

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update November 19, 2020*** ***(3<sup>rd</sup> Kislev, 5781)***

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## **For the Yachad Report Newsletter For November 2020**

**'Serious' Covid Cases Dip Below 300 for First Time Since July;** The number of coronavirus patients in Israel in serious condition dropped below 300 Thursday for the first time in over three months, according to figures released by the Health Ministry. An evening update from the ministry showed a total of 298 people with the virus in Israeli hospitals in serious condition, down from highs of over 820 in the middle of October. The ministry said there were 158 patients in critical condition, with 137 on ventilators, out of a total of 7,922 active cases in the country. Despite the falling rate of serious cases, the number of daily diagnoses continued its slight upward trend, with 522 new cases since midnight. Out of over 26,000 virus test results returned Thursday, two percent were positive, slightly up from the 1.9% recorded out of over 36,000 test results on Wednesday. Since the start of the outbreak earlier this year, 322,068 people in Israel have tested positive for the coronavirus and 2,706 have died.

**Health Ministry Shortens Covid Isolation Period to 12 Days;** The coronavirus isolation period will be shortened from 14 days to 12 days in most instances, the Health Ministry announced Thursday. Under the new procedure, a person who enters isolation after returning from abroad or coming into contact with someone who had the virus must register with the Health Ministry online or through its call center. The individual should then take a PCR swab test as soon as possible and must be retested on the 10th day after arrival or contact – not after the first test. The second test must be carried out at least 24 hours after the first one. If both tests are negative and the person does not experience any symptoms, he or she would be certified healthy by the Health Ministry and be allowed to leave isolation. Coronavirus tests must be performed at drive-in centers certified by the ministry. The new plan took effect on Thursday at midnight and applies retroactively to people already in isolation.

**New Deal Could Bring Millions of Vaccine Doses to Israel;** Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Health Minister Yuli Edelstein (Likud) touted a newly-signed deal with pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, which they said would secure for Israel millions of doses of the coronavirus vaccine now being tested. Speaking with reporters Friday afternoon, Netanyahu and Edelstein said the deal marked a “great day” for Israel in the fight against the coronavirus. “This is a great day for Israel,” said Netanyahu. “We just now signed a deal with Pfizer to receive eight million doses of the vaccine for four million Israeli citizens. We

hope that the vaccine will start to be delivered in January, increasing in the months afterward.” “In the months until the coronavirus vaccine gets here, we all must continue to obey the health regulations.” Health Minister Edelstein said that Israel is also in talks with another pharmaceutical company which is developing its own coronavirus vaccine. “We cannot become complacent – there is no vaccine for complacency. Keep wearing masks, maintain social distancing, and adhere to all the health guidelines.”

**The Pandemic’s Impact on Anxious Israelis;** Pandemic-induced stress is causing a huge rise in the anxious habits of teeth grinding and jaw clenching, Israeli researchers have found. Tel Aviv University’s dental school surveyed a sample of the Israeli population during the spring lockdown and found that some 36 percent of respondents were grinding their teeth at night, compared to 10% before the pandemic. A common daytime nervous habit, jaw-clenching also saw a major rise, from 17% in normal times to 32% during a lockdown, according to the research just published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Clinical Medicine. Both habits are known to be greatly impacted by emotional factors such as stress and anxiety and have the potential to badly damage the teeth and jaw joints. Symptoms of temporomandibular disorder (TMD), which is often related to the habits, were reported by 47% of respondents, up from 35% pre-pandemic. The disorders tend to cause chronic facial pain by affecting muscles, nerves, and joints.

**Iran May Execute Disabled Bodybuilder who Criticized Covid Rules;** The Islamic Republic of Iran arrested the country’s Paralympian Reza Tabrizi because he questioned why gyms have been closed due to the coronavirus pandemic while religious shrines continue to remain open, according to posts on social media from human rights experts. Iranian dissident and women’s rights campaigner Masih Alinejad tweeted on Tuesday that “I got this shocking video from Iran. Reza Tabrizi, a disabled athlete, was violently forced into a police car & harassed by plainclothes agents as he struggled to walk. He was arrested for asking why religious shrines are open while gyms are closed during [COVID-19]. He faces death.” Tabrizi won a silver medal for powerlifting in the 2011 New Zealand World Para Athletics Championships, according to the British Telegraph paper. He argued on Instagram that it was “hypocritical” to close down gyms in the city of Mashad but still permit pilgrims into the Imam Reza Shrine.

**Knesset Approves Normalization with Bahrain;** The Knesset on Tuesday approved Israel’s agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Bahrain with an overwhelming majority, giving Jerusalem the go-ahead to forge ties with a second Gulf state in as many months. The vote came following a marathon five-hour legislative session that featured some 80 lawmakers giving speeches to the plenum. Sixty-two lawmakers voted in favor; 14 — all from the predominantly-Arab Joint List party — opposed the agreement. There were no abstentions. The so-called “Joint Communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic, peaceful, and friendly relations” will now head back to the cabinet, where it is expected to be ratified with unanimous support. “Bahrain is a small country but it has big aspirations,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at the beginning of the debate. He also vowed that additional Arab countries will soon publicize “the normalization that is being developed” with Israel.

**Israel Requests Permission to Fly Over Sudan;** Israel has officially asked the Sudanese government to allow Israeli airlines to fly in its airspace, as part of the cooperation between the countries following their normalization agreement. A senior Sudanese official said that the country's authorities were considering the Israeli request and intended to approve it. In recent days, it has been reported that Israeli planes have already flown in the skies of Sudan, but the senior source claimed that if there had been such flights, it would have been an unusual procedure. The designated foreign minister of Sudan said there was no impediment to Israel using Sudan's airspace and spoke of the economic benefits that could emerge from his country from the move. However, he said, it all depends on government approval. Sudanese Civil Aviation Authority spokesman noted that the Israeli request had indeed been received and was being discussed.

**Pompeo to Visit West Bank Settlement, Golan;** In a historic first US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to visit the Psagot winery in the West Bank and Jesus' baptismal site in the Jordan Valley as well as the Golan Heights, during his visit to Israel next week, according to a report published on Thursday. An English version of the story ran in Axios. Pompeo's visit would mark the first time a US Secretary of State has visited a West Bank settlement or the Golan. It's the latest in a series of steps Pompeo has taken to legitimize Israeli settlement activity. The Trump administration suspended plans to annex the West Bank settlement, as a prerequisite for Israel's normalization deal with the United Arab Emirates. A visit by Pompeo, however, is a symbolic gesture that speaks to his support for eventual Israeli sovereignty of all the settlements. It is particularly significant that Pompeo has chosen the Psagot winery, which lost a case before the European Union's top court on the issue of product labeling.

**IDF on Alert for Attack on 1st Anniversary of Killing;** The Israel Defense Forces went on heightened alert Wednesday, sending additional air defenses to southern Israel, ahead of the one-year anniversary of the killing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander Baha Abu al-Ata, out of concerns the terror group may mark the occasion with an attack. In addition to more Iron Dome missile defense batteries deployed to the south, flights into and out of Israel appeared to have been directed to use Ben Gurion International Airport's northern paths, keeping them farther from the Gaza Strip.

**UAE Ambassador 'Excited,' 'Optimistic' About Israel Ties;** United Arab Emirates Ambassador to the United States Yousef Al Otaiba spoke about the Abraham Accords and the changing political makeup of the Middle East in an address to the online session of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) Wednesday. Addressing the growing relationship between Israel and the UAE, Ambassador Otaiba said: "We are optimistic and enthusiastic about this relationship. I hope Israelis are equally excited to get to know our people, heritage, and values—not just our shiny buildings and nice airports." "Having trade, investment, research, a joint space program—it's good for our two countries. As for me, I promised a good friend of mine we'll visit Israel when the time is right, as soon as Covid is a little more under control & things look somewhat more normal," he said. "We still believe the 2-state solution is the only game in town. You need to move forward with this. The Palestinians are not going away. At the end of the day - all we can do is create the space. We're going to have tough conversations with the Israeli government about the Palestinians and the Palestinian state. This requires diplomacy and more importantly willingness and political courage from the leaders to make compromises and resolve this issue."

**Bahrain's Prime Minister Dies;** Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the prime minister of Bahrain, has died, according to a statement released by the Bahraini government Wednesday. The prime minister was being treated at an American hospital when he died. His body will be flown back to Bahrain for burial, with a limited number of close relatives permitted to attend the funeral, due to coronavirus restrictions. The 84-year-old prince had served as Bahrain's premier for 50 years, assuming office in 1970. Bahraini King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa has declared a nationwide week of mourning, with the national flag lowered and work at government agencies halted for three days. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu offered his condolences Wednesday afternoon.

**Iran Storing 12x Enriched Uranium than Allowed;** Iran continues to increase its stockpile of low-enriched uranium far beyond the limits set in a landmark nuclear deal with world powers and to enrich it to a greater purity than permitted, the UN's atomic watchdog agency said Wednesday. The International Atomic Energy Agency reported in a confidential document distributed to member countries and seen by The Associated Press that Iran as of November 2 had a stockpile of 2,442.9 kilograms (5385.7 pounds) of low-enriched uranium, up from 2,105.4 kilograms (4,641.6 pounds) reported on August 25. The nuclear deal signed in 2015 with the United States, Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, allows Iran only to keep a stockpile of 202.8 kilograms (447 pounds).

The IAEA reported that Iran has also been continuing to enrich uranium to a purity of up to 4.5%, higher than the 3.67% allowed under the deal.

**Israeli Innovation Leads with Covid-19 Technology Solutions;** Israel has truly earned its title of the “Start-Up Nation”. The Israeli innovation ecosystem has given birth to a unique environment, within which the Israeli entrepreneur flourishes and thrives. In 2019, Israeli high tech exits were worth a staggering total of \$21.7 billion and high tech exports from Israel were worth \$46 billion – that’s in one year alone. Mobileye – acquired by Intel in 2017 for \$15.3 billion. Soda Stream – acquired by PepsiCo in 2018 for \$3.2 billion. Wix – IPO in 2013 and with a current market cap over \$13 billion. And this is just the tip of a very large iceberg. Israeli startups are addressing pressing worldwide problems in fields as diverse as medical, Proptech and Contech engineering, Agritech, Foodtech and Fintech, with new solutions cropping up every day. Investination’s CEO Oded Eliashiv explains, “Eighty Israeli companies have been launched in 2020 alone to work on solutions to COVID-19-related issues. That’s the largest cluster of COVID-19-relevant companies from any one country in the world.

**Israel Surveillance System to Track Masks, Social Distancing;** A new surveillance system that detects whether individuals are obeying coronavirus guidelines has been implemented in Or Akiva, a northern Israeli city. Or Akiva has seen experimental monitoring systems pop up in popular locations throughout the city over the past few weeks. In hopes of slowing the spread of COVID-19, the technology is able to detect face masks, social distancing, and overcrowding. Shlomi Segev, the Director of the Municipal Authority for the Prevention of Violence, Drugs, and Alcohol Abuse, stated that the system was introduced in partnership with Israeli law enforcement, with the goal of preventing violence and vandalism in the city, while also upholding health guidelines. Following the deployment of this new system, Israeli locals have reportedly expressed concerns about privacy issues, drawing comparisons to China’s surveillance systems.

**Israel's Haredi Population to Reach 6.5 Million by 2065;** Israel's Haredi community currently numbers about 1.1 million, according to a report by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Details of the report were released by Kikar HaShabbat, showing that in 2019, Israel's Haredi population numbered an estimated 1,094,828, or 12% of the total population of the State of Israel. That amounts to close to 17% of Israel's Jewish population. The Haredi population, which has the highest birthrate in Israel, is projected to rise to grow rapidly over the next 45 years, with Haredim going from 12% of the total population of Israel to 32% by 2065. By 2065, Israeli Haredim will number almost 6.5 million, compared to less than 10 million non-Haredi Jews and those categorized as ‘Other’, and about four million Israeli Arabs. The report also revealed that Haredim have, on average, an income roughly one-third lower than the national average, making up 12% of the population but 8% of the total national income.

**King David-Era Fort Found in Golan;** Dating to around the time of King David 3,000 years ago, what may be the earliest fortified settlement in the Golan Heights was recently discovered during salvage excavations ahead of the construction of a new neighborhood. Incredible rock etchings of two figures holding their arms aloft — possibly at prayer with what could be a moon — were uncovered inside the unique fort, which was dated to circa 11th-9th century BCE. The striking find is being tentatively linked to the Geshurite people, whose capital is recorded in the Bible as having been located nearby, to the north of the Sea of Galilee. In a brief Hebrew video about the discovery, dig co-director Barak Tzin said that when the etching was found near the entrance of the fort, “We understood that we had something very, very important... We were astonished to discover a rare and exciting find: a large basalt stone with a schematic engraving of two-horned figures with outspread arms.

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