

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update February 25, 2021 (13<sup>th</sup> Adar, 5781)***



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

***COVID-19 Pandemic Ebbs in Israel with Lowest Positive Rate in Almost 2 Months;*** Israel's coronavirus infection rate continued to drop Friday, with just 6.2 percent of tests coming back positive Thursday, or some 3,000 cases, the lowest figures seen since the beginning of January. The R-value, the reproduction rate of the virus measuring the average number of people each positive person infects, dropped to 0.79. Meanwhile, 40% of new serious cases are in the under 60 age groups, likely due to slower vaccine rollout among those under 60, according to the Coronavirus National Information and Knowledge Center, operating under the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate in cooperation with the Health Ministry. Currently, 89% of those over 50 are either vaccinated with at least the first Pfizer vaccine dose or recovered from the virus, the report said.

***Dead Sea Hotels Designated 'Green Islands,' Allowed to Reopen Sunday;*** The areas of Ein Bokek and Hamei Zohar in southern Israel were designated as "green islands" by the Ministerial Committee for Coronavirus on Friday afternoon. Accordingly, hotels and other resorts surrounding the Dead Sea will be allowed to reopen for visitors starting Sunday. Besides people who have been vaccinated, the hotels will allow people who present a negative coronavirus test from the past 72 hours to make reservations, as well. They will also accept people with proof that they already had coronavirus and healed.

***Jerusalem Reopens Culture with Concert Using Green Passport System;*** The Jerusalem Municipality will reopen cultural events in the city with a concert by singer Miri Mesika on Monday at 8:30 p.m., as the cultural world in Israel returns to operation after months of being shut down by coronavirus restrictions. Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion will be present at the event that will take place at the Jerusalem Pais Cultural and Arts Hall in Pisgat Ze'ev. The hall was inaugurated in June, amid strict coronavirus regulations. This is the first cultural event to take place in the city after the third lockdown and the first to use the green passport system. In order to enter the concert, audience members will need to present a green passport, showing that they were either vaccinated, recovered from the coronavirus, or underwent a negative coronavirus test within 48 hours of the event.

***In Signal to Iran, Israel, US Begin Developing Arrow-4 Missile Defense System;*** In the face of Iran's continued development of long-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, the Defense Ministry announced on Thursday that it has started developing, alongside the US Missile Defense Agency, a new generation of the advanced Arrow missile defense system. The new system known as the Arrow-4 will become a major part of Israel's multilayered missile defense architecture. The Arrow-3 currently serves as the upper layer of Israel's multi-tier missile defense array, designed to protect Israel from long-range missiles particularly those produced in Iran.

***US Threatens to Ban Israeli Planes Landing in America;*** If American planes are not allowed to operate emergency flights to Israel, Israeli planes will not be allowed to land in the US. The Biden administration accused Israel of violating the freedoms of the air and creating a crisis with the new administration following the Israeli border closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. The administration then demanded that planes from the US be allowed to land in Israel. A source in the Foreign Ministry denied the report and said that they were not aware of any threats.

***In Israel, Muslim Nurse Says Last Prayer with Jewish Patient;*** A religious Jew hospitalized with coronavirus at Ha'emek Medical Center in northern Israel said his final prayers with the help of a Muslim nurse by his side. The patient had been waiting for his family to arrive at his side, but because of the snowstorm, his family was trapped in traffic jams. Maheer Ibrahim, the head nurse in Ha'emek's coronavirus ward, decided to take the initiative and read the "Shema Yisrael" prayer together with the patient, helping him through his last moments. Ibrahim noted, "It may sound touching, but I thought that this was what needed to be done for him." He added: "His daughter called me the day after his death and said that my act was the only thing that gave her comfort... It warmed my heart to know that it did good for her," he concluded, noting that he had seen tears in her eyes after he told her of the event. "We need to be there as people before we're there as healthcare providers."

***Equatorial Guinea to Relocate Embassy to Jerusalem;*** Equatorial Guinea plans to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the first such pledge of its kind under the new administration of US President Joe Biden. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke about the matter with Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo on Friday, after which his office put out an announcement on the matter. Netanyahu said he welcomed this trend in which countries relocate their embassies to Jerusalem, but he noted in particular that this pledge was part of Israel's growing ties with Africa.

***Google Gives Israeli Non-Profit Lender \$1M Impact Loan to Help Small Businesses;*** Not-for-profit lender The Ogen Group has received a landmark "impact loan" of \$1M from Google towards Ogen's low-interest loans to small businesses throughout Israel. Google's funds will provide a vital injection of capital to help underserved small business owners launch, rebuild, or expand their activities in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Google is the first international corporate impact investor to support Ogen in this way. The announcement, made public by Google on February 17, follows a commitment made in 2020 to invest \$200 million in NGOs and financial institutions around the world to help provide small businesses with access to capital. In 2020, Ogen lent almost \$50 million to small businesses, low-income households and nonprofits – \$20M of which was directed to small businesses. Ogen intends to lend an additional \$30M to small businesses in 2021.

***Israeli Study Finds 94 Percent Drop in Symptomatic COVID-19 Cases with Pfizer Vaccine;*** Israel's largest healthcare provider on Sunday reported a 94% drop in symptomatic COVID-19 infections among 600,000 people who received two doses of Pfizer's vaccine in the country's biggest study to date. Health maintenance organization (HMO) Clalit, which covers more than half of all Israelis, said the same group was also 92% less likely to develop severe illness from the virus. The comparison was against a group of the same size, with matching medical histories, who had not received the vaccine. "It shows unequivocally that Pfizer's

coronavirus vaccine is extremely effective in the real world a week after the second dose, just as it was found to be in the clinical study," said Ran Balicer, Clalit's chief innovation officer.

***Covid in Israel: Purim Only Celebrated with Immediate Family;*** A specific outline for the upcoming festival of Purim was approved by the coronavirus cabinet on Monday. The holiday falls on Friday, February 26 – except in Jerusalem where it falls the following Sunday. Israelis will be required to hold the traditional holiday meal with nuclear family members. The Health Ministry stated that it will organize a PR campaign to persuade people to host only family members who are fully vaccinated or have recovered from the virus – those eligible for the green passport. Moreover, starting from Saturday synagogues will be allowed to function at 50% of their capacity for green passport holders or alternatively with ten worshippers indoors and 20 outdoors.

***Pandemic-Battered Israeli Economy Contracts 2.4% in 2020;*** The Israeli economy shrank by 2.4 percent in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics Tuesday showed. The figures represent the first contraction of the economy over a year since a marginal drop in 2002, as increased unemployment and a likely rise in insolvencies after the latest national lockdown weighs on economic recovery. But the data is nonetheless better than expected, with economic officials having predicted a contraction of at least 3.3%-4.6%. And it was far better than the 5.5% average contraction in OECD countries last year.

***Iran Threatens to End Some Nuclear Inspections Next Week;*** Iran on Monday reiterated its warning that it will halt certain nuclear inspections if other parties to the 2015 deal limiting the country's atomic program "fail to meet their obligations" by February 21. The Iranian foreign ministry said the move would see Iran end its adherence to the "additional protocol" of the nuclear accord, which prescribes intrusive inspections of its nuclear facilities. "All these measures will be reversible, provided the other parties adhere to their obligations," ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

***Blinken Says for Iran, 'The Path to Diplomacy is Open';*** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that the US was open to diplomacy with Iran and voiced support for the 2015 deal Iran signed with world powers while asserting that it must not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. In an interview with National Public Radio, Blinken said that for Iran, "the path to diplomacy is open." He reiterated the US stance that Iran must first return to compliance with the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and said that "Right now, Iran is still a ways away from being in compliance, so we'll have to see what it does." The Biden administration has repeatedly said it will return to the deal if Iran first returns to its terms, but Iran has said the US must first lift sanctions before talks resume, putting the two sides at a stalemate for now.

***Iran Could Deploy 200 Missiles in Iraq to Attack Israel;*** With tensions rising with Iran, Israel is concerned that the Islamic Republic could deploy up to 200 long-range missiles in Iraq that could be used to attack the Jewish state. Iran is already believed to have hundreds of missiles that can reach Israel. While the chances of a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran are deemed low, heightened tensions in the North amid the possibility of a confrontation in Syria or Lebanon could also draw Iran to retaliate. The rationale for Iran to deploy missiles in Iraq and launch them from there against Israel would be to try and prevent a direct IDF retaliation against targets within Iranian territory.

***IAI Introduces New Electro-Optical High-Resolution Surveillance System;*** Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) introduced on Wednesday a new electro-optical long-range surveillance system – the MegaPOP. The new payload is designed for land applications, such as marine or land border control, surveillance of sensitive facilities, or any other operational mission that requires especially lengthy surveillance performance, as well as high-definition vision capabilities with a system that uses several sensors

simultaneously, the company said in a statement. MegaPOP simultaneously tapes a video on a thermal/HD channel with night vision, a color daylight HD channel, and an innovative HD SWIR technology channel. The continuous zoom capability provides the end-user with high-quality output even under highly challenging visual conditions, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) said. The system can be installed on various platforms – from poles for sea vessels to land vehicles and fences.

***Israel Named a Top 10 Most Innovative Country (Again);*** Israel was ranked seventh among the world's 60 most innovative economies, according to the Bloomberg Innovation Index published last week. The Jewish state went down one spot from its standing in 2020 and two places from 2019, where it came in fifth place. South Korea was ranked as the world's most innovative country and took the title from Germany, which fell to fourth place this year. The East Asian nation has taken the top spot on the index for seven of the nine years that it's been published. Following South Korea were Singapore and Switzerland, which each moved up one spot, and were ranked second and third, respectively. Sweden was ranked fifth, followed by Denmark and then Israel.



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