staff of the Office of the President and Vice President, as well as Ivanka Trump and other senior White House officers.

Everyone Entering Israel Must Now Self-Quarantine; PM Netanyahu announced early this week that anyone arriving in Israel must self-quarantine for 14 days due to concerns about the spread of the new coronavirus. Monday's 9 March 2020 decision essentially shuts down tourism to Israel, as only non-citizens with a place to quarantine for 14 days will be allowed in the country. Many Israelis were also expected to cancel travel plans rather than face two weeks of quarantine when they return home. Also, on Monday, the Arkia airline said it was ending international flights immediately until further notice. Avi Nakash, an Arkia owner called the decision a death blow to Israeli aviation. "There is no more Israeli aviation - not Arkia, not El Al, not Israir," said Nakash, referring to the national carrier and a second Israeli airline. Israir Airlines said it will end international charter flights from next week until the end of the month. The company said it will strive to bring all of its passengers who are still abroad - around 5,000 - back to the country by the end of the week. “Before Passover, there will be wide layoffs at the airport. We’re waiting for a miracle,” lamented Pinchas Idan, who heads the workers union. “This is a difficult time for the country’s tourism industry,” Israir added.

Palestinians Malign Israel as Israel Saves Their Lives; Israel is making a massive effort to help the Palestinians contain a coronavirus outbreak after several Palestinians in Bethlehem tested positive for the

disease. Israel has transferred hundreds of coronavirus test kits to the Palestinians and conducted joint training sessions for Israeli and Palestinian medical personnel. "We will continue working to help the Palestinian authorities curb the spread of the virus, both as an Israeli interest and for humanitarian reasons," said Israeli Civil Administration Health Coordinator Dalia Basa. "We will expand medical training to Palestinian personnel as much as possible, as well as the transfer of medical equipment to the Palestinian healthcare system." In return, the Palestinians are continuing to spread blood libels against Israel and the Jews. Last weekend the Palestinian daily Al-Quds claimed that Israel had been releasing wild boars in Judea & Samaria to destroy Palestinian crops. It is hard to find one Palestinian who does not carry a smartphone. Palestinians regularly document the actions of Israeli soldiers and settlers. Why has no one snapped even one photo of an Israeli truck carrying the animals into Palestinian villages? How come the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Judea & Samaria have not been attacked by wild boars? And how are the boars able to distinguish between Arabs and Jews?

Hold Off On Boycotting Israel; Those calling for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel should consider putting a sock in it until the coronavirus blows over. Scientists at Israel's MIGAL Research Institute say they are 8-10 weeks away from a vaccine. Indeed, Israel is at the forefront of a host of medical breakthroughs. But the BDS movement would cut off such promising research from collaborators and investors in the USA. What's going on in Israel's laboratories is saving lives all over the world. For example, take Israel's medical breakthrough in treatment for multiple sclerosis over a decade ago, or consider its advances in treatment for Parkinson's disease. BDSers should be asking themselves if they would really say no to a vaccine just because it was created in Israel.



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