

# **Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 31, 2020 (16<sup>th</sup> Tevet, 5781)**



## **[For the Yachad Report Newsletter For January 2021](#)**

***Virus Crisis Drives 41% Rise in Number of At-Risk Youth Seeking Help;*** There has been a sharp increase in substance abuse, emotional distress, and violence among at-risk youths during the ongoing coronavirus crisis, according to a report published Sunday by a nonprofit welfare organization. During September-November, the organization had been contacted by 6,517 youths, an increase of 41% over the same period in 2019. Depression, anxiety, self-harm, violence, and alcohol and drug abuse all increased compared to the year before. In addition, 1,989 youths said they are using drugs—2.7 times the figure in 2019 and 1.5 times the number in June-August. Reports of self-harm went up to 426, 1.8 times higher than the year before, and the number of eating disorders doubled.

***Coronavirus: Lockdown Likely to Last At Least Four Weeks;*** Before the lockdown has even started, Israelis were informed by health officials on Thursday that the latest lockdown was likely to last longer than two weeks. “I do not believe that two weeks will be enough [to stop the spread of the virus],” coronavirus commissioner Prof. Nachman Ash said in an interview with the Hebrew website Ynet. He said the government determined that it would evaluate the state of morbidity after two weeks to see if the country could reopen. If the number of new daily cases dropped to 1,000 or less, the lockdown would be lifted. If not, it will be extended another two weeks. Originally, the Health Ministry proposed a 25-day lockdown.

***Iran to Import COVID-19 Vaccines, Despite US Sanctions – Report;*** Despite US sanctions, Iran has still been able to import coronavirus vaccines from foreign companies, according to Iran's First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri. “Of course, sanctions and pressures have posed obstacles [to Iran's trade] in all fields, including supplying coronavirus vaccine, but fortunately, the country’s management power can defuse the sanctions,” Jahangiri said. Abdolnasser Hemmati, governor of the Central Bank of Iran, said Thursday that nearly 200 million euros were allocated to purchase 16.8 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. The news comes after claims by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani that the US has been sabotaging Tehran's attempts at securing a vaccine abroad, though the country does have an active effort at producing its own vaccine product.

***Iron Dome Intercepts Two Rockets Fired from Gaza;*** Red Color sirens were heard on Friday evening, around 8:00 p.m., in the Ashkelon area and in communities located near the Gaza Strip. Residents of the area

reported hearing explosions, likely as a result of the Iron Dome intercepting rockets. The IDF confirmed that two rockets were fired from Gaza towards southern Israel and were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system. There were no reports of damages. One woman who suffered from shock was treated at Barzilai Hospital. Last month, a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip exploded in the Ashkelon area. The rocket hit a factory and caused damage. There were no reports of physical injuries. In retaliation, IDF fighter jets and helicopters attacked two sites for the production of rockets, underground infrastructure, and a military training complex belonging to Hamas' naval force.

***IDF Strikes Gaza in Response to Earlier Rocket Attacks;*** The IDF struck targets belonging to Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip late Friday night in response to rockets fired from Gaza into Israeli territory earlier in the night. During the IDF operation, a rocket weapon production site was targeted, in addition to underground infrastructure and a Hamas military post. The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said after the strike that "the IDF condemns any kind of terror attacks against Israel, and it is ready and prepared to act in determinations against attempts to harm Israeli citizens and against Israeli sovereignty." Two Palestinians were reportedly lightly injured as a result of the attack. A source in Gaza said that the shrapnel caused by the bombing hit a hospital for children and a center for disabled persons situated in the coastal enclave.

***Erdogan Says Turkey Interested in Improving Relations with Israel;*** Turkey would like better ties with Israel, but claims its policy towards the Palestinians remains "unacceptable," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday, adding that talks at the intelligence level are continuing between the two sides. Turkey has been condemned by the US for hosting senior Hamas terrorists twice this year, and Ankara's ruling party often compares Israel to Nazi Germany. Turkey and Israel, once allies, have had a bitter falling out in recent years. Ankara, which illegally occupies northern Syria and persecutes Kurds, has repeatedly condemned Israel's "occupation" of the West Bank and its treatment of Palestinians.

***Moroccan Officials to Land in Israel at Start of Week, PM Invites King;*** A delegation of Moroccan officials is due to visit Israel as early as Sunday to prepare for the opening of a liaison office, now that ties between the two countries have been resumed after 20 years. They are also expected to speak with Israelis about opening an embassy, a move that would upgrade the ties to that of full diplomatic relations. On Friday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu personally invited King Mohammed VI of Morocco to visit Israel, during a phone call. "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," Netanyahu told the king, as he borrowed the famous last line of the well-known Humphrey Bogart movie Casablanca that was set in Morocco.

***Jewish Leaders Respond to Anti-Semitic Cyberattack on NY Jewish School;*** New Yorkers remain on edge following the anti-Semitic cyberattack that took place at a Jewish high school in Great Neck on December 14. As the FBI continues its investigation, Jewish leaders are speaking out about proactive ways to mitigate further incidents. "Nothing like this has ever happened in my hometown. I've never experienced antisemitism before," Dina Silberstein told The Jerusalem Post. Silberstein, 37, is an alumna of North Shore Hebrew Academy, a Modern Orthodox yeshiva in Nassau County. On the fifth night of Hanukkah, the academy's website was hacked, compromising students' private information and targeting the community with anti-Semitic threats and slurs. On the school's homepage, the North Shore logo was replaced with a swastika, the background image was changed to a Nazi concentration camp, and the school's name was modified to "North Shore Hebrew Concentration Camp." Its address was changed to that of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

***Israel to Enter Third Lockdown for At Least Two Weeks Starting Sunday;*** Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza are dealing with a renewed coronavirus outbreak, leading to proposals and measures intended to curb its spread and mitigate the economic ramifications of the crisis by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Israel is severely limiting the entry of foreigners into the country as cases continue to spike. Starting Wednesday,

Israelis returning from abroad will be obligated to enter a 14-day quarantine, or 10-days if they twice test negative for COVID. Israel currently has 28,308 active cases; 3,136 people have died. In the West Bank, there are 14,894 active cases and 1,033 deaths, and in Gaza 9,574 active cases and 283 deaths.

***Pfizer, Moderna to Test Their Vaccines Against UK Coronavirus Variant;*** Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc. are testing their COVID-19 vaccines against the new fast-spreading version of the virus that has emerged in Britain. Moderna expects immunity from its vaccine to protect against the variants and is performing more tests in the coming weeks to confirm, the company said in a statement. Pfizer said it is "generating data" on how well blood samples from people immunized with its vaccine "may be able to neutralize the new strain from the UK," according to the report. The main worry is that the new variant is 40%-70% more transmissible. Scientists have said there's no evidence that vaccines currently being deployed in the United Kingdom or other COVID-19 shots in development will not protect against this variant.

***Israel Ranks No. 1 in COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Administered Per Capita;*** Only three days after launching its nationwide coronavirus vaccination campaign, Israel now ranks first in the world in the number of COVID-19 vaccination doses administered per 100 people, according to official data collected by Our World in Data and published on Wednesday. According to the recent data, Israel and the UK outrank other countries by far, with Israel ranking at 0.83%, followed by the UK with 0.74%. The US is next with a much lower rank of 0.19%. The world average stands at 0.03%. As more and more Israelis are getting vaccinated for coronavirus, it seems like the ongoing endeavors of providing vaccines from different companies around the world paid off. With doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines already available and with more AstraZeneca vaccines expected to arrive, it looks like Israel is heading towards a coronavirus-free population, perhaps sooner than expected.

***Israel Set for Fourth Election in Two Years as Netanyahu's Coalition Collapses;*** Israel will now face its fourth election in the last two years following the Tuesday collapse of its governing coalition led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel's parliament, the Knesset, failed to pass a new budget by the midnight deadline. That was the final straw that broke a coalition that has been splintering for months. The governing coalition between Israel's main right-wing and centrist parties has failed at a number of basic governing duties in recent months. Netanyahu's popularity has fallen as members defect from his Likud party, presenting him with a strong challenge in the newly scheduled elections to be held on Mar. 23.

***Netanyahu Hints Israel Won't Shy Away from Military Action Against Iran;*** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hinted that Israel would not shy away from military action against Iran when he spoke at the graduation ceremony for new IAF pilots on Wednesday. "We will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons," Netanyahu said. "We do not take lightly the threats made against us, nor do we shy away from them," Netanyahu said. "Our policy is clear and consistent: whoever tries to harm us will suffer a crushing blow. "In the face of danger, the air force is ready to act forcefully – at any range, in any arena, and on any target," Netanyahu stated. He promised that Israel would stand firm against Iran's nuclear program and its entrenchment in Syria. "We will continue to act against attempts by Iran and its proxies to establish military bases in Syria. We will not compromise on this issue," he said.

***US Threatens Iran after Rocket Fire on Baghdad Embassy;*** US President Donald Trump threatened Iran on Tuesday afternoon, two days after rockets struck the US embassy compound in Baghdad. The rockets are some of dozens that have been fired over the last year by pro-Iranian militias. The US has put in place air defense called C-RAM to defend the Green Zone and embassy area, however some of the rockets still caused damage. In the past when US soldiers and a contractor have been killed the US responded with airstrikes in December 2019 and March 2020. Trump also ordered the strike on IRGC Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in January 2020. Iran and its allies in the region are commemorating those deaths this month. Tensions are running high.

**Indonesia May Receive \$1 B. in US Financing if it Makes Peace with Israel;** Indonesia could receive over \$1 billion from the Trump administration if it normalizes ties with Israel, US International Development Finance Corporation CEO Adam Boehler said while he was in Israel. “We’re talking to them about it,” said Boehler. “If they’re ready, they’re ready, and if they are, then we’ll be happy to even support more financially than what we do.” Boehler’s government agency, DFC, already invests over \$1b. in Indonesia, and he said that this amount could be increased by a further “one or two billion.” Boehler was part of the US delegation headed by White House Senior Advisor Jared Kushner that visited Israel on Monday prior to heading to Morocco on Tuesday to advance the normalization of ties between Rabat and Jerusalem.

**Miss France Runner-Up Attacked Online for Saying Her Father is Israeli;** A flood of anti-Semitic insults, threats, and violent comments were spread on social media over the weekend targeting Miss Provence, April Benayoum, first runner-up in Miss France 2021 pageant, after it was revealed Saturday night during the final competition that she has an Israeli father. “I have an array of origins: my mother is Serbo-Croat, my father Israeli-Italian. This gave me a passion for geography and the discerning of other cultures,” Benayoum said in response to one of the judge's questions. The reactions on social media were not long in coming. “Hitler forgot to exterminate you, Miss Provence.” "Uncle Hitler forgot to exterminate you." "#MissFrance2021 do not vote for her. The reason: She is Jewish." "Miss Provence has a link with Israel. Get rid of her." The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (Crif), the umbrella organization of France’s Jewish community, called the attacks on Benayoum “vile and unacceptable!”



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