

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update February 24, 2022*** ***(23<sup>rd</sup> Adar-A, 5782)***

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The image shows two items: on the left, a CD case with a purple cover titled "GOD'S APPOINTED TIMES" by Barney Kasdan, with the subtitle "A Practical Guide for Understanding and Utilizing the Mosaic Festivals"; on the right, a glass bottle of "Anointing Oil" by Jerusalem of Gold, featuring a label with a dove and the text "Jerusalem of Gold Anointing Oil".

## ***For the Yachad Report Newsletter For February 2022***

***Iranian Fighter Jet Crashes Near School in Tabriz, Killing Three People;*** An Iranian military fighter jet crashed Monday, February 21, in a residential area of the northwestern city of Tabriz. Three people were reportedly killed in the incident — two pilots and a civilian. An F-5 fighter jet crashed near a sports complex operated by a nearby school, which was closed at the time. Video footage of the scene of the crash shared on Twitter showed a large blaze burning as firefighters tried to contain it. The head of the local Red Crescent said the jet smashed into a school, and that one of the dead was a resident of the neighborhood. Authorities are investigating the incident. Iran's air force has an assortment of US-made military aircraft purchased before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It also has Russian-made MiG and Sukhoi planes. Decades of Western sanctions have made it hard to maintain the aging fleet. Previous avian accidents in Iran include Tehran-based Caspian Airlines Flight 6936 that in January 2020 crashed in the middle of a highway in the city of Mahshahr. Two passengers were injured in that incident.

***Khamenei Rejects 'Nonsense' Accusation Iran Seeking Atomic Bomb;*** Iran's supreme leader vowed on Thursday, February 17, that his country would ramp up the development of its civilian nuclear program, as major world powers continued delicate talks in Vienna to revive Tehran's landmark nuclear deal. In a televised speech, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stressed the importance of nuclear energy for Iran, while again asserting that it had no interest in nuclear weapons, saying any claim otherwise was "nonsense." Khamenei's remarks seemed clearly aimed at the countries involved in the Vienna talks. "Enemies are making cruel moves against our nuclear energy issue, (putting) sanctions on nuclear energy that they know is peaceful," he said. "They do not want Iran to achieve this great and significant progress." The accord, which former US President Donald Trump abandoned nearly four years ago, granted Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its atomic program. Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, tweeted late Wednesday that the parties were "closer than ever" to an agreement. But talks have repeatedly stalled in recent months as Iranian negotiators press hardline demands, exasperating Western diplomats. Khamenei, who so far has largely stayed silent on the ongoing negotiations, called claims that Iran was pursuing a bomb "nonsense," saying they were meant to deprive Iran of its legitimate right to nuclear power. "If we do not pursue (peaceful nuclear energy) today, tomorrow will be late," he said. Iran has long insisted its nuclear program is peaceful. But the country's steps away from its obligations under the 2015 accord have alarmed Israel and world powers. Tehran has since started publicly enriching uranium up to 60% purity — a short technical step from the 90% needed to make an atomic bomb, and spinning far more advanced centrifuges than those permitted under the deal. Last

year the head of the UN' International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran's enrichment of uranium had reached levels that only countries seeking to make atomic weapons acquire. A US assessment earlier this month found that Iran is just "weeks" away from bomb breakout technology. Iran is negotiating in Vienna with the remaining parties to the JCPOA — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. The US is participating indirectly through mediators. Israel has repeatedly declared it will not allow Iran to become a nuclear-armed state and that, if necessary, it will strike Iranian nuclear facilities, regardless of the outcome of the Vienna talks to save the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

***Emergency Plan to Absorb Thousands of Jewish Immigrants from Ukraine;*** Government ministries, the IDF, the Jewish Agency and other bodies are preparing to receive a wave of immigration from Ukraine in light of the continuing threat of a Russian invasion of the country. The Israel Hayom newspaper has learned that preparations were held last week, and a detailed emergency plan was formulated in case thousands of Jews and those entitled to the Law of Return decide to flee to Israel in the event of war. The move is being led by Immigrant Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata (Blue and White), who also chaired the emergency hearings. The meetings were also attended by Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai, Director General of the Housing Ministry Aviad Friedman, IDF Operations Division Chief Aharon Haliva, representatives of the Hotels Association, Home Front Command representatives, the Population Authority, the Airports Authority and other bodies. The Defense and Interior Ministers, Benny Gantz and Ayelet Shaked, are also participating in the planning, as is the National Security Headquarters at the Prime Minister's Office. At this stage, Israel is not taking action to encourage immigration. However, the deployment is in case a large-scale operation is needed for the rapid evacuation and absorption of thousands of people. Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry continues to call on Israeli citizens in Ukraine to leave the country immediately. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid spoke on Friday, February 18, with Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Dr. Nicu Popescu, and discussed with him the possibility that his country would help rescue Israelis and Jews from Ukraine. "Action must be taken so that Israelis understand that a late rescue can be complicated and dangerous," Lapid said. At the same time, to help Israelis, the Foreign Ministry decided to keep Ambassador Michael Brodsky and the embassy staff in Kyiv for the time being and today to open the consular department at the embassy, to provide travel documents to citizens in need. The Foreign Ministry has decided that at this point the embassy in Kyiv will continue to operate, but the decision may change.

***Lapid on US Sanctions on Russia: Israel Has Its Own Considerations;*** Israel has its own considerations to weigh when it comes to US sanctions on Russia, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said on Monday, February 21, as Israeli officials began publicly saying Jerusalem would follow Washington's cues. In light of Russia's amassing of troops on Ukraine's borders and the US threatening massive sanctions in the event of an invasion, Lapid said he told Washington and Moscow that Israel "will do the right thing according to our set of values." While Israel has "liberal democratic values," Lapid said, there are other considerations as well. Israel has its own considerations to weigh when it comes to US sanctions on Russia, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said on Monday, as Israeli officials began publicly saying Jerusalem would follow Washington's cues. In light of Russia's amassing of troops on Ukraine's borders and the US threatening massive sanctions in the event of an invasion, Lapid said he told Washington and Moscow that Israel "will do the right thing according to our set of values." While Israel has "liberal democratic values," Lapid said, there are other considerations as well. In addition, Lapid pointed out that Russia and Ukraine have large Jewish communities, and as such, asserted he has to be "more careful than any other foreign minister in the world." "I think there is an understanding of this," he said. "This is where the special relationship [with the US] comes into play. They understand this because they understand us. We have a mutual vocabulary, a language that we share." Lapid said he thinks that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is still avoidable, and expressed hope that French President Emmanuel Macron's mediation efforts will be fruitful. "There is still enough room for a diplomatic effort to try to make this invasion – which looks inevitable – not happen," he said. Lapid asked cabinet ministers not to comment on the situation in Ukraine, when asked about it at a Yesh Atid faction meeting later Monday.

***Israel to Open to Unvaccinated Tourists Starting March 1;*** Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz announced Sunday, February 20, a plan to ease certain COVID restrictions on travel and education, set to come into effect on March 1. Under the new guidelines, both vaccinated and unvaccinated tourists of all ages will be allowed into the country, as long as they submit a negative PCR test before boarding the flight and take another one after landing in Israel. Israeli citizens returning to Israel will not have to take a pre-flight test, but only a PCR upon landing. Unvaccinated Israelis will not have to quarantine after their return to Israel as long as they test negative upon landing. The announcement came after the Health Ministry last week recommended easing COVID-19 restrictions as the fifth wave of infections fueled by the Omicron variant continues to recede. Under the new regulations, mandatory home COVID tests for Israeli schoolchildren will be canceled as well — for middle schoolers on Thursday and elementary school students on March 10. “We are seeing a steady decline in the morbidity data; therefore, this is the time to gradually open what we were the first in the world to close,” Bennett said after a meeting on the matter Sunday with Horowitz and Tourism Minister Yoel Razvozov. “Our indicators must be in sync with the situation on the ground. What we are telling the public must be in sync with what is expected of it,” he said. “In order to maintain the public’s trust and be certain that the citizens of Israel are implementing the directives and the government’s decision, we must open up as the situation improves – and it is improving significantly.” “At the moment, the situation in Israel is good... At the same time, we will continue to closely monitor the situation and in the event of a new variant, we will again act quickly,” Bennett added. The Health Ministry had originally recommended only allowing unvaccinated tourists under the age of 12 to enter the country, and only if they are accompanied by vaccinated parents.

***Epidemiologist Estimates Nearly Half of Israeli Population Caught Omicron;*** The pandemic continued its retreat this week in Israel and globally after the Omicron variant caused a staggering number of infections since it emerged several months ago. There were 2.2 million confirmed Omicron infections in Israel, but epidemiologist Eran Segal estimated on Friday, February 18, that the actual number of cases was far higher — around 4.5 million, close to half of Israel’s population of over 9 million. Around 70 percent of Israelis have been infected with the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic, or around 6 to 7 million people, Segal told Channel 12.” The number of new cases in Israel has been falling in recent weeks, after peaking last month, and the government has begun rolling back rules put in place to contain the Omicron wave. The Health Ministry on Friday reported 15,358 infections diagnosed the day before. At the height of the outbreak in January, there were a record 85,185 infections in a day. There were 152,411 active infections on Friday, including 808 severe cases, the Health Ministry said. In the past week, 249 Israelis died of the virus, bringing the toll since the start of the pandemic to 9,828. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Thursday that the Omicron wave was “breaking,” as he and top officials agreed to cease the Green Pass vaccine pass system at the end of the month. Some other restrictions will remain in place. Globally, after a surge which lasted for three-and-a-half months, the average number of daily cases dropped for a third week in a row, falling back by 22% to 1.97 million new worldwide cases, according to an AFP tally on Thursday. The number of daily cases dropped significantly in North America, the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and Africa, and remained steady in Asia and Oceania. Sweden saw the biggest drop of the week with 78% fewer cases.

***Azerbaijan 'Proud of Historic Relations with the Jewish People';*** Israel National News spoke with Sevil Mikailova, Milli Mejlis (parliament) Member, Azerbaijan, on the occasion of her first official visit to Israel. “From the very moment arriving in this beautiful country I felt this warmth from the people, from friends which I met. Today and tomorrow we are having events scheduled to commemorate the victims of a hotel genocide which was committed by Armenian aggressors 30 years ago in 1992 in a small town of Azerbaijan. And now it is the 30th [anniversary] of this tragedy and we will commemorate this tragic event here in Israel.” Mikailova describes relations between Israel and Azerbaijan – there is an Israeli embassy in Azerbaijan but no Azerbaijani embassy in Israel – “as a high level because our relations are not just only

between the two states but we have historic routes.” “We are very proud of our history, we are very proud of our relations with Jewish people and even now they are equal members of the society in Azerbaijan,” Mikailova says. “We celebrate all holidays irrespective of religious tradition. Also on the ground, the Muslim citizens of Azerbaijan feel okay and the Jews feel okay with their Muslim neighbors. We have synagogues in Azerbaijan which are really one of the very sacred places for Jews and again we preserve these values and we share everything.” Coming from a Muslim country with good relations with the Jewish people, she mentions that seeing relations between Jews and Arabs throughout the centuries being full of tension is a “sad history.” “The news about the clashes in this area are very painful for us to hear,” she says. “But we do believe that one day durable peace will come to this land and people here will live with a full understanding and respect each other.” On the topic of a potential war between Ukraine and Russia, Mikailova says: “I want to say that Azerbaijan supports the territorial integrity of countries. This is the fundamental right of each country as indicated in the UN Charter. It's really sad that tensions around Ukraine are arising. We do believe that political dialogue would be the better choice for the sides to come to common ground because war means victims, war is blood, and believe me that taking into account our own experience I want to say that it leads to many human casualties.” In terms of the 2020 Azerbaijan war with Armenia, Mikailova explains that the war ended with victory for Azerbaijan, who liberated their territory from Armenian occupation.

***Israeli Strawberry Wins Guinness Record as World's Largest;*** A giant strawberry grown in Israel and weighing 289 grams (10.19 ounces) has been confirmed as setting a new Guinness World Record as the heaviest ever, the top feat-tracking organization said in a statement Tuesday, February 14. The bulging fruit was discovered on the Strawberries in the Field plantation run by the Ariel family in the agricultural community Kadima-Zoran, in the central district of Israel. It was 18 centimeters (seven inches) long, four centimeters thick, and a whopping 34 centimeters in circumference, according to the statement. The strawberry is of the Ilan variety, which was originally bred by Nir Dai at Israel's Agricultural Research Organization and is known for producing large berries. Dai himself was on hand to witness the weighing of the strawberry and said that this year the strawberry season has been late due to cold weather, enabling the multiple berries to grow together into one large fruit. The Ariel family, a father and his four sons, in fact grew four oversized strawberries this year, but only one of them beat the previous 250-gram record holder, which was weighed in Fukuoka, Japan, on January 28, 2015.

***Cooperation Between Countries Needed to Tackle Iranian Threat;*** Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani praised Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's historic visit to his country on Tuesday, February 15. “The two sides discussed political and security developments in the region and the challenges facing its countries, including the Iranian nuclear file, terrorism, religious extremism, poverty, as well as social issues,” Al-Zayani said. “They underlined the importance of intensifying joint efforts to address regional challenges and threats, maintain stability and security in the Middle East, and enhance regional and international peace.” He added: “Prime Minister Bennett invited his Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister to visit the State of Israel, an invitation which was accepted, with the visit anticipated to take place in the near future.” Al-Zayani said that he “greatly appreciated” Bennett's “clear dedication and commitment to further enhancing and strengthening our relations and his government's determination to support and advance this process across the board.” Al-Zayani said when asked by Israel National News that the “Palestinian issue is always there on the table.” “In once again welcoming the success of this visit, I look forward to new horizons of cooperation, understanding, and opportunity for our countries and their peoples,” he said. “Our stand is always calling for the two parties to negotiate. Our position is hopefully to have negotiations to reach a solution that can achieve two states,” Al-Zayani said.

***Bennett Says Religion in Middle East No Longer Needs to be Defined by Brutality and Extremism;*** Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke to Bahraini students during his visit to the Gulf country Tuesday, February 15. Following are some of his remarks. “I have come here to talk about the future. Your future. My

people's future. Our shared future. A future that chooses cooperation over conflict, hope over hostility, and friendship over fear. A future that is dependent on all the people sitting in this room. There was once a tent — that was the first home of all of us: The tent of Abraham. Abraham, you know, he was not your average leader. He was a man of God, he was a man of the world. He wasn't just a family man — but a businessman. A man who was both deeply attached to his faith, but at the same time — open to the world. Everyone was welcome in Abraham's tent. It was wide open. I think it is remarkable that the historic agreements between Israel and the Arab nations are called "the Abraham Accords". When I became Prime Minister, I was asked what I thought about the "Abraham accords"; I was asked if I planned to keep using this name — I said, "There could be no better name." Religion in the Middle East no longer needs to be defined by brutality and extremism. For the like-minded leaders of the Abraham Accords, our faith was the glue that healed the wounds of our past — and strengthened the connection between us. My Bahraini friends — together we sit in the great tent of Abraham. In this tent, no one is a stranger — we are all family. Come and see for yourself what Israel is about. The Israeli people welcome you with open arms. The Middle East is changing and I am convinced that Israel's growing friendships with Bahrain and other countries in the region — are a leading force in the profound change. Together, we are creating a new reality in the Middle East that will greatly benefit our people, our countries and the entire region. We must seize the momentum of the historic Abraham accords, we must make the most of the opportunity we've been given. אָר אַ יוֹ אַ רַמְבַּן אַ אֹל אַ אֵ יְהִת יְוֹרְהָ יְתָא : And Abraham said unto Lot — who your Quran refers to as 'Lut': "Let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brothers"

**Revelers Chant 'Death to Israel, US, UK' on Iran Revolution Anniversary;** Tens of thousands of Iranians on motorcycles and in cars celebrated the 43rd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on Friday, February 11, Ynet reported. In 1979, the pro-Western shah (king) Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was deposed and the powerful cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became the country's supreme leader. According to the Ynet report, revelers attended the celebrations in their vehicles due to COVID-19 restrictions forbidding public gatherings. Some participants burned Israeli and American flags while shouting "We will not give up," the report said. Processions were held in numerous cities and towns, including Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, and Tabriz. Some attendees held photos of current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, former Supreme Leader Khomeini, and the late general of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Qasem Soleimani, who was assassinated in 2020 in an American drone strike in Baghdad, Iraq, the report quoted Iranian media as saying. Ynet added that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke before Friday prayers, saying the country was never dependent on the ongoing negotiations with world powers in Vienna, Austria, regarding its nuclear program. "We hang [our] hopes in the east, west, north, and south of our country," he said. "We have never hung [our] hopes in Vienna or New York." The report noted some attendees of the speech chanted "Death to America," "Death to Israel" and "Death to England."

**MK Mansour Abbas: Israel is Not an Apartheid State;** Ra'am Party leader MK Mansour Abbas rejected the claim that the State of Israel was guilty of the crime of apartheid within its sovereign borders. "I would not call it apartheid," he said during a virtual talk he gave at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on Thursday, February 10. He defended his position by pointing out the obvious: that he leads an Israeli-Arab party that is a member of the government's coalition. "I am within the coalition," he said, adding that the option also exists for Israeli-Arabs to be ministers in the government. He was quizzed about the issue during his talk, in light of Amnesty International's report last month which accused Israel of apartheid both within sovereign Israel and within the West Bank and Gaza. Human Rights Watch and the Israeli NGO B'Tselem have made similar claims. Abbas was asked if he felt the term apartheid aptly described the relationship between Arabs and Jews within sovereign Israel. He responded that he was not a fan of exploring the situation from the broad macro-level such as apartheid or racism, but preferred instead to take a hands-on approach to solve discrimination at the micro-level. Such accusations do not help resolve the issues, he said, adding that

reports such as the one published by Amnesty and others outline areas of discrimination that should be addressed. “This is an opportunity for us to look at what is happening and to be introspective, to see what we can fix and change,” he said. “I do not have the privilege to judge people,” the Ra’am leader said. “But I have the wish, a desire to accomplish this change together with them. I will change, you will change. It is not that I am the good one and you are the bad one. Our fate here is to live together and we can decide how we want to live together.” When it comes to the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Abbas said that he tends to rely on the framework set by the international community and international law.

***12 Hurt as Drone Targets Saudi Airport; Yemen’s Iran-Backed Houthis Blamed;*** The Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen said Thursday that 12 people were wounded in a drone attack on an airport in the southern Saudi region of Abha near the kingdom’s border with Yemen. It was not immediately clear from the coalition statement whether the people, who included travelers and workers at the airport, were wounded by the drone itself or from fallen debris. Saudi air defenses destroyed the drone, according to the statement, which also said it was launched by Houthi rebels inside Yemen early Thursday afternoon, February 10. Saudi state television and accompanying social media accounts carried video from inside Abha’s airport showing operations there running as normal. Saudi Arabia has been at war in Yemen since 2015 fighting against Iranian-backed Houthis who overran the capital and ousted the government from power. On Tuesday, US President Joe Biden spoke with Saudi King Salman. The White House said the president and king discussed “Iranian-enabled attacks by the Houthis against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia.” Biden underscored US commitment in supporting Saudi Arabia in the defense of its people and territory from such attacks, it added. The war has killed tens of thousands of people, both fighters and civilians, and spawned the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

***Unauthorized Bus Stop Signs Describing Israel as 'Apartheid' State Appear in London;*** Posters labeling Israel an “apartheid” state have been illegally placed in bus stops around London, England, the Jewish Chronicle reported. The posters resemble dictionary entries, with the word “apartheid” written as a dictionary definition. The definition of the word is given as a “system of oppression and domination by one racial group over another, as imposed by South Africa (1948-1991) and Israel (1948-present).” The posters also say “Usage: Amnesty International called for Israel to end its system of apartheid against the Palestinian people.” The full-length ads, which have been noted at bus stops in north London district Chalk Farm, were not authorized by Transport for London (TfL). The unauthorized posters appeared a week after a much-criticized report from Amnesty International that alleged Israel was guilty of “apartheid.”

***Dutch Plan to Force Universities to Reveal Ties to Israel Blasted as Anti-Semitic;*** The chief rabbi of the Netherlands has slammed an order that forces Dutch universities to reveal ties to Israel and Jewish institutions, saying it “reeks of antisemitism,” the Jewish Chronicle reported. The move came about after a pro-Palestinian advocacy group, The Rights Forum, placed a freedom of information request to compel universities to disclose “institutional ties with Israel universities, institutions, and businesses and with organizations that propagate support for the State of Israel.” Reportedly the list of institutions includes national and international Jewish community organizations such as the Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands, the Anti-Defamation League, and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Rights Forum also put in freedom of information requests to force universities to reveal ties to Israeli international defense and electronics company Elbit, B’nai Brith, and Christians for Israel. “The clear inference is that some shadowy Zionist/Jewish cabal is operating in the Dutch university system. This reeks of antisemitism, but it comes as no surprise to me given this group’s reputation,” Chief Rabbi of the Netherlands Binyomin Jacobs told the Chronicle. Rabbi Jacobs said the most concerning aspect was the “number of universities that were so compliant with such a transparently anti-Semitic request.” “It reminds us that most mayors cooperated during the occupation to pass on the names of their Jewish citizens to the Germans,” he said.

***UAE Bank Mashreq to Use Israeli Financial Crime Detection Tool;*** Israel technology firm ThetaRay will license a financial crime detection tool that monitors transactions for correspondent banking to Emirati bank Mashreq, the companies said on Monday, February 14. It is ThetaRay's first direct licensing agreement with a bank from the United Arab Emirates, Chief Executive Mark Gazit said, declining to disclose the annual fee. The Israeli-developed tool uses artificial intelligence to identify financial cyber threats like money laundering or fraud so users can take action against suspicious transactions. "It's almost like a scanning machine," Gazit told Reuters. Dubai-headquartered Mashreq, which in the past has paid penalties for violating US sanctions, said the solution allowed banks to "effectively thwart financial crime risks in the increasingly complex space of cross-border payments." The UAE, the Middle East's financial and trading hub, has in recent years tightened banking and financial regulations - and urged banks to increase anti-money laundering efforts - to tackle a perception it is a hot spot for illicit money. ThetaRay's Gazit said he hoped the Mashreq deal would pave the way for more contracts in the UAE and other Arab countries. In 2020, Israel and the UAE established ties under a US-brokered deal that expanded to Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Gazit also said the company planned to remain private in the near term and could soon raise on the "higher side" of tens of millions of dollars to help it expand and build capacity.



*Robert I. Solomon: Messianic Rabbi, [rabbisolomon@yachad.com](mailto:rabbisolomon@yachad.com)*

*Jeffery Blalock: Ministries Coordinator, [jeffery@yachad.com](mailto:jeffery@yachad.com)*

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

*E-mail: [info@yachad.com](mailto:info@yachad.com), Web Page: <https://www.yachad.com/>*

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

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