

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update February 17, 2022 ***(16th Adar-A, 5782)***



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Israel Calls on All Citizens to Leave Ukraine Immediately; Israel called on all of its citizens on Saturday, February 12, evening to leave Ukraine immediately, as a Russian invasion looked increasingly likely. “Following the tensions and concern at escalation, the Foreign Ministry calls on Israeli citizens in Ukraine to leave the country as soon as possible,” the travel warning reads. “In addition, the Foreign Ministry calls on Israelis planning to arrive in Ukraine soon to cancel their trips at this time,” the ministry stated. “The Foreign Ministry and Israeli Embassy in Ukraine call on Israeli citizens in the country to register [on the embassy website].” Some 4,500 had done so by Saturday night. They also discussed the possibility that it will be necessary to evacuate Israelis from the country, with the IDF and Foreign Ministry already planning for such a scenario. There are currently 22 flights per week from Ukraine to Israel, and the airports are open, so there is no need for special flights yet, a Foreign Ministry source said, urging Israelis not to wait until the last minute to get out. The Foreign Ministry estimated that there are 10,000-15,000 Israelis in Ukraine. About 200,000 Ukrainians qualify for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return, according to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

UK Minister Likens Russia-Ukraine to WWII; British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has compared Western diplomatic efforts to head off a Russian invasion of Ukraine to the appeasement of Nazi Germany ahead of World War II. Wallace told the Sunday Times that Russian President Vladimir Putin could send his massed troops into Ukraine “at any time.” And he suggested unnamed Western countries were not being tough enough with Moscow. “It may be that he (Putin) just switches off his tanks and we all go home but there is a whiff of Munich in the air from some in the West,” Wallace said. The 1938 Munich Agreement handed Nazi Germany parts of Czechoslovakia in a failed bid to head off major conflict in Europe. Western leaders have been shuttling back and forth to Moscow in the hopes of persuading Putin to stand his troops down. Wallace said, “The worrying thing is that despite the massive amount of increased diplomacy, that military build-up has continued. It has not paused, it has continued.”

Bennett Discusses Iran with Visiting US Senator Lindsey Graham; Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met with US Senator Lindsey Graham at the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem on Monday morning, February 14. Their discussion focused on “the Iranian threat, which is faced by both Israel and the US, and ways to deal with it,” according to a readout by the PMO. “They also discussed the security challenges in the Middle East

and ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation,” the statement added. After the meeting, Bennett thanked Graham for being “a true friend of Israel in both good times and in more challenging moments.” The meeting came as Iran on Monday said talks with world powers in Vienna to restore the 2015 nuclear deal are “complicated and difficult” but have not hit an impasse. US President Joe Biden is in a tough spot over the talks, gambling on a successful outcome but facing growing bipartisan concern that even if a deal is reached it may be insufficient to curb Tehran’s nuclear program. US negotiator Rob Malley and National Security Council envoy Brett McGurk said last week that Iran could have enough fissile material to build a nuclear weapon within weeks if it wants to, indicating a growing urgency to reach a deal soon.

Turkey, Israel Foil Iranian Assassination Attempt on Israeli Businessman; Turkish and Israeli intelligence forces came together to foil an assassination attempt of Israeli businessman Yair Geller, according to Turkish media. The alleged assassination attempt, which in this case included a team of nine, is in response to the killing of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in 2020, which Iran has attributed to Israel, according to Turkish and Israeli media reports. It is unclear what Geller's connection is. "I am an Israeli businessman in Turkey with an engineering research and development company. I was informed that the Iranians are tracking and are attempting to assassinate me," Geller told KAN in the first response to Israeli media on the story. His company, CNC İleri Teknoloji, a metal machinery supplier for the automotive, aerospace and medical industries, is based in Istanbul. The Iranian cell tracked Geller and took photos of him in his home. Turkish intelligence was aware of the tracking movements done by the Iranian cell and reportedly shared the information with the Mossad once the activity neared operational status. The cell was reportedly run by Yassin Tahermkandi, 53, an Iran-based intelligence officer, and Saleh Mushtag Bhighus, 44, his Turkish counterpart. Bhighus was among eight arrested.

UN Covered Up Assad’s Killing of Humanitarian Workers; The United Nations has allegedly concealed the murder by the regime of President Bashar Assad of two humanitarian staffers who were part of a relief convoy between the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Homs in 2016. A year-long investigation into alleged UN misconduct in Syria can now reveal that UN officials in 2016 appeared to have worked at cross purposes and did not publicize an internal UN message saying that Assad’s military had killed two aid workers. A UN source in the Middle East said the reluctance to investigate and report the alleged murder of aid workers can be explained by the global organization’s fears it would be banned from conducting future relief missions in the Syrian Arab Republic. Mohammad Al Abdallah, a Syrian human rights and democracy researcher and activist who is executive director of the Washington-based Syrian Justice and Accountability Center, said the UN had accepted a “poisoned and unhealthy” relationship with the Damascus government, in which the Syrian regime has allowed them to access places where they operate in exchange for dealing with the regime or concealing its violations. When confronted about its failure to disclose the killings, including in its public documents, the UN proceeded to delete evidence on its webpage that was based on a disclosure from a local UN official for Syria. After press queries were sent to the UN in June, the international body scrubbed its website of a video news conference that took place in Geneva on April 28, 2016, when an Arabic translator noted the death of one person during an aid mission.

Latvia Passes Law for Restitution of Jewish Property Taken in Holocaust; Latvia's parliament passed a law on Thursday, February 10, regarding Holocaust restitution to the country's Jewish community. Prior to the onset of World War II and the Holocaust, Jews in the Baltic nation owned schools, orphanages, cultural institutions, hospitals and other properties. However, during the Nazi occupation, approximately 75,000 Jews in Latvia were murdered. "This was the most serious crime against humanity ever committed on Latvian territory," the Latvian parliament said in a statement. Something that is complicating the issue is the fact that many of the institutions that owned property no longer exist and that no heirs can be found. Additionally, the exact amount of private property lost has been hard to determine. However, the government managed to calculate the worth of stolen Jewish real estate to be in excess of €47 million, based on property belonging to

Jews in 1940 and based on real estate value at the end of 2018. Jews were denied property during the Holocaust, which was seized by the Nazis. However, in Latvia, as with most countries in Eastern Europe, that property was subsequently nationalized after the war ended when the area was under Communist rule. When Latvia achieved independence in 1991, the property then became the property of the new country. The law stresses that Latvia is not to blame for the loss of Jewish property, but "it would be ethical and fair if the state would, in good faith, reimburse the Latvian Jewish community," the parliament said.

Ex-Bank of Israel Gov. Weighs In on Inflation, Rise in Prices; This week, the government announced the rollout of a plan to reduce the cost of living in Israel. It includes tax credit for working parents, tariff reductions, and increased negative income tax for low-wage workers. The plan comes in response to consumer protest regarding inflation, a word that has been on the financially conscious Israeli's mind for the past few weeks as a developing wave of increased prices has crashed over the nation. Over the course of 2021, Israel's consumer price index – a key statistic used to measure inflation – rose by 2.8%. While that number pales in comparison to other nation's inflation rates during the COVID-19 pandemic's second year, it looms over Israel's rate over the last several years, which has consistently remained close to 0%. One of the driving factors behind the current trend of inflation is an increase in the cost of food. The most notable instance of this unfolded earlier this month, as food mega-manufacturer Osem (a subsidiary of Nestlé) announced that it would be increasing the prices of its products by as much as 5% due to higher costs of packaging, transport and raw materials. This spurred severe pushback from community leaders, the public, and the finance and economy ministers, the latter of whom co-wrote a letter to food manufacturers in Israel urging them not to raise their prices, lest they face government intervention. Additionally, residents of Israel grew restless when, on February 1, the government introduced increased tariffs on electricity (which has been addressed, at least in part, by the government's aid plan), and raised the maximum price for standard 95 octane gasoline. The cost increase of electricity and gasoline reflects global increases in material costs. The Electricity Authority directed blame toward the rising cost of coal as a primary cause for the rise in electricity production costs. The Energy Ministry indicated that gas prices are rising in tandem with the surging price of crude oil. These climbing raw material costs have led to significant supply shortages; the raw materials are only one link in a chain of compounding issues plaguing the global economy.

Israeli Skier Szollos Surprises with 6th-Place Finish at Winter Olympics; Barnabas Szollos finished in sixth place overall in the men's alpine combined at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics on Thursday, February 10, in Israel's best-ever Olympic skiing finish. Szollos, a Hungarian-born skier representing Israel in his Olympic debut, finished an incredible second in the slalom portion of the event, and 11th in the downhill portion, granting him an overall sixth-place finish with a time of 1:45.04. Gold in the alpine combined went to Austria's Johannes Strolz, who finished with 1:43.87, silver was won by Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde and bronze taken by Canada's James Crawford. "It was a really good race, I had a lot of fun," Szollos said in a video message to reporters following the event. "To place sixth feels amazing and I'm really happy... it's an honor to be here, to represent Israel, and I'm really, really happy." Ahead of the Games, the head of Israel's delegation to the Winter Olympics, Yaniv Ashkenazi, said it would be "a very impressive achievement" if Szollos finished his races in the top half of athletes. The alpine combined was Szollos's third Olympic event, after he finished 30th overall in both the men's downhill and Super-G. On Sunday, February 13, he is slated to compete in the giant slalom, and on Wednesday, February 16, in the slalom. His sixth-place finish in the alpine combined puts him tied for Israel's best Winter Olympics showing with ice dancers Galit Chait and Sergei Sakhnovski, who placed sixth in ice dancing at the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City. Today, Chait is the head coach and choreographer for Israel's national figure skaters.

IDF Drills for a Winter War with Hezbollah; In the middle of two harsh winter storms, the IDF's 74th Armored Battalion conducted a large-scale drill and significantly improved its ability to go to war against Hezbollah. The five-day exercise saw troops simulate combat against the Iran-backed terror group after a

three-month training period in the Golan. The drill saw them practice combat methods in rocky terrain and in urban centers where soldiers will have to battle the group. "The drill was long and complicated, with a number of technical operations that we worked on," said Lt.-Col. Ofer Tchorz, commander of the 74th battalion, a part of the 188th Armored Brigade. The challenges posed by the Israeli winter such as cold temperatures and rain, as well as challenges posed by the communication between maneuvering units are a central part of the drill that troops are training on. "The summer doesn't influence tanks, but winter takes the drill to the next level," he said, explaining that some of the tanks got stuck in the mud during the drill, needing to be removed by engineering platforms. Having to carry out the drill during bad weather showed troops how to deal with the added challenges posed by such conditions should war break out with Hezbollah in the winter, Tchorz explained. "We are preparing for war with Hezbollah in all weather conditions." Hezbollah has been described by senior military officers as the strongest army in the Middle East after the IDF.

Iran Unveils New Missile Named for Jewish Oasis; Iran unveiled a new domestically-made missile with a range of 1,450 kilometers on Wednesday, February 9, state TV reported, a day after Tehran and Washington resumed indirect talks to salvage a 2015 nuclear deal. Iran, which has one of the biggest missile programs in the Middle East, says its ballistic missiles have a range of up to 2,000 km (1,200 miles) and are capable of reaching its arch-foe Israel and US bases in the region. State TV displayed the new surface-to-surface "Khaybar Shekan" (Khaybar buster) missile, which refers to an ancient Jewish oasis called Khaybar in the Arabian Peninsula's Hijaz region that was overrun by Muslim warriors in the 7th century. "This long-range missile is domestically manufactured by the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC)... It has high accuracy and is propelled by solid fuel and is capable of penetrating missile shields," Iranian state media reported. Tehran regards its missile program as an important deterrent against the United States, Israel, and other adversaries. It has rejected Western demands to halt its ballistic missile work. "Iran will continue advancing its ballistic missile program," Iran's armed forces chief of staff Maj.-Gen. Mohammad Bagheri said at a ceremony at an IRGC base where the new missile was displayed

Thousands of Palestinians Demonstrate in Hebron Against Chaos, High Prices; Holding signs reading: "We want to live, no to high prices," thousands of angry Palestinians demonstrated in the southern West Bank city of Hebron on Sunday and Monday, February 6 & 7, against high prices and the security chaos. In addition, dozens of truck owners and drivers organized a convoy protest in the center of Hebron demanding the Palestinian Authority government reduce prices and taxes, and provide security to end the recent uptick in lawlessness and the state of chaos in the city. Other areas of the West Bank witnessed similar protests, called for by labor unions. Protesters chanted slogans calling for "the fall of the government and the governor of Hebron." Since the beginning of the month, prices in the West Bank increased significantly, affecting dozens of food products, essential commodities, electricity, and fuel. The current tension is not new to the largest Palestinian city, where tribal order rules and the PA security forces have had difficulty reining in the violence. The past few days have seen a surge in violence in the city, but the city has been simmering and on the verge of boiling over for more than a year. Meanwhile, last week several Palestinian businesses hiked the prices of their products, putting substantial pressure on the PA, which forced the businesses to reverse their decision. Public pressure also led to the decision by businesses to cancel the price hikes. Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced the formation of a committee to study and follow up on the issue of price increases in local markets. Shtayyeh stressed that the government "will not abandon the poor and low-income groups by controlling the prices of basic commodities," insisting that the government will take the necessary measures to protect those with limited income.

Israeli Police Hacked Phones to Target Netanyahu; Evidence Would Be Inadmissible in U.S. Courts; The trial of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has revealed in recent days that police hacked the phones of close aides to Netanyahu without authority — which would, in the U.S., make the resulting evidence inadmissible in court. Netanyahu is on trial for corruption in a case that his allies say reflects an

effort by Israel's left-wing legal fraternity to target him. He is accused of attempting to negotiate with a newspaper for better coverage; accepting unauthorized gifts, such as cigars, from a friend; and for interference in a telecommunications deal. The charges are considered flimsy and politically motivated; supporters of the case against Netanyahu argue they are a test of Israel's ability to hold politicians accountable. During the trial, it emerged that Israeli police used illicit spyware to target Netanyahu aides who were turned into state witnesses. The alleged hacking is linked to a broader scandal in which an Israeli company is alleged to have sold spyware to foreign governments. As Politico noted Sunday, February 5, there have also been revelations that the spyware was used to spy on Israeli citizens. The hacking may have affected more than one witness — and information gained in the hacking may have been used by police to force witnesses to turn against Netanyahu. Leaks about the allegations against Netanyahu were used in several elections and played a role in his eventual replacement in last year's election — even though his Likud Party received more votes than any other. Netanyahu tweeted that the revelations were an “earthquake,” and there are growing calls for an inquiry into whether Israel's law enforcement apparatus violated the law and civil liberties in an attempt to bring down the prime minister. In the U.S., evidence obtained without legal authority is inadmissible at a criminal trial as the “fruit of the poisonous tree.” If the evidence that is excluded is important enough to the prosecution's case, the charges may be dismissed entirely. Other methods used to encourage witnesses to turn against Netanyahu have shocked the public.

Iran ‘Society Set to Explode’ While Biden Unfreezes \$29 Billion for Regime; A hacktivist organization has revealed a highly sensitive Iran Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) document that asserts Iranian “society is in a state of explosion” because of the crippling sanctions imposed on the nation due to its illicit nuclear program. The US government news organization Radio Farda obtained the document from Edalat-e Ali (Ali's Justice), the whistleblower entity that has also secured confidential documents and video footage about the torture of Iranian prisoners, wrote Farda. According to Radio Farda's Golnaz Esfandiari, who authored the exclusive article, “the document covers a meeting with IRGC's intelligence wing and quotes an official named “Mohammadi” saying that Iran's “society is in a state of explosion.” Mohammadi added that “social discontent has risen by 300% in the past year.” The official noted that “several shocks” in recent months have “shaken public trust” in the regime of President Ebrahim Raisi, who is listed as a US-sanctioned person for his role in several mass murders, including the massacre of at least 5,000 Iranian political prisoners in 1988. Radio Farda reported that “Mohammadi referred to soaring inflation, including hikes in the price of food items, energy, and cars. He also noted the sharp declines in stock prices.” “The leaked document includes notes from a November 2021 task-force meeting chaired by Brig.-Gen. Hossein Nejat, a senior IRGC commander and deputy head of Sarallah, a key IRGC base that oversees security in Tehran,” the station said.

A Congressman Who Wants Israel to be Narrower than his District; A Michigan congressman is complaining that he is being subjected to “ad hominem attacks” because his pro-Palestinian positions have been criticized. But there's nothing ad hominem about pointing out that this congressman wants to reduce Israel to a size that will be barely one-third the width of his own congressional district. The congressman in question is Andy Levin of Michigan, who is closely associated with J Street and advocates forcing Israel back to the nine-miles-wide pre-1967 armistice lines. In fact, Levin is so deeply devoted to making Israel just nine miles wide, that he is the lead sponsor on a bill called the “Two-State Solution Act.” The bill demands the creation of a Palestinian Arab state next to Israel, in what he calls “the occupied Palestinian Territories.” Sec.5 (a) of the Levin bill defines those territories as “the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.” Those are the areas that Israel captured in the 1967 war (Six-Day War) which means that if the state of Palestine is established, Israel will return to being nine miles wide at a point a few miles above Tel Aviv, as it was prior to 1967. By way of comparison, Rep. Levin's district, the 9th Congressional District of Michigan, is about 25 miles wide. His district is in a suburb of Detroit, which is about 45 miles wide.

Israel Gets New Earthquake Warning System, Sends Alert Within Seconds of First Tremor; Earthquake experts at the Geological Survey of Israel on Monday, February 7, unveiled cutting-edge technology capable of sensing the first sign of an earthquake and having the Home Front Command send out an alert within 10 seconds. Called TRUAA, and based on a system developed at Berkley University in California, which went live in 2019, the new NIS 45 million (\$14 million) national earthquake early warning system puts Israel on a par with a small number of other nations such as the US, Taiwan, and Japan. Israel is located on the seismically active Syrian-African Rift Valley and being so small, most of its residents are exposed to the risk of earthquake damage. Earthquake drills took place on Monday in various locations after several tremors were felt in Israel over the past month. Prof. Zohar Gvirtzman, director of the Geological Survey, told a press briefing that current technology cannot yet predict the location, timing, or strength of an earthquake. But, by picking up the initial, weaker tremor that precedes a stronger one, it can get the information out quickly in the hope that as many Israelis as possible within range will have enough time to seek protection.

Expiration Date for Israel's Pfizer Shots Extended by Two Weeks; The expiration date for the Pfizer shots currently in Israel's possession has been extended by two weeks. According to a report, Health Clinics were notified of the extension on Thursday, February 3. The original expiration date was supposed to be this coming Wednesday, February 9. The extension concerns some unused 250,000 shots which would otherwise be "thrown in the trash," amid a dramatic decline in demand for the shots in recent weeks, the report said. Senior Health Clinic officials told Channel 12 that "the health ministry is no longer doing enough to encourage vaccination. We, ourselves, are trying in the clinics, but it is not enough. It is painful to see the vaccination complexes empty, with nobody coming."



Robert I. Solomon: Messianic Rabbi, rabbisolomon@yachad.com

Jeffery Blalock: Ministries Coordinator, jeffery@yachad.com

Yachad Ministries, 950 Pine Grove Road, Roswell, Georgia 30075

E-mail: info@yachad.com, Web Page: <https://www.yachad.com/>

Phone: 770-641-3000 (ext. 6)

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