

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 30 , 2021 (26th Tevet, 5782)



For the Yachad Report Newsletter For December 2021

As Talks in Vienna Stall Again, Iran Approaching Break-Out Capacity; Iran continues to behave itself as if it is invincible in the nuclear stand-off with the West. At the same time, the Islamic Republic continues to provoke Israel and launched fresh cyberattacks against governmental institutions in Israel while openly threatening the Jewish state with missile attacks if it makes “just one wrong move.” The renewed nuclear negotiations in Vienna between the remaining participants in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 landmark nuclear agreement with Iran, are going nowhere, as even the European Union now admits. “Iran’s continued nuclear escalation means that we are rapidly reaching the end of the road,” Nicolas de Riviere the French ambassador to the United Nations, told the General Assembly of the United Nations two weeks ago. He added that this was actually the joint opinion of Britain, France, and Germany. “We are nearing the point where Iran’s escalation of its nuclear program will have completely hollowed out the JCPOA”, France’s UN ambassador stated. The three European nations are still part of the JCPOA and their joint statement makes it clear that those countries no longer believe it will be possible to reach a compromise with Iran. They have no credible military plan B ready for the eventuality that the talks in Vienna collapse, however. Iran on its part portrays itself as a victim of former US President Donald J. Trump who in 2018 decided to leave the JCPOA and heaped a series of biting sanctions on the Islamic Republic. As a direct result of Trump’s actions, Iran then decided to escalate its nuclear program and began to enrich uranium to a level of sixty percent.

Hezbollah Has 2,000 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles; Hezbollah has some 2,000 unmanned aerial vehicles, many of them advanced UAVs from Iran and others manufactured independently by the Lebanese terrorist group, a new report by the ALMA Research Center has found. Hezbollah has been using UAVs since the 1990s and has used its drones in Syria as well as against Israel. Even before the Second Lebanon War in 2006, the group launched drones into Israel; and during the war, Hezbollah launched several armed drones into the country. The report by ALMA listed several attempts by Hezbollah to fly its drones into Israel, including in October 2012 when a UAV launched over the Mediterranean Sea reached the Negev before it was intercepted by Israel Air Force jets. The group was said to have 200 Iranian-made UAVs in 2013; and with help from the Islamic Republic, it has since significantly increased its fleet, which is set to be used for kamikaze attacks on strategic national assets in Israel as well as reconnaissance against IDF troops and bases. According to the report, Hezbollah “most likely” has advanced UAV models such as the Mohajer, Shahed, and Samed (KAS-

04), Karrar and Saegheh types. It also possesses dozens of smaller civilian drones made by China that are used to photograph as well as to carry and drop bombs. In September 2021, Defense Minister Benny Gantz said that Iran's drone fleet "is one of the most significant tools developed by Iran." It's "an array of deadly, precision weapons that, like a ballistic missile or a plane, can cross thousands of miles. The Iranians produce and export these aircraft to their proxies, in coordination with and led by the IRGC Air Force and Quds Force." According to Gantz, Iran is training militias from Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria to operate and manufacture Iranian UAVs at Kashan Base north of the city of Isfahan, "the cornerstone of Iranian aerial terrorism in the region." In addition to Kashan, the report noted more than 20 production, storage and launch sites used by Iran to launch drones from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia Says Iran and Hezbollah Are Helping the Houthis; The Saudi-led coalition on Sunday, December 26, accused Iran and Hezbollah of helping Yemen's Houthi rebels to launch missiles and drones at the kingdom, where two people were killed, AFP reported. The Saudi accusation came as the coalition intensified an aerial bombing campaign against the Iran-backed Houthis in retaliation for deadly attacks on the kingdom. Coalition spokesman Turki al-Malki told a news conference the Houthis were "militarizing" Sanaa airport and using it as a "main center for launching ballistic missiles and drones" towards the kingdom. He showed reporters a video clip which he said depicted "the headquarters of Iranian and Hezbollah experts at the airport" where, he alleged, "Hezbollah is training the Houthis to booby-trap and use drones". He said the international community must "stop hostile acts by this terrorist organization," a reference to Hezbollah. The Houthis and their allies took over large parts of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa, in 2015. A Saudi-led military coalition then intervened in Yemen to try to restore the government.

Israeli PM's Christmas Message: Israel Only Place in Region Protecting Christian Life; Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett issued Christmas greetings to Christians worldwide along with a message of brotherhood and unity, highlighting Israel's determination to protect Christian life and thanking Christian "brothers and sisters" who are "united in our love for Jerusalem" for "caring about us" and "fighting for the state of Israel." In his public Christmas message in English posted on Thursday, December 23, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett wished all Christians in Israel and around the world a merry Christmas. He also highlighted what he described as the "common heritage" of both Jews and Christians. "It's here in this ancient land where our forefathers lived the stories we all read in the Bible from the Galilee to the Holy City of Jerusalem, right here," he said. "You see, the land of Israel is the land of our common heritage, and it remains a beacon of religious freedom, tolerance, and prosperity." Noting the increased persecution of Christians in the region, Bennett highlighted Israel's role in protecting Christian life there. "In a region where Christians are routinely persecuted, there's only one place, one country, that protects Christian life — where the Christian community is growing, thriving, and prospering — and that's right here in the state of Israel," he said. Stating, "We're brothers and sisters, and we're all united in our love for Jerusalem and our prayers for peace," the prime minister wished "warm greetings" from Israel's historic capital. "So, as you celebrate the holidays in Israel and around the world, I would like to send you all warm greetings from Jerusalem," he said. He concluded by expressing appreciation for Christians who support the Jewish state.

Israelis Flood Nazareth for Christmas Celebrations, While Bethlehem Subdued; Tens of thousands of people visited Nazareth on Friday, December 24, for the traditional Christmas procession despite the lack of international tourists, a welcome change for residents after last year's cancellation of major events due to the pandemic. The atmosphere in the city where Christians believe Jesus lived was cheery as the parade moved from the Temple of Mary along Paul VI Street, with visitors bustling along between shops and stalls offering food and holiday trinkets. The event was lively despite fears of rising infections as a result of the Omicron variant of coronavirus. With Israel closed to tourists and its citizens restricted from traveling abroad, the mainly Arab city of Nazareth, normally a magnet for Christian pilgrims, has been thronged with Jewish visitors. Livnat Kizner, from central Israel, told Ynet that visiting the city was a good substitute for a trip

abroad. “It’s very reminiscent of Europe, in the sounds, the smells, the experience. You can definitely have fun in Israel in such places and not fly,” she said. Another visitor identified only as Tal told Walla: “When you can’t fly abroad, Nazareth was a good alternative. It was really joyous seeing the tens of thousands of revelers enjoying the colors and tastes of the city.” Meanwhile, in Bethlehem’s Manger Square, visitors in Santa hats and scouts beating drums marked Christmas Eve, but fewer people attended as coronavirus fears overshadowed celebrations for a second year. The city where Jesus is said to have been born is usually a focal point of the holiday, with thousands packing the streets and filling the hotels. But Israel, through which tourists travel to Bethlehem in the West Bank, barred its borders to foreigners in an effort to rein in infections from the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

4,000 Immigrants from U.S. to Israel in 2021 – Marking Nearly 50 Year High; Four-thousand people immigrated to Israel from the United States in 2021, marking a nearly 50-year high, government statistics showed Wednesday, December 21. A total 27,050 new immigrants arrived in Israel over 2021, and while that number marked a 30 percent increase over 2020, it was still lower than the pre-pandemic rate. The last time 4,000 Jews immigrated from the U.S. was in 1973. This year also saw 3,500 Jews immigrate from France, the highest number in four years. Another 7,500 people from Russia made aliyah, or immigration to Israel, a 10 percent increase from 2020, while 3,000 came from Ukraine. Other countries that saw an increase in 2021 include Brazil, Mexico, Canada, UK, Argentina, and South Africa. The latter also saw more people immigrating since the fall of the apartheid regime in the 1990s. Aliyah and Integration Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata said: “Despite the pandemic and a variety of limitations, immigration to Israel has not stopped. We are delighted to welcome the tens of thousands of immigrants who chose to make Israel their home. Immigrants are a growth engine for the Israeli economy and are a national, economic and moral powerhouse for the nation.”

UAE's First Astronaut Reveals He Brought Israeli Flag to Space; Hazzaa al-Mansoori, the first Emirati astronaut in space, revealed he brought an Israeli flag to his first space flight in 2019, Ynet reported. The Emirati astronaut presented the same flag he took to space to delegates of the Israeli pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020. Al-Mansoori launched aboard the Soyuz MS-15 in September 2019, a year prior to the signing of the Abraham Accords, which normalized ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). "I am happy to be here and present this Israeli flag to the people here and the Israeli public," al-Mansoori said. "I took this flag with me two years ago on my first mission as an Emirati astronaut and this is my gift to all Israelis," he added. The Emirati astronaut was part of Expedition 61 to the International Space Station (ISS), staying at the station for eight days before landing safely in Kazakhstan in October.

Israel Approves Plans for Golan Heights, Will Build Two New Towns; The Israeli government approved a NIS 1 billion plan to develop the Golan Heights that will at least double its Jewish population and allow for the creation of two new towns in the region. “We are making history in the Golan,” Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted in advance of the vote, which took place at a special meeting at Kibbutz Mevo Hamma in the Golan Heights. At the start of the visit, Bennett said: “Friends, this is our moment; this is the moment for the Golan Heights.” “A combination of circumstances has led us today to a dramatic government decision to channel considerable resources, around NIS 1b., to strengthen communities on the Golan Heights,” he said. “First, it must be said, the Golan Heights are Israeli; this is self-evident,” he added. The goal of the development plan is to double the population on the Golan within five years, including through the construction of two new neighborhoods in the town of Katzrin and the creation of two new towns already named Asif and Matar, Bennett said. The plan calls for a NIS 576m. investment in housing to allow for 23,000 new Golan residents. This would include the construction of 7,300 new units of which 3,300 would be in Katzrin and the remainder in the communities under the Golan Regional Council. This includes 18 moshavim, 10 kibbutzim and four towns. Another 4,000 units would be built in the two planned new towns, Asif and Matar. The plan also calls for NIS 160 million for transportation systems and healthcare facilities. It will also

invest in education and the Odem Plan for technological-security leadership in Katzrin. Another NIS 162m. will be allocated for regional economic development, including tourism. Some 2,000 jobs will be created in agritech, hotels, agriculture and commercial sectors, according to the government. The Golan Heights will become the “renewal energy capital,” the government said in summary notes of the meeting. This will include investments in solar projects as well as agri-voltaic projects and research across 200 hectares. In addition, changes in the way people in the 21st century work allow for those who work virtually to consider living in places such as the Golan, Bennett told the ministers. Bennett emphasized that a decision taken by this government to strengthen the Golan was a sign of how much Israeli sovereignty there was a matter of national consensus, given that his coalition represented a broad cross section of Israeli society.

Iran’s Regime Posts Threatening Image of Israel; An Arabic language Twitter account of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Sunday, December 19, published an image that shows the planned burned elimination of the Jewish state in 2022. The picture shows Israel composed of nails and matches and a book of matches next to words in Hebrew and English declaring: “Just try and you will see.” The book of matches, which is situated next to Israel in the image, says “Ballistic matchstick” and shows an Iranian regime flag on it. The apparent message is that the clerical regime is prepared to detonate the matches to destroy Israel in 2022. The tweet came from the Islamic Republic of Iran’s account. The account says it joined Twitter in February 2020 and has 39,800 followers. On December 15 the Tehran Times wrote on its front page “One wrong move,” with military targets listed within Israel. Sheina Vojoudi, an Iranian dissident who fled the Islamic Republic of Iran due to repression, told The Jerusalem Post, that “The Islamic Republic in Iran is only provoking Israel, it’s been years that the Islamic Republic is threatening to wipe Israel off the map but now it’s become more serious because the regime knows that the end for this evil regime has come, especially after Vienna Talks.

Israel is a Jewish State and Will Remain So; “The State of Israel was born as a Jewish state, and it will remain one,” Ra’am (United Arab List) leader Mansour Abbas said on Tuesday, December 21, at a conference of the Hebrew Economic Newspaper Globes. The statement by Abbas in an interview with Channel 12 analyst Muhammad Magadli was considered historic because it is very different from the view of Arab parties until now. The point of view of Arab parties in the past has been that Israel should be a state of all its citizens, not a Jewish state. Arab parties have supported changing the Law of Return to make it easier for Arabs to move to Israel and gain a majority. Balad Party leader Sami Abou Shehadeh said, “Only a state of all its citizens can bring about justice and full equality among all citizens,” Abou Shehadeh said. Meanwhile, Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked (Yamina) and Ra’am faction head Waleed Taha met for the first time in weeks late Tuesday night, in an effort to resolve their differences. Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman (Yisrael Beytenu) mediated between Shaked and Taha. Taha has been boycotting votes in the Knesset plenum to protest statements Shaked has made about his bill, which would hook up more than 50,000 illegally built Arab homes to the national electricity grid. With a thin majority, the coalition cannot handle his boycott continuing to Wednesday’s votes in the plenum. Ra’am MK Mazen Ghenayim threatened to bring about the end of the coalition over the bill on Tuesday in an interview with KAN’s Arabic radio station. But Abbas has repeatedly downplayed the coalition crisis. “I am satisfied with the process we started,” Abbas said at the Globes conference. “We are inside. Now is the time to know how to play the game. That means improving our steps and finding solutions to problems.”

Omicron Variant: More Countries Added to the Red List; The government approved the Health Ministry’s recommendation to classify the United States, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Morocco, Portugal, Canada, Switzerland and Turkey as “red” states and place them under a travel ban on Monday, December 20. The recommendation also requires the approval of the Knesset Law and Constitution Committee. The committee is set to meet for this purpose on Tuesday morning, just hours before the measure is supposed to come into effect at midnight between Tuesday and Wednesday. Israelis are not allowed to travel to red countries unless they receive special permission from a governmental Exception Committee. In

addition, if they return to Israel, they need to be quarantined for a minimum of seven days, even if they are fully vaccinated. Individuals who are not considered protected are required to remain in a coronavirus hotel for seven days. The group of red countries already includes the UK, Denmark, the United Arab Emirates, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Finland, France, Sweden, South Africa, and several dozen other African nations. “We do not intend to close the skies, but it could be that in practice this is what is going to happen,” said coronavirus commissioner Prof. Salman Zarka, speaking before a joint session of the Knesset Health and Constitution committees. Israeli borders have already been closed to foreign nationals since the end of November, with very limited exceptions. All the travel restrictions are set to expire on December 29, but they might be extended, as it has already happened twice in the past month. Countries remain on the red list until the authorities decide to change their status.

Anti-Israel Candidate Elected as Chile's New President; Gabriel Boric, a 35-year-old left-wing lawmaker who has been sharply critical of Israel and Chilean Jews who support it, was elected president of Chile in a landslide victory this weekend. Boric, who came to fame as a student leader, won with 56% of the vote, 12 points over his conservative rival, José Antonio Kast, a right-wing pro-Israel politician. The election left many Chilean Jews feeling uneasy because they had to choose between Boric, who has encouraged Chilean Jews to lobby for Israeli territorial concessions, and Kast, a right-wing pro-Israel politician whose father likely was a Nazi and who has defended the legacy of Augusto Pinochet, the head of Chile's military dictatorship that killed thousands of dissidents in the 1970s. Most Jews seemed to be siding with Kast, telling the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last month that their community was experiencing “a feeling of siege.” Of the 111 Chileans living in Israel who voted from abroad, 73 cast their ballots for Kast, compared to just 33 for Boric, according to Chile's national elections database. In his victory speech, Boric promised to “firmly fight against the privileges of a few” as he seeks to advance his vision for Chile's future. “I guarantee that I will be a president who cares for democracy and does not risk it, listens more than speaks, seeks unity, and attends to the needs of the people daily,” he said. The Jewish Community of Chile, a nonprofit representing communal interests, congratulated Boric in a short statement, wishing him and his government “much success” and praising the transparency of the country's elections. It concluded, “We will continue to work for a democratic, diverse Chile where minorities are respected. “ The official group representing Chile's roughly 18,000 Jews has a complicated relationship with Boric. In 2019, it sent him a Rosh Hashanah gift along with a note expressing a desire for a “more inclusive, respectful society with more solidarity.” “I appreciate the gesture but they could start by asking Israel to return the illegally occupied Palestinian territory,” Boric wrote after posting a picture of the gift to Twitter. Boric's criticism of Israel is longstanding. As a lawmaker, he supported a bill proposing to boycott Israeli goods from the Golan, Judea and Samaria, and areas of Jerusalem that came under Israeli control in 1967.

Storm Carmel Brings 25 cm of Snow on Mt. Hermon, Kinneret Rises 2 cm; Twenty-five cm of snow has accumulated on Mt. Hermon, and the Kinneret has risen by 2 cm, as winter storm Carmel continued to hit northern and central Israel on Tuesday, December 21. About 25 cm of snow accumulated in the lower part of the Hermon ski resort, which is closed to visitors until further notice. Meanwhile, the Kinneret rose by two cm to 210.76 meters below sea level on Tuesday morning. The lake is 1.96 meters below the upper red line that marks a full lake and 2.25 meters above the lower red line that marks a dangerously low lake. Storm Carmel brought heavy rainfall to central and northern Israel on Monday, with 37.5 mm of rain falling in Jerusalem, 24.7 mm falling in Tel Aviv, 63.1 mm falling in Haifa, and 75.1 mm falling in Safed. The highest amount of rainfall was recorded in Amikam, with 96 mm of rainfall recorded on Monday. Further rain showers were expected in northern Israel and along the coast on Tuesday, with concerns of flooding as well as more snowfall on the Hermon. The high winds brought by the storm gradually weakened throughout the day. It was colder than usual for this time of year. The storm is the third named storm in the Eastern Mediterranean Group of EUMETNET, which includes the meteorological services of Israel, Greece, and Cyprus. Other Hebrew names in the list of names for the 2021/2022 season include Irit, Joel, Lavi, Ora, and Raphael.

Satanic Temple's Holiday Display Coming Back to Illinois Capitol Rotunda; The Illinois State Capitol Rotunda will feature a holiday art display from the Satanic Temple that will stand alongside other religious exhibits. This year's installment, the third for the organization, will feature the satanic figure Baphomet depicted as a baby to celebrate the holiday Sol Invictus, the State Journal-Register reported. The Satanic Temple is a social activist organization that is an outspoken supporter of women's reproductive rights, the separation of church and state, and several other social justice issues. According to the organization's website, Sol Invictus is a "celebration of being unconquered by superstition and consistent in the pursuit of sharing knowledge," and has its origins in the cult of Sol in pre-Christian Rome. "This year's tradition marks a greater urgency in the Baphomet's message of harmony and reconciliation," Satanic Temple's director of campaign operations Erin Helian said in a statement, obtained by The State Journal-Register. The display will be installed at 1 p.m. Monday, December 20, at the rotunda in Springfield, overseen by members of the congregation." The display has been a source of controversy with local Christian leaders. A Nativity scene was installed at the rotunda recently at an event sponsored by the Diocese of Springfield, where Bishop Thomas Paprocki said the Satanic Temple's displays "should have no place in this Capitol or any other place," according to The State Journal-Register. "Our real message is to re-establish pluralism," Greaves told the Journal-Register. "It doesn't mean that people with opposing viewpoints have to be in conflict." The Satanic Temple's first holiday installation at the rotunda was in 2018, followed by another installation in 2019 called "Knowledge is the Greatest Gift," which featured the forearm of the biblical Eve beside an apple and snake.

Syrian Soccer Player Expelled from National Team after Match with Israeli Coach; Syrian soccer player Firas Al-Khatib was expelled on Monday, December 20, from the national team after he played in a showcase match with an Israeli coach. The Syrian Olympic Committee announced that Al-Khatib was being expelled from the National Olympic Committee and General Sports Federation for "violating the values and ideals of the organization and deviating from its national principles." The showcase match at the FIFA Arab Cup starred former soccer players from Arab countries and around the world. The team of world legends was coached by Israeli Avram Grant. Three Algerian soccer players withdrew from the match and several Arab players erased the Israeli flags from their shirts in protest against Grant's involvement. Al-Khatib, for his part, expressed shock at the Syrian Olympic Committee's decision, writing in a post on his social media accounts that the penalty was "unjust" and that he was not summoned in advance to provide answers about the situation. The soccer player stressed that he was not aware that Grant was participating in the match and that he has documents that can confirm this. He added that Grant's name was not on the list he was provided with before the match and that he was only made aware that Grant was participating on the day of the match. Al-Khatib stated that, despite Grant's participation, he decided to take part in the match "due to his concern for the presence of Syria's name on such a festive occasion." He added that he was "surprised" by the presence of the Israeli flag on the shirt he wore and that he had clearly removed the flag from the shirt, as did a number of other players. The soccer player apologized to "supporters of the Palestinian cause in all parts of the world and to the Palestinian people everywhere" for any "psychological distress" his participation may have caused. He stressed his "firm position" on the Palestinian cause which matches up with the position of the Syrian state.

Mothers' Smartphone Use Could Damage Toddler Development; Parents distracted by their smartphones could be causing long-term developmental damage to their toddlers because they aren't interacting with them enough, according to a recently published study by researchers at Tel Aviv University. The research found that interaction between mothers and toddlers is reduced by up to a factor of four when the mother is using her smartphone, the university said in a statement about the research. "The consequences of inadequate mother-child interaction can be far-reaching," cautioned Katy Borodkin of the Department of Communication Disorders at the Stanley Steyer School of Health Professions, Sackler Faculty of Medicine, and who led the study. There is a "high probability" that the research findings apply to fathers as well, Borodkin said, as men and women have similar patterns of use for their smartphones. Borodkin noted there is

currently no research suggesting that parental use of smartphones actually affects child development, “as this is a relatively new phenomenon,” but the findings indicate an “adverse impact on the foundation of child development.” Researchers studied dozens of mothers as they interacted with their toddlers aged 2 to 3. The mothers were told the experiment was to examine the link between the interests of a mother and a child, making them unaware of the real purpose, which was to examine their interactions, Borodkin explained. Mothers were told to browse a designated Facebook page and like videos and articles they found interesting while their children were at play. In other sessions, they were told to read a printed magazine while marking articles of interest, also while playing with their toddlers, and finally to play with their child when the smartphone and magazine were not in the room. Borodkin said the experiment was designed to simulate real-life situations when a mother divides her attention between her child and her smartphone. Her subjects behaved naturally, “splitting their interest between the toddlers and the smartphone and magazines.” The sessions were videotaped and then carefully examined frame by frame to quantify the mother-child interactions. Tel Aviv researchers specified three elements in mother-child interactions and studied how participants in the experiments performed in each one.



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