

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update May 19, 2022 (18th Iyyar, 5782)



[For the Yachad Report Newsletter For May 2022](#)

Initial Forensics Can't Determine Who Killed Journalist in Jenin; Israeli and Palestinian initial findings on the death of Shireen Abu Akleh have been unable to determine who shot the veteran Al-Jazeera correspondent in Jenin during clashes between armed Palestinians and IDF troops in Jenin. An initial autopsy of her body said that she died after a bullet that was fired several meters away struck her head. Dr. Ryan al-Ali of the Pathological Institute at the a-Najah University in Nablus was quoted by al-Jarmak TV channel as saying that they could not determine who had shot her. The IDF launched an investigation into the death on Wednesday evening, May 11. Speaking to journalists on Wednesday night, Gantz said that Israel is “committed to finding out the truth” of the incident. Expressing his sorrow and regret over her death, the defense minister said that it will take time to get a clear picture of her death and who is at fault.

Satellite Images Show Complete Destruction of Syrian Site Hit by Israel; Images published by Israeli intelligence firm ImageSat International (ISI) of a site allegedly struck by Israel on Friday, May 13, show its complete destruction. According to ISI, the structures that were hit served as an entrance to underground tunnels and were completely destroyed by the airstrikes. The same structures were hit in September 2018 in another strike blamed on Israel and were rebuilt. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the Syrian civil war, said that at least eight missiles were fired toward weapons depots and sites belonging to Iranian militias. A five-man crew of a Pantsir missile-defense system was killed after firing toward Israel Air Force jets. Another seven civilians were injured. According to SOHR, it was the 12th Israeli attack on Syrian territory since the beginning of the year. The report by ISI said that the strikes came after the IAF struck Syria’s Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) east, north and west on April 9. Israeli officials have repeatedly voiced concerns over Iran’s entrenchment in Syria and the smuggling of sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah from Tehran to Lebanon via Syria, stressing that both are red lines for the Jewish state. Israel has been carrying out its war-between-wars campaign for close to a decade in an attempt to prevent Iran from entrenching itself in Syria and to stop Tehran from smuggling advanced weaponry.

Hezbollah and Allies Dealt a Blow in Lebanon Election, Early Results Show; Lebanon’s Hezbollah terror group and its allies appear to have suffered some losses in this weekend’s parliamentary

elections, with their opponents gaining more seats and some of their traditional partners not making it into the legislature, early results showed Monday, May 16. Despite the apparent setback, Hezbollah and its main Shiite ally, the Amal group of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, are likely to retain the 27 seats allocated to the sect. The unofficial results show that independents, including those from the 2019 protest movement, made some gains by removing longtime politicians from parliament. The closely watched elections on Sunday were the first since a devastating economic crisis erupted in Lebanon in October 2019, triggering nationwide protests against the ruling class blamed for decades of corruption and mismanagement. The Saudi-backed Christian Lebanese Forces party, which has been among the most vocal critics of the Iran-armed Hezbollah, says it won at least 20 seats, adding five members from the 2018 vote. This would make it the largest Christian block in parliament, replacing the Free Patriotic Movement that was founded by President Michel Aoun and has been a Hezbollah ally since 2006.

Iran Official Says Tehran Mulling Gas Exports to Europe Amid Soaring Energy Prices; Iran is considering the possibility of exporting gas to Europe, an oil ministry official said Sunday, May 15, against the backdrop of soaring energy prices due to Russia's war in Ukraine. "Iran is studying this subject but we have not reached a conclusion yet," deputy oil minister Majid Chegeni was quoted as saying by the ministry's official news agency, Shana. "Iran is always after the development of energy diplomacy and expansion of the market," he added. Though Iran boasts one of the world's largest proven gas reserves, its industry has been hit by US sanctions that were reimposed in 2018 when Washington withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. Talks aiming to revive the 2015 nuclear deal began last year in Vienna but have been on pause for weeks amid outstanding issues.

European Nations Tell Israel: Do Not Build New West Bank Housing Units; Israel must not build the more than 4,000 settler homes, plans for which were advanced this week, fourteen European nations said in a joint statement they issued on Friday, May 13. "We are deeply concerned by the decision of the Israeli Higher Planning Council to advance plans for the construction of more than 4,000 housing units in the West Bank," the countries said. "We urge the Israeli authorities to reverse this decision," they added. "The new housing units would constitute an additional obstacle to the two-state solution. Israeli settlements are in clear violation of international law and stand in the way of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians," they added. They also spoke out against Israeli demolitions of illegal Palestinian homes, including potentially pending evictions in an area of the South Hebron Hills known as Masafer Yatta. The countries that signed the statement authored by France were: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. All the countries mentioned, save for Norway, are European Union members. The Higher Planning Council for Judea and Samaria met on Thursday to advance the plans. The left-wing NGO Peace Now counted the number of homes involved. It said that plans for 4,427 settler homes were advanced or approved, including two outposts, a hotel, a conservation area and two industrial parks.

S&P Affirms Israel's AA- Rating; The S&P Global logo is displayed on its offices in the financial district in New York City Credit rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) has kept Israel's favorable rating unchanged at AA- with a "stable" outlook, the Finance Ministry said Saturday evening, May 14, citing the company's announcement released on Thursday. The agency cited Israel's strong economic performance in the past year, a robust economy, and fiscal outturns that helped "net general government debt fall below its pre-pandemic level more quickly," it said in the announcement. S&P also expressed concerns over the political and security risks in the country, given the coalition's loss of its already razor-thin majority and the future political landscape, as well as an ongoing wave of terror attacks that has claimed the lives of 19 people in Israel and the West Bank since late March. The agency also said that while Israel has normalized relations with a number of Muslim-majority states in the context of the US-brokered Abraham Accords, opening up significant trade and diplomatic opportunities, "Israel's relations with several other

neighboring countries remain very tense, especially with Syria and Iran.” S&P said it expects the Israeli economy to grow at a rate of 5.5% in 2022, following growth of over 8% in 2021, which surpassed forecasts and marking the highest financial growth rate recorded in Israel in 21 years, according to data published in February by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The OECD had projected growth of roughly 6.3% in 2022 for Israel in its December 2021 Economic Outlook. S&P noted Israel’s positive fiscal performance and a strong tech sector, which make up a resilient economy, as well as the “limited impact” of Russia’s war on Ukraine on Israel and limited further pandemic-related risks such as closures. “The stable outlook balances elevated geopolitical and domestic political risks and the pandemic-induced deterioration of Israel’s fiscal position, against the state’s persistently resilient economy, improving budgetary performance, and strong balance of payments,” the S&P announcement read. S&P expects an average inflation rate of 3.8% in 2022, noting that this rate is significantly lower compared to most developed countries. Inflation in the US, for example, reached a high of 8.5% in March, dropping to 8.1% in April.

Housing Prices Soar by More Than 16% in Past Year; Housing prices in Israel have surged by 16.3 percent over the past year, the biggest uptick the country has seen since 2010, according to a report released Sunday, May 15, by the Central Bureau of Statistics. February-March saw housing prices climb 1.9%, the data showed. Northern and central Israel saw the highest increase during February and March of 2022, 2.9% and 2.4% respectively. Haifa saw an increase of 1.8%, Tel Aviv 1.5%, Jerusalem 1.3% and southern Israel 1.2%. Prices in central Israel are up 18.5% over the past year; in Jerusalem 16.7%; in Tel Aviv 16%; in Haifa 14.9%; in northern Israel 13.8%, and in southern Israel 12.3%. The nationwide average rent rose to NIS 4,153.6 (about \$1,220) in the first quarter of this year from NIS 4,112.6 in the previous one. Governments have promised to lower ever-climbing housing prices for more than a decade. The sky-high costs have put home ownership out of the reach of many Israelis, weakening the middle class. Finance Minister Avigdor Liberman said in December that housing prices would “moderate” by the end of 2022, and that he believes Israelis may even see prices drop in the coming years.

Serious COVID Cases in Israel Drop Below 100 for First Time in Months; The number of serious COVID cases in Israel dropped to 99, according to new data from the Health Ministry released on Monday morning, May 16, marking the first time in months the figure has dipped below 100. The last time the caseload of seriously ill COVID patients dropped below 100 was December 31. Out of the 99 cases, 47 patients were reported to be on ventilators and four are connected to an ECMO machine. The drop in serious cases has continued despite Israel lifting its indoor mask mandate on April 24, leaving the requirement for face coverings in place only in hospitals and old age homes and aboard aircraft. Health Ministry statistics also showed that more than 6.7 million Israelis have received at least one vaccine dose and more than 6.1 million got both shots. Additionally, nearly 4.5 million people have been administered a booster shot, including 807,090 who received a fourth dose. In further steps to loosen COVID-related restrictions, Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz is reportedly seeking to end the mask requirement for international flights, following a similar decision by the European Union. The European Union said that it will no longer recommend medical masks be worn at airports and on planes starting Monday, though member states can still require them.

Israel Prepping Teams to Carry out Targeted Killings of Hamas Leaders Abroad; Israel has reportedly told foreign allies that it is readying teams to carry out the targeted killing of leaders of the Hamas terrorist group who live abroad in retaliation for a wave of deadly terror attacks. While Hamas has not taken responsibility for most of the attacks since March 22 that have left 19 people in Israel and the West Bank dead, the group’s Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar has repeatedly called for Palestinians to assault Israelis and the group has publicly praised the perpetrators, encouraging more attacks. However, the terror group did claim responsibility for an attack that killed a security officer guarding the West Bank settlement

of Ariel last month. While some Israeli legislators and pundits have advocated killing Sinwar in response to the current terror wave, which he has urged on from the coastal enclave, officials are wary of carrying out targeted killings in Gaza or the West Bank for fear it could spark rocket fire on Israeli towns and cities. However, any potential targeted killings are more likely to take place in other countries in the region where Hamas leaders live, with Lebanon and Qatar given as examples. Targets could include Saleh al-Arouri, a deputy leader of the terror group who splits his time between Qatar, Turkey, and Lebanon and is in charge of West Bank operations.

Israeli Embassy in New Delhi on High Alert amid Serious Fear of Iran Attack; The Israeli embassy in New Delhi has been on high alert in recent weeks amid “serious” fears of a possible terror attack by Iran-backed perpetrators. Security measures have been tightened in areas surrounding the embassy in the Indian capital and nearby streets have been outfitted with surveillance cameras and subject to increased security patrols. The security alerts are “serious” as the embassy in New Delhi has become one of several “likely targets” for Iran-affiliated militias. Indian police and counter-terror forces recently conducted a security drill to prepare for a possible attack where streets around the diplomatic mission were blocked, and gunfire and explosions could be heard. This comes just a week after Israel’s Mossad spy agency foiled a recent Iranian attempt to assassinate an Israeli diplomat working at the consulate in Istanbul. In addition to the Israeli worker at the consulate, an American general stationed in Germany and a journalist in France were also targeted in the plot.

Israel Doesn't Need Permission from the US to Build in Settlements; Israel doesn't need permission from the United States to build in West Bank settlements, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid told reporters in the Knesset. "Israel is a sovereign state and does not ask for permission to operate in its territory," Lapid said. He spoke amid the latest diplomatic row between Israel and the United States over the Higher Planning Council for Judea and Samaria's meeting on Thursday to advance and approve plans for 3,988 settler homes. The US had asked Israel not to advance the plans, given its stiff opposition to any Israeli settlement construction. "We always update the Americans" when it comes to settlement construction. He clarified that this was not the same thing needing their approval. However, to offset US anger regarding the move, Israel cut back on the scope of the plans by some 1,800-2,000 units. US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides and Secretary of State Antony Blinken as well as State Department spokesman Ned Price have stated many times that they believe such settlement activity harms the possibility of creating a two-state resolution to the conflict. When asked about tension with the US on this matter, Lapid said, that if the advancement of plans for 3,988 settler homes had "international consequences - it is my job to deal with them and I will deal with them."

UN Nuclear Agency 'Extremely Concerned' by Iranian Silence on Undeclared Sites; The UN atomic energy watchdog chief said Tuesday, May 10, that he was “extremely concerned” about Iran’s lack of cooperation as the EU seeks to unblock talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. Talks between world powers and Iran have stalled since mid-March as negotiators seek to return to the landmark accord that curtailed the Islamic republic’s nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The International Atomic Energy Agency is “trying to clarify a number of still open matters with Iran,” IAEA head Rafael Grossi told a European Parliament committee. “I am referring to the fact that we, in the last few months, were able to identify traces of enriched uranium in places that had never been declared by Iran as places where any activity was taking place,” he said. “The situation does not look very good. Iran, for the time being, has not been forthcoming in the kind of information we need from them... We are extremely concerned about this,” he said. EU diplomat Enrique Mora, who chairs the negotiations, said he was on his way to Tehran Tuesday as the United States — which is seeking to come back to the deal that GOP then-president Donald Trump unilaterally left in 2018 — voiced hope for progress. Mora tweeted he would hold talks

with Ali Bagheri, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, and other officials. "Work on closing the remaining gaps of this negotiation continues," he said.

Dozens of Jews Removed from Lufthansa Flight over COVID-19 Masks; Germany's leading airline, Lufthansa, issued a public apology on Tuesday, May 10, after dozens of passengers, whose appearance clearly showed them to be Jewish, were not allowed to board a flight in Frankfurt last Wednesday because some of them allegedly did not comply with COVID-19 mask rules. "Lufthansa regrets the circumstances surrounding the decision to exclude affected passengers from the flight, for which Lufthansa sincerely apologizes," said the statement. "While Lufthansa is still reviewing the facts and circumstances of that day, we regret that the large group was denied boarding rather than limiting it to the non-compliant guests." Some passengers on a flight from New York to Frankfurt had not complied with COVID-19 masking mandates, including some of the identifiably Jewish passengers traveling to visit the tomb of Rabbi Yeshaya Steiner of Kerestir in Hungary. Jewish passengers had also reportedly irritated the flight crew by praying in the plane's aisles. "We confirm that a larger group of passengers could not be carried yesterday on Lufthansa flight LH1334 from Frankfurt to Budapest because the travelers refused to wear the legally mandated mask (medical mask) on board," Lufthansa said. After the flight from New York had landed in Frankfurt, the Jewish passengers waited to board their connecting flight – only for the passengers, who were visibly Jewish, to be allegedly singled out and denied boarding. Lufthansa reportedly identified many of the Jewish passengers as part of a large travel group, reportedly punishing them collectively. "I'm not with the group," one Jewish traveler said in a video of the incident. "Is this a Lufthansa decision that all Jewish people that were on the flight can't get on any flight today – because this is 2022 and this is a Western country and this has to go up to upper management." A Lufthansa representative explained to the Jewish passenger that everyone had to pay for the action of the other passengers. Non-Jewish passengers reportedly faced no such denial to board, despite allegedly also flouting masking requirements. "Jewish people who were the mess, they made the problems," said the representative. "Lufthansa's 'apology' makes no mention of the fact that it was Jews specifically who were denied boarding the plane," noted the American Jewish Committee. "This 'apology' is a cop-out," a report pointed out. "It calls the denied passengers a large group, when in fact there were several dozen Jews on the flight who were denied boarding, despite not being part of any group! This apology skirts the primary issue of racial profiling by Lufthansa employees."

Nazi Flags Flown Outside Florida's Disney World; Jewish groups on Monday, May 9, called on Florida officials to condemn an incident where protesters outside Disney World flew swastika flags and yelled slogans at people entering the amusement park. The Anti-Defamation League called it "an abhorrent display of antisemitism." "At a time when incidents of anti-Jewish hate are at their highest, it is incumbent upon all in positions of power and leadership to condemn this bigotry," the group said. The Florida Holocaust Museum also slammed the incident and called for action. "It's a sad day for humanity when even Disney World – the 'happiest place on earth' – is not immune to blatant antisemitism," the museum said in a statement. Some reports said that the protesters also had an American flag and a sign that said "DeSantis Country." Disney is currently embroiled in a dispute with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. DeSantis has been criticized for his handling of previous Nazi protests in his state. He declined to specifically condemn a Nazi rally in February, instead, attacking Democrats for attempting to smear him in connection with the small gathering that saw two dozen people in Orlando waving swastikas, stomping on Israeli flags, and yelling anti-Semitic epithets at passersby.

Israel's Chicken Coops Riddled with Health and Safety Concerns; Israeli egg producers are rife with health and safety concerns, sparking fears of sanitation problems and the possible spread of zoonotic diseases, according to the State Comptroller's Report. The situation was especially bad in the North, where chicken coops were found to host severe diseases at a much higher rate than the rest of the country, the

report said Tuesday, May 10. There was a large outbreak of bird flu in Israel late last year. It was likely brought to the country by migratory birds and spread throughout chicken coops in the North. The Agriculture Ministry was forced to cull about one million birds in poultry farms throughout the country. It was necessary because bird flu is a zoonotic disease, meaning it could have made the jump from animals to humans; in fact, this has occurred in several countries worldwide already. On average, Israeli chicken coops produce 2.2 billion eggs each year. However, 94% of all hens laying the eggs are housed in cage coops. In light of the recent mass recall caused by salmonella contamination, which is a zoonotic disease, there is a grave concern for public health.

After 800 Years, Church of England Apologizes to Jews for Laws that Led to Expulsion; The Church of England on Sunday, May 8, apologized for anti-Jewish laws that were passed 800 years ago and eventually led to the expulsion of Jews from the kingdom for hundreds of years. A special service held at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford was attended by Britain's Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and representatives of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby to mark the Synod of Oxford, passed in 1222. The synod forbade social interactions between Jews and Christians, placed a specific tithe on Jews, and required them to wear an identifying badge. They were also banned from some professions and from building new synagogues. The decrees were followed by more anti-Jewish laws, and eventually the mass expulsion of England's 3,000 Jews of the time in 1290. It would be another 360 years before Jews were permitted to return. "Today's service is an opportunity to remember, repent and rebuild," Welby tweeted. "Let us pray it inspires Christians today to reject contemporary forms of anti-Judaism and antisemitism and to appreciate and receive the gift of our Jewish neighbors." "Our intention is for this commemoration to be a strong signal of such rich potential, reflected in the depth of interfaith encounter and service that increasingly exists in Oxford and across our society," the Diocese of Oxford said in a statement ahead of the event.



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