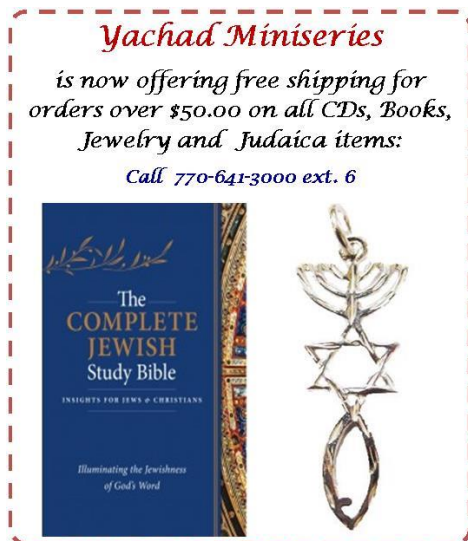


Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 7, 2021 ***(23rd Tevet, 5781)***



For the Yachad Report Newsletter For January 2021

US Working on Another Normalization Deal in January; The US is pushing for another Arab or Muslim state to normalize relations with Israel in the three weeks before US President Donald Trump leaves office, a Trump administration source said on Wednesday. "We're working very hard on making it happen," said the source, who has been involved in negotiations for the Abraham Accords, as the agreements are called. A second Trump administration source confirmed the ongoing efforts. Sources in Jerusalem and Washington have said in recent weeks that Indonesia, Mauritania, Niger, or Oman could be next to join the accords. All three have had a certain level of secret or unofficial ties with Jerusalem in the past. There have also been persistent reports of progress with Pakistan.

COVID Crisis Sinks 50,000 Israeli Families Below Poverty Line; Covid-related lockdowns have pushed nearly 50,000 households in Israel under the poverty line in October. Attendees of the recent Eli Hurvitz Conference on Economics and Society received the daunting statistic that there is merely one job opening for every 16 unemployed people. And that's not everything. "The economic crisis brought on by covid is unprecedented in its scope and strength," Minister of Labor, Social Welfare and Social Services Itzik Shmuli said at the conference. The event was organized by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI). Two and a half million Israelis have been damaged economically by the crisis, nearly 50,000 households have sunk below the poverty line and about 100,000 are currently closer to poverty.

Final Nefesh B'Nefesh Aliyah Flight of 2020 Lands in Israel; The final Nefesh B'Nefesh flight of 2020 landed in Israel on Wednesday afternoon, carrying 48 new immigrants to the Jewish state, NBN announced. The 48 olim who landed this week join the 3,168 people who moved to Israel from North America in 2020. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, some 2,625 people have immigrated to Israel from North America since the beginning of the pandemic. NBN received 6,704 applications from people who wanted to immigrate to Israel, which is a 126% increase in interest in aliyah compared to the 3,035 applications in 2019. "As we look back at the challenges everyone faced in 2020, we are extremely proud of what we have accomplished together," said Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Nefesh B'Nefesh. "We look forward to watching each oleh [new immigrant] grow and build their new lives in Israel, and eagerly look ahead to 2021, a year with the potential to exceed all expectations in aliyah."

Health Ministry: Due to Shortage, Israel Will Take 2-Week Vaccine Break; Israel will have a two-week break in the vaccination of the general public due to an expected shortage of vaccines and the need to hold on to an amount that can be used for the second "booster" shot required by people who have been inoculated once, Health Ministry Director-General Prof. Chezy Levy said on Thursday. Levy was referring to reports that the vaccine campaign will stop in ten days due to a shortage. In addition, the director-general addressed the issue of vaccines among teaching staff, as well as cases in which the entire population is invited to be vaccinated before the vaccines run out. When asked if the vaccine will run out in 10 days, Levy replied: "No, we will start a second round of vaccinations. There will be a two-week break, but we are working on renewing the shipping inventory because we started a little ahead of time."

Israel's Population Nears 10 Million Mark as Country Enters 2021; Israel will grow to 10 million people in the coming years, the Central Bureau of Statistics said on Thursday, on the eve of the new year of 2021. With a total of 151,000 new additions in 2020, Israel's general population stands at nearly 9.3 million, including 6,870,000 Jews (73.9%), 1,956,000 Arabs (21.1%) and 465,000 people (5%) belonging to other ethnic groups. In other words, Israel's population grew by 1.7% in 2020. Some 84% of that was due to natural population growth, subjected to the number of overall births and deaths, while 16% was due to international migration into the country. Data released by the Central Bureau of Statistics before have previously indicated that the country's population will reach 10 million by the end of 2024, 15 million by 2048, and 20 million by 2065.

Israel Officially Joins Regional Gas Forum; The cabinet authorized Israel's membership in the new East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) on Tuesday, after resolving a dispute between ministers on the matter. "The vision became a reality!" Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz tweeted, pointing out that he and his Egyptian counterpart Tarek al-Mulla initiated the EMGF. "The blessing of gas leads us to historic cooperation with Arab and European states that will only broaden, along with contracts to export natural gas to Jordan and Egypt worth tens of billions of dollars, and more to come," Steinitz added.

US to Label Products from Parts of Judea and Samaria as 'Made in Israel'; Products from parts of Judea and Samaria sold in the United States will be labeled "Made in Israel" as of December 24 as per regulation issued by US Customs. According to the US Customs regulation, "Goods produced in the territorial areas of the West Bank where Israel continues to exercise relevant authorities—specifically Area C under the Oslo Accords and the area known as 'H2' which is under Israeli administrative control consistent with the 1997 Hebron protocol—must be marked as [...] 'Made in Israel.'" On the other hand, "Goods produced in Areas A and B under the Oslo Accords, which are under the civilian oversight of the Palestinian Authority for these purposes, along with the area known as 'H1' from the 1997 Hebron Protocol, must be marked as [...] 'Made in West Bank.'"

1 Killed, 3 Injured in Alleged Israeli Airstrike Near Syria-Lebanon Border; Syrian air defenses responded to an alleged Israeli airstrike near the Syria-Lebanon border on Tuesday night, which has left one soldier dead and three others wounded, according to a Syrian military source, SANA reported. The source added that the strike targeted an air defense unit in the area. The open-source intelligence social media account Intelli Times tweeted earlier that the strike targeted a weapons stockpile intended for Hezbollah located along a weapons-smuggling route between Syria and Lebanon. A round-trip Fars Air Qeshm flight between Tehran and Damascus was reported by civilian flight tracking sites on Monday. The airline is suspected of being used to smuggle weapons from Iran to Syria and Lebanon.

Iranian Official: Foreign Forces Must Leave the Region; A top Iranian security official on Monday urged foreign forces to leave the region. "Security in the region can only be achieved through the removal of external factors" which are against the stability of the region, Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, was quoted as saying. He said that "the recent US forces' increased

mobility in the region is a show of defiance and fear." Earlier in the day, Saeed Khatibzadeh, a spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, said that Iran has sent messages to the United States to avoid any new "adventurism" in the region. "We have not been looking for a tension in the region and we are not," said Khatibzadeh, adding, "We will not hesitate to defend our country...We hope the wise in Washington will defuse tensions." Iran's warnings come ahead of the first anniversary of the elimination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, who was killed on January 3 in a US strike in the Iraqi capital.

Israelis Returning from Abroad Will No Longer Quarantine in Gov't Facilities; Authorities in Israel, as well as the West Bank and Gaza, are grappling with the current increase in coronavirus cases, which has prompted directives to curb its spread but also an effort to mitigate the economic consequences of the crisis. Israel has entered a third nationwide lockdown and has severely limited the entry of foreigners into the country as cases continue to spike. Israelis returning from abroad are obligated to go into quarantine for 14 days – or 10 days if they twice test negative for COVID-19. Israel currently has 40,929 active cases; 3,292 people have died. In the West Bank, there are 12,972 active cases and 1,120 deaths, and in Gaza 10,729 active cases and 340 deaths.

Quality of Life Index: Kfar Saba Leads, Jerusalem Ranked Worst; Kfar Saba, Ramat Gan, and Rehovot have the highest quality of life among large cities in Israel and the Tel Aviv district has the highest quality of life compared to other districts, according to the 2019 Quality of Life Index released by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) on Tuesday. Large cities are defined as cities with populations of over 100,000 people. Jerusalem, Bat Yam, and Ashdod were the lowest-ranked large cities in terms of quality of life, with Bat Yam and Ashdod ranking below average in 29 out of 42 life quality measurements each and Jerusalem ranking below average in 35 out of 42 life quality measurements. Kfar Saba was above average in 30 out of 42 life quality measurements, leading the country in terms of life expectancy (84.8 years), job positions that match employees' fields of study (74.5%), housing density (0.68%), satisfaction with the area of residence (95.3%), satisfaction with the housing (91.8%), satisfaction with the cleanliness of the area, satisfaction with economic situation (73.2%), Internet usage (93.8%) and the lowest rate of part-time workers who don't want to be part-time workers (0.4%).

12 Israeli Researchers Among World Top 50 in their Field, 333 in Top 2%; A dozen Israeli researchers from Tel Aviv University (TAU) were ranked among the world's top 50 in their disciplines, a new study from Stanford University has revealed. Some 333 TAU researchers were among the top 2%, with 155 of them included in the top 1% and 74 in the top 0.5%, said the study, making TAU's achievement even more impressive. "This is a cause for real national pride. TAU is known for its academic excellence and recognized as a leading interdisciplinary university," said the university's vice president for research Prof. Dan Peer, adding that it is ranked among the top 0.4% in the world in nanotechnology. "It is a great honor for us that 333 of our researchers rank among the top 2% of the world's best researchers," he said.

Israel to Become Natural Gas-Independent for the First Time; Israel will rely on its own natural gas supplies without needing external suppliers, starting in 2022, the Energy Ministry has said. Israel maintains an offshore emergency gas supply in a Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) boat off the coast of Hadera. Canceling that unit will save Israelis more than NIS 250 million per year in electricity costs. Israel operates two major natural gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea: Tamar, which has been pumping gas since 2013, and Leviathan, which began production last year. A third gas source, the Karish field, is expected to start producing gas during the coming year. At that point, the Energy Ministry maintains, there will be no need for external backups. The existing FSRU infrastructure that was built in 2012 will be maintained in case of future need, the ministry noted. The system allows liquefied natural gas to be imported and stored, and then converted back to a gas and delivered via sea link to Israel's natural gas transmission system.

Israel to be Soon Hit by a Destructive and Deadly Earthquake; A destructive earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale is expected to hit Israel and its surrounding neighbors in the coming years, causing hundreds of deaths, a new study led by researchers from Tel Aviv University has found. For the study, carried out under the auspices of the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program (ICDP) and published in the Science Advances journal, a rig was placed in 2010 in the center of the Dead Sea, which began drilling to a depth of hundreds of meters, enabling an analysis of some 220,000 years of Dead-Sea geology by studying the seabed. The researchers revealed a cyclical pattern since such devastating earthquakes seem to be hitting the region every 130 to 150 years – but there have been cases in history where the period of time between one earthquake and another was only a few decades long.

Jonathan Pollard, Former Jewish Spy, Lands in Israel 35 Years After Arrest; Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard made aliyah (immigrated) early Wednesday morning, landing in Israel 35 years after he was sentenced to life imprisonment for passing classified US information to an ally. He and his wife, Esther, arrived on the private jet of American billionaire Sheldon Adelson, immediately kissing the ground after coming down the steps of their plane. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu greeted the Pollards at Ben-Gurion Airport, handed Jonathan an identity card, and recited the sheheheyanu (you kept us alive) and matir asurim (freeing of prisoners) prayers with them. Netanyahu said he is glad that they are home.



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