

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update March 25, 2021 (12th Nisan, 5781)



For the Yachad Report Newsletter For March 2021

Coronavirus: Knesset Okays Electronic Bracelet for Returnees from Abroad; All Israelis returning from abroad can be required to wear an electronic bracelet to ensure that they isolate at home, or be quarantined in a hotel, according to a bill approved by the Knesset on Wednesday. The legislation gave the government authorization to force those who enter the country from abroad or from specific countries to choose between the two options, except for children under 14 and other special humanitarian cases. All those currently entering the country are required to isolate unless they present a vaccination or a recovery certificate issued by the Israeli Health Ministry. Those who were inoculated or who recovered abroad can be released from the quarantine if they undergo a serological test to prove their level of antibodies.

High Court Rules Skies to Open for Returning Israelis; The High Court of Justice declared as unconstitutional on Wednesday the government's limit of 3,000 people per day to enter Ben-Gurion Airport, which was imposed to minimize coronavirus transmission. The High Court ruled that the restriction must end on Saturday, three days before the elections on Tuesday. Thousands of Israelis have been unable to return to the country since the restrictions were imposed in late January. The restrictions also impacted Israelis wanting to return home to vote. Israel's coronavirus commissioner Prof. Nachman Ash criticized the High Court's ruling lifting the restrictions to allow Israelis to return to vote, saying it will increase COVID-19 morbidity rates and heighten the risk from dangerous variants of the virus.

Iran to Conduct Initial Testing of Redesigned Arak Nuclear Reactor; Iran will "cold test" its revamped Arak nuclear reactor as a prelude to its full inauguration later in the year, the country's Atomic Energy Organization said on Friday, according to a report. Cold testing of reactors usually includes the initial startup of fluid systems and support systems. The nuclear agency spokesperson Behrouz Kamalvandi said it will take place sometime early in the Iranian new year, which begins Sunday, the report said. While Iran had agreed to shut down the reactor at the Arak facility under the 2015 deal, Tehran says it has been working on redesigning it for medical and agricultural use.

Iran Built New Ballistic Missile Launch Positions; The Iranian Khorgo underground ballistic missile site is almost operational after new launching positions were constructed, satellite images show. Images taken by Maxar Technologies reveal four holes dug into the side of a mountain. Three of the shafts are hardened vertical launch positions in their final construction phase, according to a separate analysis done by the civilian intelligence group Intel Lab. "Considering the geographic location as well as the existing topography, once this complex reaches full operational capability, it will not be an easy task to neutralize it by conventional means," said Chief Intel Lab Analyst Itay Bar-Lev.

Iceland Recognizes Judaism as an Official State Religion; Iceland has finally recognized Judaism as a religion. The process took over a year and, despite being home to a small Jewish community, Iceland has never before acknowledged the religion. Recognition was finally awarded on March 8. The country has only one rabbi, Avi Feldman, who initiated the Chabad Lubavitch of Iceland in 2018. Feldman and the community members have worked hard to gain Iceland's formal approval of their presence. "For Iceland to formally recognize the world's oldest religion is in itself very significant," Feldman explained. The decision is so significant because it allows Jews to pay taxes towards their own religious institutions. Jewish marriages, baby-naming, and funerals will also be accepted by civil law.

Palestinian TV Broadcasts 1964 PLO Charter Calling for Israel's Destruction; Palestinian Authority television allegedly repeatedly broadcasted an educational series in early March highlighting the outdated 1964 Palestine Liberation Organization Charter that explicitly calls for the destruction of Israel, as reported by Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) on Wednesday. The broadcast did not make any mention of important amendments made in 1993 and 1995 that recognized Jewish connections to the land, in addition to forming the basis of acceptance of a two-state solution. Rather, the television broadcast included a slide referring to Clause 16 of the charter, which calls for "the liberation of Palestine, from an international perspective, [as] a defensive operation necessitated by self-defense, as determined by the UN Charter."

Dead Sea Scroll Discovery Brings Tantalizing Prospect of More Yet to be Found; On a day that saw the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) unveil the first Bible scroll fragments found in decades and numerous other dazzling artifacts from the "Cave of Horror" above the Dead Sea — including a huge 10,500-year-old complete woven basket, the oldest in the world — perhaps the most extraordinary news is that there are another 20 promising caves, holding untold potential treasures, that have yet to be excavated. That means the dozens of fragments shown to the public on Tuesday could mark the beginning of an exciting new era of discovery, 60 years after the last major scroll finds. Since 2017, the IAA has spearheaded an ambitious survey of some 500 caves in the Judean Desert in an unprecedentedly wide-ranging and physically daring operation involving rappelling down rockfaces and setting up work camps on sheer cliffs.

Oldest Woven Basket in the World Found in Israel, Dates Back 10,000 Years; A perfectly preserved large woven basket dating back some 10,500 years was unearthed in the Judean Desert, the Antiquities Authority announced Tuesday. Experts believe the artifact is probably the oldest of its kind ever uncovered. It was excavated in a Judean Desert cave by the IAA in cooperation with the Civil Administration's Archaeology Department. "This is the most exciting discovery that I have encountered in my life," Dr. Haim Cohen said during a press briefing at the IAA lab in Jerusalem. Materials from four different parts of the basket were analyzed to date it. The researchers concluded that the object was manufactured around 10,500 years ago during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period.

Israel Okays Flights from All Destinations, Coronavirus Passenger Cap Stays; Starting Tuesday, flights to Israel will be allowed from all destinations. The government made the decision during a late-night meeting on Sunday. Despite effectively opening Israel to the world, the limit of 3,000 passengers entering the country per day will remain. Under the current airport regulations, valid until March 20, flights could be

authorized only from a limited set of cities, including New York, Paris, and Frankfurt. The change is expected to facilitate the return of Israelis abroad who wish to vote in the upcoming March 23 election. The ministers also considered increasing the cap on daily returnees but decided against it due to the opposition of healthcare officials.

Restaurants Fully Booked as Israelis Flock Back After Year of Restrictions; Israelis have flocked back to restaurants, bars, and cafes in the days since they were allowed to reopen, with many booked up and credit card companies noting a spike in spending on Friday. Since reopening Sunday, restaurants and cafes have seen a torrent of customers, with many would-be diners unable to make reservations as tables at many eateries are all booked days in advance, according to the Kan public broadcaster. Some restaurants had a 10-day waiting list, the report said. "It's crazy," said Haggai, a co-owner of Tel Aviv's Goocha restaurant. "From the start of the week, every day has been packed to weekend levels."

Shin Bet COVID Tracing Program Comes to an End; As of last night at midnight, a Supreme Court ruling brought to an end the GSS initiative to track those defying public health guidelines by cellular activity. About two weeks ago, the Supreme Court judges ruled that the General Security Service must stop such espionage on patients themselves. The ruling allowed a limited exception in the case of individuals who do not cooperate with Health Ministry epidemiological investigations. Among other things, the state comptroller found the cellular tracking to be less effective than the investigations it was supposed to assist, and that the resolution allowing such an invasion of the privacy of patients or those who may have come into contact with them was never brought to a vote for governmental approval.

UK Sanctions Allies of Syrian President Assad; Britain on Monday announced sanctions on six allies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, including his foreign minister and close advisers. "The Assad regime has subjected the Syrian people to a decade of brutality for the temerity of demanding peaceful reform," Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said. Those sanctioned include Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad, Assad adviser Luna al-Shibl, financier Yassar Ibrahim, businessman Muhammad Bara' Al-Qatirji, Republican Guard commander Malik Aliaa and Army Major Zaid Salah.

Israel's Three Defense Giants Lead World in Arms Industry; International arms transfers are going strong in the Middle East, even if they are leveling off in other regions, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, a group that monitors arms transfers. SIPRI says its Arms Transfer Database is the only public resource that provides consistent information and estimates on all international transfers of major arms. "International transfers of major arms stayed at the same level between 2011-15 and 2016-20," it said in a report on Monday. "Substantial increases in transfers by three of the top five arms exporters – the USA, France, and Germany – were largely offset by declining Russian and Chinese arms exports." Middle Eastern arms imports increased 25%. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt were leaders in the last four years, with Doha increasing its purchases by a whopping 361%, the report said.

Iron Dome Shoots Down Drones, Rocket Barrage Simultaneously in Hi-Tech Leap; After significant upgrades, Israel's famed Iron Dome missile defense system successfully and simultaneously intercepted a barrage of rockets and drones in a recent round of tests. The news comes as the IDF warns of a possible new confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon where the Iranian-backed terrorist group is constantly working to improve its missile and drone capabilities. The tests were completed on Tuesday by the Defense Ministry and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, demonstrating a significant upgrade of Iron Dome's technological capabilities. The Iron Dome was tested in a range of complex scenarios and successfully intercepted and destroyed targets simulating existing and emerging threats, including the simultaneous interception of multiple drones as well as a salvo of rockets and missiles.

'Iron Sting': Israel Completes Testing of 'Groundbreaking' Laser-Guided Mortar; A new laser-guided mortar completed trials and will bring greater firepower to smaller units while reducing collateral damage to noncombatants due to its high levels of accuracy, the Defense Ministry said in a statement Sunday. The Iron Sting 120mm mortar was developed by the ministry along with the Israel Defense Forces and Elbit Systems and, following the successful completion of the tests in the south of the country, is set to be delivered to the army. Defense Minister Benny Gantz said in the statement that Israeli industry provides the IDF with technology "that changes the combat arena and gives us more lethal, accurate, and effective means."

'Israel Will Be Hit By 2,000 Missiles a Day in Future War' - IDF General; Israel will come under an onslaught of 2,000 rockets and missiles every day during a future war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, OC Home Front Command Maj.-Gen. Uri Gordin warned on Monday. Speaking at the B'Sheva Conference in Jerusalem, Gordin said that some 2,000 rockets and missiles will be fired at Israel every day and will challenge Israel's military and civil defense capabilities. "Our enemies on the different fronts need to know that if needed, we will activate a powerful military that has never been seen before," Gordin said. He added that Israel's enemies should know that the Israeli home front is resilient and has proven itself in the past.



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