

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 28, 2021 (15th Shvat, 5781)



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Government Approves Extension of Lockdown through End of January; The Cabinet unanimously approved Prime Minister Netanyahu's request to extend the current lockdown by a further ten days until the end of January. The government also approved aviation regulations that require every passenger entering Israel to have a coronavirus test 72 hours before taking off for Israel. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said in his opening remarks at the start of the meeting: "We must decide immediately on extending the lockdown. Many European countries are extending their lockdowns until March, even until April. If we open up now, it will cost us human lives."

Police to Set up Roughly 200 Roadblocks to Enforce COVID-19 Lockdown; Police operated roughly 200 roadblocks over the past weekend, especially on intercity roads, to deter Israelis from taking advantage of the sunny days and travel in violation of the COVID-19 lockdown, N12 reported on Friday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government recently extended the lockdown by another ten days. While essential workers are able to travel for work and political protests are allowed to continue, most Israelis are encouraged to remain indoors. In addition to the roadblocks, police means to send officers on patrols to prevent mass gatherings and claimed that the existing regulations will be enforced to the full measure of the law.

While COVID-19 Surges, Israel Has Zero Cases of Influenza, RSV; There are zero cases of influenza or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in Israel, according to Dr. Galia Barkai, director of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Unit at Sheba Medical Center. "It is not just that we have much less influenza, we don't see it at all," Barkai told The Jerusalem Post. "We have zero positive tests for influenza or RSV," a virus that causes severe respiratory distress in infants and children. Flu season in Israel usually starts in November. "This is really, really special," Barkai said. But she noted that it is also "understandable."

About Two Million Israelis Live Below the Poverty Line – Report; Bituach Leumi (National Insurance) published a short and overdue report from past data on poverty and inequality in Israel, due to a delay in the arrival of data from the Central Bureau of Statistics on which the report is usually based, given the general chaos in the last two years of political-governmental paralysis. Nevertheless, the data from this year's report also show that alongside the socio-economic crisis of the past year, the one that preceded it, 2019, was

characterized by a social deterioration without a functioning government in Israel (recall that the political crisis began with the dissolution of the 20th Knesset exactly two years ago). According to the report, 1,980,309 Israelis live below the poverty line, as of last year, according to Bituach Leumi. This is 23% of Israeli citizens and 31.7% of Israeli children. In the Arab sector, 702,832 are poor, with 346,397 of this population being children. In the Jewish population, the proportion of the poor is 17.7%, but in the ultra-Orthodox sector alone, it is 49%.

British Jews Feel More Welcome, Optimistic in 1st Major Poll After Corbyn Replacement; In an annual survey of British Jewish adults, two-thirds said Jews have a future in the United Kingdom — the highest level of confidence since 2015. And the portion of British Jews who said they felt “unwelcome” in the United Kingdom fell from 53% last year to 18% in 2020. The “Antisemitism Barometer” survey, conducted in November and December by King’s College London for the Campaign Against Antisemitism watchdog group, shows that British Jews are “back from the brink” following the replacement as the head of Labour of the far-left politician Jeremy Corbyn, whom many British Jews believe is anti-Semitic, the campaign said in a statement about the report published Sunday.

American Airlines to Launch New Direct New York-Israel Flights; American Airlines is set to launch a new direct flight between New York and Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport, the airline announced in a statement. The flights are set to begin on May 6 and will take place daily throughout the year between Ben-Gurion Airport and JFK in New York. Customers will be able to pre-order kosher meals on every flight, and kosher wine will be available for everyone regardless of which class their seat is in. WiFi will also be available on every flight. The flights are part of a new strategic partnership between American Airlines and JetBlue, creating the biggest flight network in the northeastern US as the companies rebuild following the COVID-19 pandemic.

City of Jerusalem Starts Light Project to Illuminate Historic Buildings; The City of Jerusalem has announced a new plan to illuminate historic buildings throughout the city, according to a press release Thursday. The plan, initiated by Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion, will illuminate prominent buildings, including the YMCA, the Tomb of David, Talita Kumi, the Great Synagogue, the Tower of David, Augusta Victoria, the Church of the Holy Trinity, the Monastery of San Salvador and the Monastery of the Valley of the Cross. The project is expected to be completed by June 2021 and will cost about NIS 6 million.

Arab Squatters Cause Damage to Archeological Site in Samaria; Near Hermesh in northern Samaria lies a registered archeological site called 'Khirbet Parsin', which preserves the biblical name 'Peresh' (descendants of Menashe) and the Talmudic name 'Kfar Parshai'. The remains of a large Iron Age settlement were discovered at this site, including a mikveh (ritual bath), burial caves, and complex underground systems from the Second Temple period, as well as impressive buildings from the Ottoman period. Sadly, these important finds have joined the list of antiquities sites suffering from damage and destruction. About two and a half months ago, an Arab began sheltering in the site and moved into one of the buildings with his family, carrying out construction work and damaging the ancient finds that bear testimony to thousands of years of history.

Joe Biden Sworn in as 46th President of The United States; Joe Biden called his inauguration day “America’s day” as he was sworn in as US president on Wednesday, saying the time had come to end the “uncivil war” and unite the country. Shortly before noon, under heavy security arrangements and with minimal in-person attendance due to the deadly global novel coronavirus pandemic, Biden took the oath of office “to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States,” becoming the 46th president of the US. Kamala Harris was sworn in as the 49th vice president. She is the first woman, the first black person, and the first South Asian person to serve in the role. “Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this:

bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our nation, and I ask every American to join me in this cause,” said Biden in his inaugural address.

Netanyahu Wishes Biden 'The Greatest Success'; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated incoming President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on his inauguration on Wednesday. Netanyahu referred to his "warm friendship going back many decades" with the new president. "I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the US-Israel alliance, to continue expanding peace between Israel and the Arab world and to confront common challenges, chief among them the threat posed by Iran," Netanyahu said. The prime minister wished Biden "the greatest success." "God bless the United States of America. God bless Israel," he added.

US-UAE Arms Deal Signed an Hour Before Biden Takes Office; The United Arab Emirates has signed an agreement with the United States to purchase 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 armed drones, people familiar with the situation told Reuters on Wednesday. Although the UAE and the United States were working to ink a deal before President Joseph Biden took office on Wednesday, the new president has said he will re-examine the agreements. The UAE, one of Washington's closest Middle East allies, has long expressed interest in acquiring the stealthy F-35 jets made by Lockheed Martin and was promised a chance to buy them in a side deal when it agreed to normalize relations with Israel last August, which was later finalized on September 15 as part of the Abraham Accords.

Biden Administration to Engage with Israel, Gulf States on Iran Policy; Anthony Blinken, US President Joe Biden's nominee for secretary of state, said that when it comes to Iran policy, it is vitally important that the incoming administration “engage on the takeoff, not the landing, with our allies and with our partners in the region, to include Israel and to include the Gulf countries.” Blinken, addressing a question from Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, was under scrutiny as part of his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday. “President-elect Biden is committed to the proposition that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon,” he said. “Iran with a nuclear weapon, or on a threshold of having one, would be Iran that is even more dangerous than it already is when it comes to all of the other malicious activities that it has engaged in, whether it is support for terrorism; whether it is fueling and feeding its proxies; whether it is destabilizing the region.”

Secretary of State-Designate: Jerusalem is Israel's Capital, the Embassy Will Remain There; Antony Blinken, US President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for Secretary of State, said at a confirmation hearing on Tuesday that the Biden administration would not move the US embassy from Jerusalem. Blinken, who spoke to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was asked by Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) if he believes that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and if the Biden administration will keep the US Embassy there. Blinken replied “yes” to both questions. Trump moved the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May of 2018, fulfilling his campaign promise to do so. The move angered the Palestinian Authority, which last year submitted a request to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for legal action against the US over the embassy relocation.

US Ambassador to Israel Bids Farewell with Trip to Western Wall; US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman completed his tenure Wednesday evening in a visit to the Western Wall at Jerusalem's Old City. He was greeted by Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, rabbi of the Western Wall, Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion, and Mordechai (Suli) Eliav, Director of the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. Eliav presented Friedman with the most recent archaeological findings from the Western Wall Tunnels. Friedman came full circle, as when he began his role as ambassador; landing in Israel in May of 2017, his first act was to pray at the Western Wall. During his time visiting the holy site, Friedman recited a Psalm of thanks in front of the Western Wall stones and spoke of the importance of Israel to him, particularly Jerusalem, in addition to his accomplishment while serving as ambassador.

Israel's Stormy Weather Reaches Mid-Week Peak; The wintery storm that began at the beginning of the week continued on Wednesday with an expected peak throughout the day, and rain, thunderstorms, and even hail in northern Israel expected. Mount Hermon saw snowfall already due to the storm, as did the northern Golan Heights, and other hilltops in the north and center of the country that are over 900 meters high are expected to see snowfall as well. There is still a concern over possible flooding throughout the day in the rivers in the south and east Israel, and temperatures throughout the Jewish state will be far colder than usual.

Ancient 'Christ, Born of Mary' Inscription Unearthed in Northern Israel; A 1,500-year-old Greek inscription bearing the name "Christ, born of Mary" was unearthed in northern Israel, the Antiquities Authority announced on Wednesday. The archaeologists discovered the inscription engraved at the entrance of an impressive building from the Byzantine or early Islamic period, featuring mosaic pavements decorated with a geometric design. The finding was unveiled in a salvage excavation directed by Tzachi Lang and Kojan Haku ahead of the construction of a road inside the village of Taiba in the Jezreel Valley.



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