

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 20, 2022 ***(18th Shvat, 5782)***



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The Colleyville Synagogue Attack Was 'Specifically' Targeting Jews; Soon after the FBI freed four hostages held by a gunman named Malik Faisal Akram for 11 hours at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, on Saturday, January 15, Matthew Desarno, the special agent in charge of the FBI Dallas Field Office, made a truly baffling statement. “We do believe from our engagement with this subject that he was singularly focused on one issue, and it was not specifically related to the Jewish community. But we are continuing to work to find [the] motive,” he said. The idea that any attack on a synagogue is “not specifically related to the Jewish community” is absurd enough. Add to that the fact that the gunman entered Congregation Beth Israel on a Saturday morning when Shabbat services are held. The timing was clearly intentional. But the specifics of this crime also show a deep current of anti-Semitism running through the “one issue” on which the hostage-taker was “singularly focused.” Perhaps at first glance, that issue, the release of Aafia Siddiqui, currently serving an 86-year prison sentence for attempting to murder American troops and FBI agents, does not seem to be “specifically related to the Jewish community.” But Siddiqui was a raving anti-Semite, and that information is readily available. The gunman said Siddiqui was his “sister” – though apparently in ideology and not in the literal sense – and that they would meet in “Jannah,” meaning paradise after he dies. Siddiqui, nicknamed “Lady al-Qaeda,” was born in Pakistan and traveled to the US on a student visa in 1990. She received her PhD in neuroscience from Brandeis University, founded by the Jewish community in 1948 and named after the first Jewish Justice in the US Supreme Court. After Siddiqui was arrested in Afghanistan for her part in plotting al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in the US, UK and Pakistan, shooting at US Army troops as they detained her, she said the case against her was a Jewish conspiracy. Siddiqui dismissed her legal defense team because she said the lawyers were Jewish, and she demanded that jurors in the trial take DNA tests to make sure they were not Israeli or Zionists, in order “to be fair.” She also wrote a letter to then-president Barack Obama telling him that Jews “have always back-stabbed everyone who has taken pity on them and made the ‘fatal’ error of giving them shelter.” “It is this cruel, ungrateful back-stabbing of the Jews that has caused them to be mercilessly expelled from wherever they gain strength. This is why ‘holocausts’ keep happening to them repeatedly! If they would only learn to be grateful and change their behavior!!” Siddiqui wrote. After her conviction, Siddiqui said: “This is a verdict coming from Israel and not from America. That’s where the anger belongs.” The likelihood of someone being so passionate about releasing Siddiqui that he would hold people hostage at gunpoint and not know of her widely reported and Wikipedia-listed views about Jews is slim. We don’t know much about the hostage-taker since the FBI is not releasing information. But we know that he

targeted a synagogue to free a woman who did not hide her hatred of Jews. And we know a leading figure in the same organization that advocated Siddiqui's cause put synagogues and other major Jewish organizations on a list of "enemies" who spark Islamophobia. These seem like directions of inquiry the FBI ought to be taking seriously. What more must it take for a crime to be viewed as "specifically related to the Jewish community?" What more needs to happen for anti-Semitic hate crimes to be viewed as such?

Texas Synagogue Hostage Crisis is a 'Terrorism-Related Matter,' FBI Says; Malik Faisal Akram, the British national who was killed Saturday night, January 15, after allegedly taking four people hostage inside a Texas synagogue, spoke "repeatedly" about a convicted terrorist during negotiations with law enforcement, according to an FBI statement obtained by Fox News. The statement, which was released late Sunday, does not identify the terrorist serving an 86-year prison sentence in the U.S. on terrorism charges, but may shed new light on a possible motive. Akram could be heard on a Facebook livestream demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist suspected of having ties to al Qaeda who was convicted of trying to kill U.S. Army officers in Afghanistan. "This is a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted, and is being investigated by the Joint Terrorism Task Force," the statement read. The Associated Press pointed out that Siddiqui is serving her sentence in Fort Worth. Colleyville is about 15 miles northeast of the city. The hostage crisis occurred at the Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, on Saturday and ended at about 9 p.m. Police did not say who shot Akram, and said the incident was under investigation. The investigation stretched to England, where late Sunday police in Manchester announced that two teenagers were in custody in connection with the standoff.

Iran Nuclear Talks Moving 'Too Slowly to Reach a Result'; Nuclear talks with Iran are moving too slowly for an agreement, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Friday, January 14, as a source in Vienna said there were unresolved issues in every part of the negotiations. "This negotiation advances way too slowly to be able to reach a conclusion and there will be nothing more to negotiate if it continues like this," Le Drian stated, while saying the success of the talks is "vital." "We now have to conclude and come to a decision: Either the Iranians want to complete this, in which case we have the impression that there will be flexibility in the Americans' stance," Le Drian said, "or they don't want to complete this, and in that case, we will be faced with a major proliferation crisis." A source close to the talks said that many issues in a range of areas remain unresolved in indirect talks between Iran and the United States on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that Donald Trump ended. "In every single part of the [unfinished] paper [outlining a deal] there are issues that are still under consideration," the source told reporters on Friday, adding that while negotiations are moving in the right direction, they "do not have all the time in the world." US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that "We're very, very short on time" and there were only "a few weeks left to see if we can get back to mutual compliance" with the 2015 nuclear deal. "Iran is getting closer and closer to the point where they could produce on very, very short order enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon," Blinken warned on NPR. "And at the same time, they're making advances that will become increasingly hard to reverse because they're learning things; they're doing new things as a result of having broken out of their constraints under the agreement." The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal is known, restricted Iran's uranium enrichment in exchange for the gradual lifting of sanctions. The restrictions expire at the end of 2030. The US left the agreement in 2018, and Iran has enriched uranium far beyond the JCPOA's limitations, to 60% – weapons-grade is 90% – and violated the agreement by developing uranium metal. The Biden administration seeks to restore the JCPOA and has been negotiating in Vienna indirectly with the Islamic Republic – which refuses to have its delegation be in the same room as the Americans – on-and-off since April of 2021. The talks are currently in their eighth round, which began in late December. Though Borrell agreed with Le Drian that the talks are moving too slowly, he remained optimistic that the JCPOA could be restored.

Three Killed in Drone Attack on Abu Dhabi; Three people were killed and six were injured after Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement claimed responsibility for an alleged drone attack on the United Arab Emirates that occurred Monday morning, January 17, state media reported. Shortly afterward, the Saudi-led coalition claimed that it had managed to down eight drones launched in the direction of Saudi Arabia. Three fuel tankers exploded in Abu Dhabi's Musaffah industrial area near storage facilities of oil firm ADNOC and a fire broke out at a storage facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport. The airport has suspended all flights for the time being due to the drone attack, local media claims. Drones were spotted in the area prior to the explosion. "Initial investigations found parts of a small plane that could possibly be a drone at both sites that could have caused the explosion and the fire," the police said in a statement on state news agency WAM. Of those killed in the drone attack, one was Pakistani and two were Indian. They were killed in the explosion of the tanker trucks. Meanwhile, those injured are lightly to moderately injured, according to local media, citing Abu Dhabi police. The military spokesperson for the Houthi movement said that the group had launched a military attack on the UAE, and that details would be announced soon. Few such attacks in the UAE have been claimed by the Houthis in the past, and they have been – for the most part – denied by Emirati officials. The Houthis have repeatedly launched cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and have in the past threatened to attack the UAE. Shortly after the attack in the UAE, Saudi-led forces announced that they had prevented a drone attack in Saudi Arabia.

FedEx Requests Missile Defense Systems on Cargo Planes; In light of missile attacks against aircraft in various recent armed conflicts around the world, the international courier giant FedEx has asked the Federal Aviation Authority for permission to install missile defense systems on its aircraft. A statement issued by FedEx said the request came after a number of cases in recent years in which missiles were fired at civilian planes near armed conflicts around the world, including FedEx planes, and fears that a round might damage an aircraft. "In a number of incidents around the world, civilian aircraft have been fired upon by human-operated firing systems. This has led several companies to design and adapt various laser-based missile defense systems, which can be installed on civilian aircraft to protect these aircraft from heat-seeking missiles," FedEx said in a statement. According to the announcement, the defense system that FedEx is requesting to install in its aircraft is based around an infrared laser that will deflect heat-seeking missiles. The Federal Aviation Authority will allow the public 45 days to send in comments on the matter before deciding whether or not to approve the installation.

A War on Trees is Waged in Israel; As Jews celebrate Tu Beshvat, the arboreal New Year, Arabs in Israel unite in a war against trees. Rabbis have ruled that this conflict is an existential threat to Israel, similar to the battle of the Maccabees, and takes precedence even over the Sabbath. Al-Jarmaq, a Palestinian media network, called for Palestinians to join the Bedouin in the Negev in their violent riots against Jewish National Fund (JNF) tree planting on Sunday night, January 16, as the holiday of Tu Beshvat began. Protests were held in Jaffa and Haifa. On Monday, as Tu Beshvat ended, protests were planned for Nazareth and Ar'ava. On Tuesday, more protests are planned for Lod and Sakhnin. The protests, which have been going on for several weeks, quickly devolved into violence and demonstrators threw stones at police, who responded with anti-riot rubber bullets, shock grenades, and a water cannon. Arab media reported that Israeli police have arrested over 100 rioters to date, though Israeli sources claim that number is significantly lower. Hamas expressed support for the Bedouin, claiming a ramming attack on Tuesday evening that wounded an IDF soldier was motivated by the tree planting.

In Honor of Tu Bishvat, New Tree Bill Submitted to Knesset; In honor of the Tu Bishvat holiday on Monday, January 17, MK Alon Tal will present what he billed as the first comprehensive forestry law proposed in Israel for a century. Tal said the present statute regulating tree planting and forestry in Israel is the 1926 "Forests Ordinance" from the British Mandate, which is similar to a 1921 version, adopted soon after the British conquered Palestine from the Ottoman armies in World War I. Since that time, modifications and

amendments of the Ordinance have been modest. The bill is an expanded version of a statute prepared some 10 years ago, when Tal chaired the committee that oversees forestry for the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund international board that was never advanced. The expanded version was submitted after several months of consultation with forestry experts at KKL-JNF and the Agriculture Ministry, which is responsible for forestry in Israel. Given the significance of Israel's trees and forests to human health, recreation, ecological corridors, species preservation and climate change, Tal declared it high time that Israel adopt legislation appropriate for the national and global challenges of the 21st century.

Inflation in Israel Hits Highest Rate for Decade in 2021; Israel's Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose unexpectedly by 0.3% in December 2021, the Central Bureau of Statistics reports, above the analysts' expectations of 0.1-0.2%. During 2021, the CPI rose by 2.8%, within the Bank of Israel's target range for inflation of between 1% and 3%. Inflation hit its highest rate for a decade in 2021, after negative inflation of 0.7% in 2020 due to the COVID crisis. There were significant price rises in December in footwear and clothing (1.1%), housing costs (0.8%), furniture and household equipment (0.7%), and food (0.5%). There were significant price falls in fresh fruit and vegetables (2.7%) and culture and entertainment (0.8%). The housing prices index, which is separate from the CPI, continued to rise in the period October-November, in comparison with September-October, climbing by 1.4%. Housing prices have risen 10.6% over the past 12 months, and by 18% since the start of 2019.

Iran Sanctions 52 Americans on Anniversary of Soleimani Killing, Drawing US Rebuke; Iran announced sanctions against more than 50 American individuals over the killing two years ago of Tehran's top general Qassem Soleimani, drawing a strong rebuke from Washington on Sunday, January 9. The Islamic Republic's foreign ministry said the 52 US nationals had been blacklisted for "their role in the terrorist crime by the United States against the martyred General Qassem Soleimani and his companions and the promotion of terrorism and violations of fundamental human rights." Many of those targeted are from the US military. They include Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley and former White House national security adviser Robert O'Brien. The sanctions let Tehran confiscate assets owned by the Americans in Iran, but since they apparently do not have such assets, the move is largely symbolic. Soleimani — the head of Iran's Quds Force, the overseas arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps — was killed in a US airstrike in Iraq in January 2020 ordered by then-president Donald Trump. On Sunday, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan responded that "should Iran attack any of our nationals, including any of the 52 people named yesterday, it will face severe consequences." Sullivan noted in a statement that the sanctions came "as Iran's proxy militias continue to attack American troops in the Middle East, and as Iranian officials threaten to carry out terror operations inside the United States and elsewhere around the world." "Make no mistake: the United States of America will protect and defend its citizens," he added. "This includes those serving the United States now and those who formerly served." "We will work with our allies and partners to deter and respond to any attacks carried out by Iran," Sullivan said. Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, with links to armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza Strip, Syria, and Yemen. The Quds force is designated by several countries as a terrorist organization, including the US and Israel.

Israel Not Bound by Any Nuclear Deal with Iran, Bennett Says; Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Monday, January 10, that Israel would not be bound by any nuclear deal with Iran and would continue to consider itself free to act "with no constraints" against its arch-foe if necessary. Indirect talks between Iran and the United States on salvaging the 2015 Iran nuclear deal resumed a week ago in Vienna. France's foreign minister said on Friday, January 7, that progress had been made, although time is running out. "In regard to the nuclear talks in Vienna, we are definitely concerned ... Israel is not a party to the agreements," Bennett said in public remarks, in a briefing to a parliamentary committee. "Israel is not bound by what will be written

in the agreements if they are signed, and Israel will continue to maintain full freedom of action anywhere any time, with no constraints," he said. Israel has called on world powers to maintain a credible military option against Iran while they pursue an agreement. Some experts have questioned whether Israel, on its own, has the military capabilities to halt what it says is an Iranian quest for nuclear weapons. Iran denies that it seeks atomic arms.

Hezbollah Drone Downed by IDF Mistakenly Reveals Operatives' Pictures; A Hezbollah drone downed by the Israeli military had a memory card with clear pictures of operatives belonging to one of the Lebanese terror group's elite units. The drone, shot down by the IDF on Wednesday, January 5, after it infiltrated Israeli airspace, had images of its operators belonging to the elite Radwan unit that uses unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to gather intelligence on Israeli troops. The pictures were likely taken by mistake by the UAV, but they revealed their faces and vehicles – complete with license plates – as well as the operatives flying another drone that had also been downed a few months ago by the IDF. According to a recent report by the ALMA Research Center, Hezbollah has some 2,000 UAVs, many of them advanced ones from Iran, and others manufactured independently by the Lebanese terror group. Others used by Hezbollah are civilian drones, similar to the one downed on Wednesday. The group was said to have 200 Iranian-made UAVs in 2013 and, with the help from the Islamic Republic, it has significantly increased its fleet, some of which is set to be used for kamikaze attacks on strategic national assets in Israel as well as in reconnaissance against IDF troops and bases.

IDF Cancels Reserve Drills for January as Troops Infected with Omicron Passes 6,000; With the number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus Omicron variant continuing to soar across the country, the Israeli military has canceled all reserve drills for January. There will be specific drills that can be approved by commanders according to operational needs. According to senior military officers, more than 6,380 troops were diagnosed with the coronavirus on Tuesday, January 11, with another 6,928 self-isolating at home. There have been several outbreaks of the virus on various IDF bases. "We are not surprised, and we have been preparing for this increase in infection rate," said one senior officer, explaining that there have been more than 1,000 new cases diagnosed in the past 24 hours. As the number of confirmed cases in the Israeli military continues to skyrocket, the officer said the IDF expects them to rise even further in the coming two weeks, when the fifth wave of the virus is expected to peak. IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kohavi visited the Home Front Command's Alon Headquarters along with the head of the Home Front Command, Maj.-Gen. Uri Gordin, and headquarters commander Brig.-Gen. Shlomi Ben Mocha, and was presented with the challenges that it's facing in the current wave as well as its action plan to deal with the Omicron variant. According to the military, the headquarters is focusing on tests, samplings, and contact tracing as well as additional efforts to help the Health Ministry, Magen David Adom, and healthcare providers in the vaccination campaign for senior citizens. While the military will not at this time keep troops on base in an attempt to keep the virus at bay, several battalions of combat troops will not be allowed furloughs for the next week and a half to maintain operational competency. Troops serving in closed units, meaning that they sleep on base, will have to quarantine at a military facility if they come into contact with an infected person, instead of self-isolating at home. "We are holding situational awareness meetings daily," he said.

Catholic, Jewish Leaders Condemn Use of Nazi Flag Outside Church Funeral; Italian Catholic and Jewish leaders on Tuesday, January 11, condemned as outrageous an episode in which right-wing extremists put a flag with a swastika on a coffin outside a church after a religious funeral and gave Nazi salutes. Rome's Catholic archdiocese said in a statement that priests at the parish of St. Lucy in a central Rome neighborhood, including the one who presided at the funeral rite, had no idea of what would happen outside the church on Monday, January 10. Pictures on the internet showed the coffin bearing the body of Alessia Augello, a former member of the right-wing extremist group Forza Nuova, covered by the flag. The diocese statement called the flag "a horrendous symbol that cannot be reconciled with Christianity" and said the episode was an offensive

example of "ideological exploitation" of a religious service. Police said they were investigating the incident as a possible hate crime.

Israel Launches Site to Keep Tourists Updated on Covid-19 Restrictions; Israel's Tourism Ministry launched a new website on Sunday, January 9, dedicated to keeping tourists updated with the latest COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions set by the Israeli government. On Friday, January 7, Israel removed every country from its 'red' list, reopening the skies and allowing Israelis to travel anywhere in the world. Two days later, restrictions on foreign nationals from non-red countries were also removed, meaning tourists are now able to enter Israel without the need for special permission, provided that they are fully vaccinated. Following the reopening of Israel's skies, the Tourism Ministry took the initiative to launch a regularly-updated landing page, incorporating all necessary and useful information for tourists visiting Israel as the Omicron wave sweeps through the country. The guide is divided into three sections with the aim of making navigation through all the different restrictions and requirements simple and providing ease of access to all relevant information.

Israeli Cleantech Company Aims Miriam's Well Water Purifier at Developing World; An Israeli water tech company has designed an off-grid household water purification system that it says is sustainable, cheap, easy to use, and could provide millions of households in developing countries with clean drinking water. Throughout the developing world, family members — usually women and children — commonly walk long distances to natural water sources to fill up bottles and jerrycans. These water bodies can be contaminated by anything from feces to chemicals, and cause diseases ranging from cholera, diarrhea, and dysentery to hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio. To help address this, the Alumor company has developed an appliance that it calls Miriam's Well, after the miracle source that, according to Jewish tradition, provided water to the Israelites throughout their 40 years in the wilderness. Powered by solar energy, the modern Miriam's Well requires no electric socket. It is fitted with advanced ultraviolet technology that kills viruses and bacteria to US National Sanitation Foundation standards, and it contains a filter that needs rinsing just a few times a year. Alumor's business development director, David Waimann, a cleantech entrepreneur and trained engineer originally from the UK told The Times of Israel that household members will simply connect the device to a jerrycan or other container via a pipe, and press a button. The device is lightweight, uses just four watts of electricity, and purifies each liter of water for less than half a cent, he said. According to World Health Organization figures (from 2017), 144 million people collect untreated surface water from lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams, with 435 million people taking their water from unprotected wells and springs.

Aura Herzog, Wife to One Israeli President and Mother to a Second, Dies at 97; Aura Herzog, the mother of President Isaac Herzog and widow of Israel's sixth president, Chaim Herzog, died Sunday night, January 9, at the age of 97. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett eulogized Herzog as "a public figure and social activist who loved her people and country. She lived humbly and raised a family to be proud of, while constantly working for the public and Israeli society." He sent his "deepest condolences" to her family. Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu said Herzog "devoted her life to public and social activity for the people of Israel... May her memory be a blessing." Defense Minister Benny Gantz called her "a pioneering woman... who worked for Israeli society and was a part of the generation that built the nation and to whom we are all grateful."

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