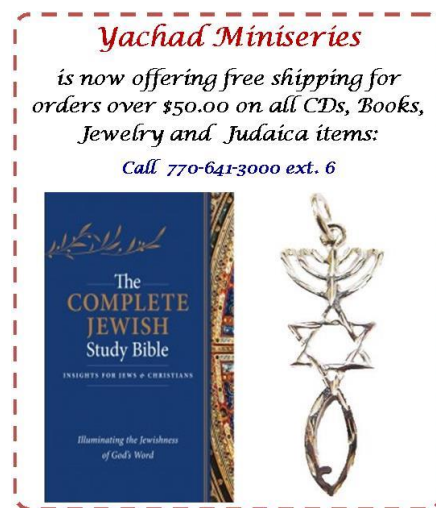


Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update September 2, 2021 (25th Elul, 5781)



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Iran is Two Months from Nuclear Bomb; Tehran is two months away from nuclear weapons capacity, warned Defense Minister Benny Gantz as he called for the international community to create a new prevention plan that did not involve reviving the 2015 Iran deal. “Iran is only two months away from acquiring the materials necessary for a nuclear weapon,” Gantz told a gathering of 60 ambassadors in Tel Aviv. He spoke just one day before Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is scheduled to present such an alternative plan to US President Joe Biden at the White House on Thursday. Biden has been in favor of reviving the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action designed to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions, which the US exited in 2018. Indirect talks brokered by the European Union have faltered and have allowed for Tehran to ramp up its uranium enrichment needed to produce nuclear weapons. “We do not know if the Iranian regime will be willing to sign an agreement and come back to the negotiation table – and the international community must build a viable ‘Plan B’ in order to stop Iran in its tracks toward a nuclear weapon,” Gantz said. The preferred option, he said, is a diplomatic one. “At the end of the day, the goal is to reach a ‘longer, stronger and broader agreement than the previous one,” Gantz said. An “Iranian nuclear program could incite an arms race in the region and the entire world.” Nevertheless, he hinted at military action if needed. “The State of Israel has the means to act and will not hesitate to do so – I do not rule out the possibility that Israel will have to take action in the future in order to prevent a nuclear Iran,” Gantz said.

Israel is Accelerating Operational Plans to Take Action Against Iran; Israel’s military is accelerating its operational plans against Iran due to the progress of the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi has warned. “The progress of the Iranian nuclear program has led the IDF to accelerate its operational plans and the recently approved defense budget is earmarked for that,” he said. With no diplomatic options likely to push Tehran to stop its nuclear program, Israel’s military believes that the Islamic Republic needs to be aware that should it continue with its program, it will face harsher sanctions and a true military option to stop it. The NIS 58 billion defense budget set for the IDF in the coming year is expected to allow the Israeli military to focus on the threats posed by Iran across the region, with some NIS 3.5b. designated specifically for this. Israel considers Iran’s nuclear program as its No. 1 concern, and though Iran has consistently denied seeking to build a nuclear bomb, tensions have risen as the West seeks to resume talks on reviving the deal to curb Tehran’s nuclear program.

According to UN, Taliban Reliant on Illegal Drug Trafficking for Financing as Production Booms;

As the Taliban secures its grip on Afghanistan, the United Nations is warning that the militant group is reliant on drug trafficking as one of its primary sources of financing, as opium poppy production has increased significantly. In a June report to the Security Council, U.N. officials said the issue of production of poppy-based drugs and methamphetamine was "unaddressed" by the Afghan peace process. "This remains the Taliban's largest single source of income," the report says. "It also has a destabilizing and corrupting effect within Afghanistan and contributes significantly to the narcotics challenges facing the wider international community." The report also found that there was a decline in narcotics seizures by the Afghan government in 2020, which was attributed in part to the gradual expansion of Taliban-controlled territory — where the militant group was reliant on it as one of its sources of funding. "The primary sources of Taliban financing remain criminal activities, including drug trafficking and opium poppy production, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, mineral exploitation, and revenues from tax collection in areas under Taliban control or influence," the report says. In the last months, the Taliban's reach has grown dramatically — with the militant group sweeping through the country in recent days ahead of the U.S. withdrawal on Aug. 31. It has led to chaos in Kabul as Americans and Afghan allies struggle to get on planes to flee the country. The U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that taxes collected from drug farmers alone were estimated to be around \$14.5 million, while another \$46-98 million comes in from heroin manufacturing and trafficking.

Finance Minister Says No More Restrictions, Let the Economy Work; Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman spoke to reporters Wednesday, August 25, and suggested that Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz stop pushing for further restrictions that would harm Israel's economy. "The coefficient of infection is going down, so we need to stop talking about the new restrictions and let the economy work," Liberman said, expressing opposition to the business owners' demand for compensation for the green pass restrictions: "Go to Superland and restaurants - everything is full." Liberman also addressed the crisis in public hospitals, explaining that "the Finance Ministry cannot transfer funds directly to the hospitals but to the Health Ministry. Then begins a story of tests of who is eligible - we do not just transfer money when it comes to hundreds of millions [of shekels]. Today the CEO and Chief of Staff [of the Finance Ministry] were with the Health Minister in order to summarize the issue and transfer funds immediately in the form of an advance payment. I hope that the way will be found to transfer advances immediately to the public hospitals."

Generals to Bennett: Tell Biden the Oslo Era is Over; A group of senior Israeli security officers and reservists called on Prime Minister Naftali Bennett Wednesday, August 25, to press the Biden administration to rethink its positions vis-à-vis the Iran nuclear deal and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. In an open letter to Bennett released by Israel's Defense and Security Forum: HaBithonistim, a group representing some 2,400 senior officers, commanders, retired soldiers, and reservists, the officers called on Bennett to rethink Israel's reliance on American hegemony in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The letter was released a day before Prime Minister Bennett is set to meet with President Joe Biden, his first meeting with the president since Bennett took office earlier this year. "In the last few weeks there has been a significant shift in the Middle East geopolitical landscape with deep ranging implications and long-term consequences for Israel," the officers wrote. "The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the swift dominance of the Taliban have highlighted the failures of current approaches to diplomacy and military strategy. Absent a new way of thinking, these radical, terrorist factions will only grow and bolster the extremists within the Palestinian and Israeli Arabs as well as the Iranian people." The officers called on Bennett to reject any overtures from the Biden administration to restart final status agreements with the Palestinian Authority on the basis of the Oslo process formula and to work to convince the White House that the approach taken by previous administrations is no longer workable. "Israel and the U.S. must stop the dated monolithic approach to the Middle East, and more particularly to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Withdrawal and retreat. Those are the stale options that career politicians have been espousing since 1967. They allow for factions like the Taliban to seize control and brutalize their people. Every place we retreat from becomes a hotbed of terror. It

happened in Gaza with Hamas and it happened in Afghanistan with the Taliban.” “When Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin entered into the Oslo accords, the world was a very different place.” “We cannot just pick up where Oslo left off. In the 1990s the Arab world was in a state of crisis, especially with the defeat of Iraq, the US was an unparalleled superpower, and the USSR collapsed. And despite the US dominance and interest in the Middle East during those years, all attempts at an effective brokered deal failed.” The letter was signed by Major General (res.) Gershon HaCohen, Major General (res.) Jerry Gershon, Brigadier General (res.) Amir Avivi, Colonel (res.) Itzik Ronen, and Lieutenant Colonel (res.) Yaron Buskila.

Russia Hosts Jordan’s King, Hints at UAE Deal; King Abdullah II of Jordan met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday. They discussed the situation in Syria and Afghanistan, according to Russian media reports. “Of course, we hope for an exchange of views on the most pressing matters...They are the normalization of the situation in Syria and the current escalation in Afghanistan,” Putin said. These comments come during an important military event in Russia and Russian outreach to the UAE, as well as S-400 deliveries to India and Russian-Iran ties which are growing. It is part of Russia’s interest in expanding its role in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. Russia has been talking to Turkey about coordinating relations with the Taliban, and Russia may hold a joint military drill with China and Iran later this year or in 2022, Iran’s Tasnim media said. The Russian ambassador announced that the exercises of the three countries will focus on maritime security and the fight against piracy, Iran’s media reported. After the Iran discussions, Russia wants to expand its relations with Jordan. The meeting with the king is part of that work. “Putin stressed that despite the coronavirus pandemic relations between Russia and Jordan are developing in all areas, including trade and economic ties and political dialogue. He noted that the intergovernmental commission, chaired by Russian Agriculture Minister Dmitry Patrushev, is working actively,” Tass media said in Moscow. “We are also working jointly to combat the pandemic and overcome its impacts,” Putin said. The Russian leader and the king of Jordan examined military hardware during a walk after the meeting. The Russian president explained that these weapons are both supplied to the Russian army and exported. In his words, “direct contacts with colleagues from the armed forces of foreign countries help build up trust.” Russia and China want to expand their navies to present a peer-to-peer challenge to the US. Russia’s navy, while an important historic arm of the Russian military, has had many setbacks and needs modernization. “We will continue ramping up Russia’s navy potential, perfect the basing system and navy infrastructure, fit the most advanced weaponry and equipment on ships, train difficult tasks at drills and in long-distance voyages as well as display the Russian flag in strategically important regions of the world’s oceans,” Putin said. The navy is important because Russia uses it to project power in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Israeli-Arab Swimmer Iyad Shalabi Wins Gold Medal in Paralympics; Israeli-Arab swimmer Iyad Shalabi picked up the gold medal in the 100-meter backstroke on the first day of the Paralympic Games on Wednesday, finishing in 2 minutes, and 28.4 seconds. Shalabi, 34, who grew up Muslim in Shfaram, was born deaf and was later paralyzed in his lower body following an accident at the age of 13. This is the first medal ever for an Israeli-Arab in an Olympic or Paralympic setting, according to KAN, the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation. Shalabi’s coach, Yaakov Benenson, responded to the win with tears. “I am very excited and happy that he won the gold medal. This is his fourth Olympics. He always finished in fourth place, but he kept going.” Iyad’s father, Yusuf Shalabi, who accompanied his son to Tokyo, stated in an interview, “My heart was pounding. When he overtook his competitor, I cried. He was constantly training. Six years, every day he trains. It’s like a dream.”

Gold Byzantine Coin Depicting Crucifixion Discovered Near Tel Aviv; An archaeological dig in Ramat HaSharon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, uncovered some remarkable finds including a wine press with an ornate mosaic floor and a Byzantine gold coin depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. “The excavation unearthed evidence of agricultural-industrial activity at the site during the Byzantine period – about 1,500 years ago. Among other finds, we discovered a large winepress paved with a mosaic as well as plastered installations and

the foundations of a large structure that may have been used as a warehouse or even a farmstead,” explained Dr. Yoav Arbel, Director of the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The gold coin was believed to be minted in 638 or 639 AD by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius who is depicted on one side of the coin with his two sons. The flip side of the coin depicts the crucifixion of Jesus. An inscription is scratched into the face of the coin, likely the name of the coin’s owner, onto its surface in Greek and possibly Arabic, according to Robert Kool, a coin expert with the IAA. “The coin encapsulates fascinating data on the decline of Byzantine rule in the country and contemporary historical events, such as the Persian invasion and the emergence of Islam, and provides information on Christian and pagan symbolism and the local population who lived here,” says Kool in the statement.

ISIS Claims Responsibility for Suicide Bombings in Kabul; At least 72 Afghans and 13 US servicemen have been killed in a suicide bombing carried out by ISIS at the Kabul airport, US officials confirmed Thursday, August 26, night. The terror group ISIS-K has claimed responsibility for the deadly double attack. President Joe Biden, his voice breaking with emotion, vowed on Thursday the United States would hunt down those responsible for twin explosions at the Kabul airport in Afghanistan and said he asked the Pentagon to develop plans to strike back at them. Biden spoke hours after the blasts killed at least a dozen American troops and scores of civilians, the worst day of casualties for US forces there in a decade. "We will not forgive, we will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," Biden said in remarks at the White House. "I have also ordered my commanders to develop operational plans to strike ISIS-K assets, leadership, and facilities. We will respond with force and precision at our time, at the place we choose and the moment of our choosing," Biden said. Biden appeared to be fighting back tears and his voice cracked with emotion as he talked about the American "heroes" who died. "It's been a tough day," he said. The president said he had told the US military that he would grant additional force if they needed it: "Whatever they need, if they need additional force, I will grant it." CENTCOM Chief Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. said that while saddened by the deaths, the US will continue conducting evacuations from Kabul. "ISIS will not deter the US from carrying out the mission." He estimated that some 1,000 Americans are still in Afghanistan. Furthermore, McKenzie expressed that he expects ISIS attacks to continue.

Bennett-Biden Meeting Moved to Friday after Kabul Terrorist Attack; Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's meeting with US President Joe Biden was postponed to Friday, August 27, in light of the suicide bombings in Afghanistan that killed at least 12 US Marines and soldiers. “The President’s bilateral meeting with H.E. Naftali Bennett, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, has been rescheduled for tomorrow,” the White House announced Thursday evening. The bombing took place an hour before the leaders were set to meet for the first time in the White House. Israeli journalists, who had already gathered in the Brady Press Room, were asked to leave the White House. Following the delay, Bennett and his delegation remained in Washington until after Shabbat, departing on Saturday night or Sunday. Sunday’s cabinet meeting in Jerusalem was postponed. Bennett’s visit to Washington was finalized days after the Afghanistan pullout crisis began. His staff and Biden administration officials said the timing was important due to developments on the Iranian nuclear front. However, the crisis in Kabul overshadowed the trip from its start on Tuesday.

With Rise of Taliban, US-Israel Alliance More Critical than Ever; US Jewish organizations were following closely as the drama was unfolding. Even before Thursday’s terror attack, it was already clear that the Afghanistan withdrawal will overshadow the meeting between US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. But the deadly attack near the Kabul airport made it clear that the administration’s attention is currently elsewhere, as the President and his close staff monitored the developments from the situation room, postponing the meeting to a later timing. William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, told The Jerusalem Post that “as we watch the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the alliance and partnership between the United States and the State of Israel is more critical than ever.” Speaking about the meeting, Daroff said that he expected the two new administrations “to make

significant progress on issues of mutual and fundamental importance to all Americans and Israelis during Prime Minister Bennett's first US trip to Washington since assuming office — the first opportunity for the two leaders to meet face-to-face during their many years in public service.” “These priorities include sharing knowledge and resources to counter the COVID-19 virus and its variants, how best to deter Iranian aggression and hold its nuclear program accountable and in check, and defending and promoting Israel's security, peace, and stability,” he said. Dan Mariaschin, CEO of B'nai B'rith International, told the Post that with the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban and all of the strategic uncertainty that it has unleashed, “events would hopefully dictate a further closing of the ranks between Washington and Jerusalem on Iran and the Palestinian issue.” “This is clearly no time for risk-taking with Iran, including sanctions relief, especially given the election of Ebrahim Raisi, Tehran's ratcheting up enrichment and other aspects of its nuclear program, and its malign behavior throughout the region,” said Mariaschin.

Iran a Threat to Israel but US is Committed to Israel Security; The meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Bennett and US President Biden on Friday was a “chance for the Prime Minister to hear directly from the President his ironclad commitment to Israel's security and self-defense, and supporting Israel's defense needs,” a senior Biden administration official told reporters ahead of the meeting. I'm often asked, “Are we de-prioritizing the Middle East and our friends in the Middle East?” And nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, in the Biden administration, we are not pursuing, unachievable goals,” the official continued. “We're not trying to transform the Middle East,” the official argued. “We're not trying to overthrow regimes. We are pursuing a very steady course, centered on achievable aims; alignment of ends and means; and, first and foremost, support to our partners, and, of course, Israel being second to none.” Speaking about Iran, the official said that “Iran will be a big topic of discussion because Iran is a threat to Israel, and we are 100 percent committed to the security of Israel - no ifs, ands, or buts.” “We, of course, committed to a diplomatic path,” the official noted. “We think that is the best way to put a ceiling on the program and roll back the gains that Iran has made over recent years on the nuclear side.” The official also noted, however, that “if that doesn't work, there are other avenues to pursue.”

Iran Gov't Appoints 2 Suspected in 1994 Bombing of Buenos Aires Jewish Center; Iran's new government includes two men who have been implicated in the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. On Wednesday, August 25, the parliament approved Ahmad Vahidi as interior minister and Mohsen Rezaei as vice president of economic affairs among the 19 nominations by President Ebrahim Raisi. In its investigation of the bombing, which also injured 300, Argentina has said Vahidi and Rezaei played key roles. Both are listed by Interpol with red alerts, meaning they are wanted for arrest internationally. Since 2010, Vahidi has been the subject of sanctions by the United States, which seek to freeze any assets he may have under U.S. jurisdiction. He headed the Quds Force, the paramilitary arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard, at the time of the 1994 attack, and was Iran's Defense Minister between 2009 and 2013. Jewish institutions in Argentina and Israel, as well as the Argentine government, criticized the Vahidi nomination. “This decision once again exposes the Iranian government's contempt for Argentine Justice and the victims of terrorism,” DAIA, the Argentine Jewish umbrella, said when Vahidi was nominated for the cabinet position two weeks ago.

Iran's Raisi Names Wanted Mass Murderer as VP for Economics; The Islamic Republic of Iran's newly appointed vice president for economic affairs minister Mohsen Rezaei is wanted by the International Criminal Police Organization for the 1994 mass murder of 85 Argentinians at the Jewish community center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires. The Iranian regime-controlled Tehran Times reported on Wednesday, August 25, that “According to a decree by the president, Rezaei has also been appointed as the secretary of the Supreme Economic Coordination Council and the head of the government's Economic Headquarters. Rezaei was the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for 16 years and also held office as the secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council.” The US government sanctioned the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as

a foreign terrorist organization. Toby Dershowitz, Senior Vice President, Government Relations and Strategy at the US-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told The Jerusalem Post that "Iranian president [Ebrahim] Raisi has named Interpol red notice holder Mohsen Rezaei - wanted in connection with the murder of 85 Argentinians - as the Islamic Republic's VP for Economic Affairs." Recently, Ahmad Vahidi, also wanted for the AMIA murders, was named the IRI's Interior Minister. Iran's cabinet is shaping up to be a 'who's who' of men meant to serve jail time rather than serving the people of Iran." Dershowitz, who is a long-time analyst of the 1994 AMIA bombing, added that "Iran is clearly seeking to normalize mass murder and is testing the will of the international community."

Israeli Tech Job Openings Rise 300% as Investment Soars;As Israel's hi-tech sector skyrockets in 2021, investment platform OurCrowd said Thursday, August 26, that job openings at its portfolio companies more than tripled over the past year. The number of vacant positions advertised by OurCrowd startups rose from a peak of 836 in the second quarter of 2020 to 2,628 at the end of June 2021, as advertised by 148 of OurCrowd's nearly 300 portfolio companies, according to its hi-tech jobs index published Thursday. Israel's hi-tech sector has been growing at a frenzied pace in 2021, with more than \$15 billion raised in the first eight months of the year. Many companies are now flushed with cash for hiring top talent, and there are concerns that there are not enough workers in Israel to meet their demand. "Even though we are still deep into the pandemic and its social costs, there is something different happening on the tech front, where there is a massive digital transformation sweeping over the world, driving tech investment to record highs and creating an abundance of jobs," OurCrowd founder and CEO Jon Medved said. Software engineers remain the most in-demand category at tech companies, representing 18% of all openings. Business development staff were a close second with 15%. Salary-wise, 35% of entry-level sales and business development staff earn NIS 12-16K/month in Israel, with roughly equal numbers making either more or less, the report said. Over 51% of mid-level sales and business development staff earn more than NIS 20K/month. Three-quarters of senior executives earn more than NIS 24K.

Israeli Paralympic Swimmer Mark Malyar Wins Gold, Breaks World Record;Israeli Paralympic swimmer Mark Malyar won a gold medal on Friday in the Tokyo Games, breaking a world record in the process and becoming the Jewish state's second medalist in the first three days of competitions. Malyar, 21, won the men's 200-meter individual medley final in the SM7 category after finishing with a time of 2:29.01. Silver was taken by Andrii Trusov of Ukraine, while bronze was snagged by Colombia's Carlos Serrano Zárate. It was the second gold medal for Israel in Paralympic swimming in three days, after that had not happened since 2004. On Wednesday, it was Iyad Shalabi who won the 100-meter backstroke in the S1 category, becoming the first Arab Israel to medal in either the Paralympics or the Olympics. Friday was Malyar's first Paralympic medal. He is competing in Tokyo and so is his twin brother Ariel. The brothers were born with cerebral palsy and started swimming at age 5 for physical therapy. President Isaac Herzog phoned Malyar to congratulate him on the win.



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