

## ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update June 2, 2022 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sivan, 5782)***



**[For the Yachad Report Newsletter For June 2022](#)**

***Iraq Approves: Death Penalty for Normalization with Israel;*** Iraqi lawmakers on Thursday, May 26, passed a bill criminalizing the normalization of ties and any relations, including business ties, with Israel, The Associated Press reported. The legislation says that violation of the law is punishable with the death sentence or life imprisonment. The law was approved with 275 lawmakers voting in favor of it in the 329-seat assembly. A parliament statement said the legislation is “a true reflection of the will of the people”, according to the report. Influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, whose party won the largest number of seats in Iraq’s parliamentary elections last year, called for Iraqis to take to the streets to celebrate this “great achievement.” Hundreds later gathered in central Baghdad, chanting anti-Israel slogans. Iraq has not recognized Israel since the country's formation in 1948. The two nations have no diplomatic relations. Four Arab countries - the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Bahrain, and Morocco - established diplomatic relations with Israel as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020. Iraqi lawmakers are adamant that Iraq will not join the Abraham Accords, despite calls for it to do so. This past September, prominent Sunni and Shiite leaders held a conference in the city of Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, in which they openly called for peace with Israel. The Iraqi government condemned the conference, and a Baghdad court later issued an arrest warrant for two people who participated in it.

***Era of Iranian Immunity is Over;*** Prime Minister Naftali Bennett hinted at Israel's possible role in the assassination of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officer last week during the weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday, May 29. "Last week we again saw that instead of improving the lives of the Iranian people, the regime in Tehran chooses tyranny, terror, and lies. Last week masses of Iranian people went out into the streets of Abadan and other places in Iran to demonstrate against the tyranny of the regime. In response, Iranian forces shot at Iranian civilians. In many places in Iran at the moment, it is difficult to acquire water and bread at a reasonable price. Iran invests in terror – like the underground UAV base they showcased recently," Bennett said, "Iran has also been investing in lies such as its deliberate misleading of the IAEA in order to evade visits by the agency, as was revealed last week. The Iranian regime is based on tyranny, terror, and lies. "The world must stand alongside the Iranian people and stand up against the brutal regime. For many years, the Iranian regime has carried out terrorism against Israel and the region via proxies but for some reason, the head of the octopus – Iran itself – has enjoyed immunity. As we have

said more than once, the era of immunity for the Iranian regime is over. Those who finance terrorists, those who arm terrorists, and those who send terrorists – will pay the full price," he said.

***Taliban Are ‘Making Women Invisible’ in Afghanistan;*** The Taliban government’s restrictions on women are aimed at making them “invisible” in Afghan society, a UN human rights observer said Thursday, May 26, during a visit to the nation. Since the Taliban stormed back to power last year, they have imposed harsh restrictions on women and girls to comply with their austere vision of Islam. Teenage girls have been shut out from secondary schools, while women have been forced from some government jobs and barred from traveling alone. This month Afghanistan’s supreme leader and Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered women to cover up fully in public, including their faces. These policies show a “pattern of absolute gender segregation and are aimed at making women invisible in the society,” Richard Bennett, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, told reporters in Kabul. In March the Taliban ordered all secondary schools for girls to shut down, just hours after opening them for the first time since taking power in August. Foreign governments have insisted the Taliban’s record on human rights, especially women’s rights, will be key in determining whether the administration will be formally recognized. During two decades of US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, women and girls made marginal gains in the deeply patriarchal nation. Some Afghan women initially pushed back against the new Taliban curbs, holding small protests where they demanded the right to education and work.

***Israel to Finalize UAE Free Trade Agreement, First with an Arab State;*** Israel is set to finalize its free trade agreement with the United Arab Emirates in Dubai on Tuesday, May 31, marking the first time it has come to such a wide-ranging economic arrangement with an Arab state. “This is a visit of strategic importance to the economic relations between the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates, in which I will sign the free trade agreement and promote a number of economic partnerships,” said Economy and Industry Minister Orna Barbivai, who will be in Dubai to sign the document. “Together we will remove barriers and promote comprehensive trade and new technologies,” she said. “This is a free, full, first trade agreement with an Arab state, which takes place so soon after the establishment of diplomatic relations.” The agreement comes less than two years after Israel and the UAE established full diplomatic ties under the rubric of the Abraham Accords. Based on the accords, Israel also normalized ties with Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Israel also has a limited free-trade agreement with Jordan, but it does not reach the same level as this document, which is more along the lines of Israel’s FTAs with the United States and the European Union. This agreement covers 96% of the trade between Israel and the UAE, which stood last year at \$885 million. That is more than double Israel’s \$330m. In trade with Egypt in 2021, even though the two countries have had a peace agreement since 1979.

***Israel to Launch Fourth Natural Gas Exploration;*** Israel will begin the process of launching a fourth exploration for natural gas in its territorial waters, Energy Minister Karin Elharrar said on Monday, May 30. The decision came due to the growing need for gas in Europe as it attempts to curb its dependence on Russia's natural gas, as part of sanctions slapped on Moscow by the West over its invasion of Ukraine. The decision came despite Elharrar's plan to halt all searches for natural gases during 2022 in order to focus on renewable energies, which she announced on December 15. "The State of Israel is pitching in and helping Europe diversify its energy sources," she said at a press conference on Monday. "The global energy crisis provides an opportunity for the State of Israel to export natural gas, along with the honest and real concern for what is going on in Europe. "The Energy Ministry under my leadership is acting to ensure Israel's energy security, the diversity of our energy sources and investment in renewable energies, and the Israeli economy's gas reserves for the coming decades," Elharrar said. "It's important to stress that we and the Europeans are in agreement that the most important strategic move in order to overcome the crisis is to accelerate the development of renewable energies," Energy Ministry Director-General Lior Shilat said.

Israel has begun to hold talks with international partners, especially in Europe, the US, and Egypt, in order to understand their strategy in handling the crisis.

***1 in 10 Israelis is a Jerusalemite, Latest Statistics Show;*** In advance of Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research published its annual report, the 36th of its kind, under the title, "Jerusalem in data, 2022," which presents a comprehensive picture of Israel's capital. One of the most interesting findings of the report is that one in ten Israelis is a Jerusalemite. As such, the capital continues to retain its status as the largest city in the country by a significant margin. At the end of 2021, Jerusalem's population stood at 965,100 people, having grown by 1.5 percent from the previous year. However, the average growth rate across the country is somewhat higher, at 1.6 percent. Furthermore, like most other large cities in Israel and across the developed world, Jerusalem has net negative migration, which in 2020 translated to a population decrease of 7,800 people. 38 percent of Jerusalemites who move to settle elsewhere don't go far, choosing to live in the region. And in 2021, the number of those leaving the city spiked, with a net negative migration of 10,900 people. Jerusalem also continues to be a very diverse city. In 2020, there were 570,100 Jews living in the capital, 61 percent of the city's population. Arabs constituted 39 percent of the city's population, with 353,800 Muslims and 12,900 Christians, for a total of 366,800. Also of note is the fact that the Jewish population of the capital has declined from being 74 percent of the total in 1967 to just 61 percent in 2020. In 1967 Arabs constituted just 26 percent of Jerusalem's population.

***Over 50,000 Participants in the Jerusalem Flag March;*** Prime Minister Naftali Bennett stands behind his decision to approve the Flag March held on Sunday, May 29, in honor of Jerusalem Day, which passed through the Damascus Gate in accordance with the route that has existed for decades. Bennett said, "We decided that the Flag March would go along its traditional route, and so it was. This year we broke records with over 50,000 participants who painted the city with the colors of our flag. It is moving and joyful to see all the people of Israel celebrating together. Am Yisrael Chai." Last year, then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to approve the march through the Damascus Gate in light of Hamas' threats to launch missiles at Israel, as it indeed did in the end. Public Security Minister Omer Barlev, who visited the Jerusalem Police headquarters on Sunday, was also pleased with the decision to allow the march to go through the Damascus Gate. Barlev said that "the decision I made about a week and a half ago, on the recommendation of the police and other security officials, that the march be held this year as scheduled and on its regular route - it was a right and inevitable decision. MK Simcha Rothman from the Religious Zionist faction offered praise for the government, writing on Facebook, "When they deserve it, they deserve it. Hats off to the Israeli government, the Public Security Minister, the Prime Minister and the Alternate Prime Minister, the commissioner, and anyone who had a hand in the decision not to fold in the face of threats, and allow the Flag March, which connected the two parts of the city. And of course, well done to the police, the Border Police, the dancers, and the celebrants. Chag Sameach."

***Israeli Orchestra Performs in Egypt for the First Time in 40 Years;*** An Israeli orchestra has performed in Egypt for the first time in 40 years, surprising locals by playing Egyptian classics from the 50s and 60s. The event took place as part of Israel's 74th Independence Day celebrations at the Israeli embassy in Cairo, according to a report by public broadcaster Kan. Ariel Cohen, the conductor, and co-founder of the Firqat Alnoor orchestra described the excitement of being able to perform in the Arab country, which signed a peace deal with Israel in 1979, but has seen relations remain frosty. "The Egyptian audience that attended the event were astonished to see an [Israeli] orchestra performing Egyptian music, and not pop or fusion, but the DNA of Egyptian music... and to play it as it was played in Egypt in the 50s or the 60s — they really appreciated it and complimented us. It was a great pleasure to perform in front of such an audience," Cohen said. And while Cohen said he wasn't sure if music alone could create a warm

relationship between Egyptians and Israelis, he said that “music, when it’s done properly, can bring people together, and that’s what we saw when we performed there.”

***Bennett Mourns ‘Horrible Murder of Innocent Children and Teachers’ in Texas Massacre;***

Israeli leaders on Wednesday, May 25, expressed their condolences after a gunman massacred at least 19 children at an elementary school in Texas. Local authorities said two adults were also killed during the shooting spree in the town of Uvalde. The attacker, who shot and critically wounded his grandmother before the attack, was killed by law enforcement. “Israel mourns together with the American people the horrific murder of innocent children and teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas,” Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said. “Our prayers are with the victims, their families and the American people,” added Bennett, who himself attended an American elementary school when his family lived in the United States for two years. “Our hearts are broken. The death of a child is a tragedy beyond measure, let alone the killing of nineteen innocent children and two adults,” President Isaac Herzog said. The assault at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde was the deadliest shooting at a US school since a gunman killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012.

***Iraqis Communicating with Israel Could Face Execution;***

A drastic anti-Israel law set to come into effect in Iraq will see citizens who communicate with Israelis in any way sentenced to death. The bill will apply to all Iraqi citizens, foreigners visiting Iraq, and Iraqis abroad, and will extend to Israeli-linked organizations and online communication via social media. There are far-reaching implications of the legislation, which goes further than similar bills that exist in other Arab states, such as Kuwait. Titled “Banning Normalization and Establishment of Relations with the Zionist Entity,” the bill strictly forbids “contact and communication of any kind and means with the occupying Zionist entity, its nationals, and representatives, whether individuals or institutions or organizations, for any reason.” The bill, which was introduced by anti-Western Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, also forbids the “promotion of any ideas, ideologies, principles, or Israeli or Zionist conduct, in any form,” with transgressors facing potential “execution or lifelong imprisonment.” On a more practical level, the bill bans any form of “financial or moral assistance” to Israel or any institution affiliated with it, raising concerns for Iraqi Jews living in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan — once home to a vibrant Jewish community that has largely relocated to Israel since its establishment. This means that any form of contact between Jewish relatives from Kurdistan and Israel could result in the death penalty. The bill still needs to receive the approval of a parliamentary subcommittee, but it will likely become law.

***Shin Bet Uncovers Iranian Attempts to Lure Israeli Businessmen;***

The Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) uncovered operations by Iranian intelligence to lure Israeli businessmen and academics abroad in order to kidnap or harm them and to gather intelligence. The Iranian operatives stole the identities of foreign and Israeli academics, journalists, reserve officers, businessmen, and philanthropists and used the stolen identities and relevant cover stories in order to gather intelligence about Israelis and to lure them to locations abroad in order to kidnap or harm them. The operatives would send an email from an address that was similar to the authentic address used by the person whose identity had been stolen, changing just a letter or symbol, before asking the target to switch to a WhatsApp conversation. The operatives used real information that could be verified by a check on the Internet. The Israelis who were contacted did not respond and alerted security forces about the attempts. In one case, an operative disguising himself as Swiss researcher Prof. Oliver Thränert, sent an invitation to an academic conference in Europe from the email address [Oliver.thranert@sipo.gess.ethz.ch](mailto:Oliver.thranert@sipo.gess.ethz.ch), which is similar to Thränert’s real email. The operative pretending to be Thränert contacted a number of Israeli citizens and sent them files and links that were said to be related to the conference. The citizens who were contacted were suspicious and contacted the real Oliver Thränert, who denied the existence of the conference and expressed concern that his email had been

hacked. The Shin Bet said that a number of Israelis were already on the verge of traveling abroad in order to attend the fake “conference” and the exposure of the Iranian operations prevented this. The security agency called on Israelis to be cautious of suspicious emails that come from addresses that are similar to the authentic address and are accompanied by a request to switch to WhatsApp on an unfamiliar phone number. If the person avoids a video call or sharing a face photo, that’s another red flag. Unusual invitations to unique or prestigious conferences accompanied by a showering of praise about the Israeli target in a way that does not necessarily match reality is another red flag, according to the Shin Bet. The agency warned against sharing personal details or responding in any other way, and asked that anyone who receives such an email contact security officials.

### ***Shin Bet Foils Hamas Plot to Assassinate MK Ben Gvir, Bomb Jerusalem Rail with Drone;***

Israeli security forces uncovered an active Hamas terror cell in East Jerusalem that planned a series of attacks, including against far-right MK Itamar Ben Gvir, authorities said on Tuesday, May 24. According to the Shin Bet security agency and Israel Police, the five men planned a shooting attack against Ben Gvir and other Israeli targets, as well as kidnappings of Israeli soldiers, and a bombing attack on the Jerusalem light rail using a drone. The security authorities said the cell was led by Rashid Rashak, “a prominent Hamas operative, a resident of the Old City of Jerusalem.” He was also accused of establishing a network of Hamas supporters who led recent clashes on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount last month. Shin Bet and police said Rashak planned, together with Mansour Safadi, another Hamas operative from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor, a shooting attack or suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem. Authorities seized a drone that was intended to be armed and used in an attack on Jerusalem’s light rail. The foiled attempt by the Hamas cell came amid heightened tensions between Israel and the Palestinians, against a backdrop of terror attacks that have left 19 dead since March 22. In a rare move, Hamas’s military wing claimed responsibility for one of those attacks — a terror shooting that left an Israeli security guard dead at the entrance to the West Bank settlement of Ariel.

### ***Freed British Woman Says Iran Forced Her to Sign False Confession;***

A British-Iranian charity worker who was detained in Tehran for almost six years says she was forced by Iranian officials to sign a false confession to spying before she was freed two months ago. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe said British government officials were present at Tehran airport when, “under duress,” she signed the false admission to spying. She said she was told by Iranian officials, “You won’t be able to get on the plane,” unless she signed. “The whole thing of me signing the forced confession was filmed,” Zaghari-Ratcliffe told the BBC in an interview broadcast Monday, May 23. “It’s a tool. So I’m sure they will show that someday.” Opposition Labour Party lawmaker Tulip Siddiq, who represents Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s home district in London, said the revelation raised “serious questions” for the British government. She said Foreign Secretary Liz Truss “must set out in Parliament what she knew about this shocking revelation and what consequences it could have for my constituent.” Zaghari-Ratcliffe was detained at Tehran’s airport in April 2016, as she was returning home to Britain after visiting family in Iran. She was employed by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of the news agency, but she was on vacation at the time of her arrest.

### ***A First in Israel: Unique Cardiac Valve Transplant Procedure;***

A few weeks ago, a 76-year-old patient in severe cardiac shock arrived at Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem, with a history of critical stenosis of the aortic valve. The patient suffered from a severe vascular disease that made it impossible to use the accepted approach through the groin artery and the alternative approaches were disqualified due to anatomical limitations and previous bypass surgery. Dr. David Planer, Director of the Catheterization Department at Hadassah Ein Kerem explains: “Until two decades ago, access to patients who required an aortic valve replacement was a surgical approach that involved opening the chest and a long and difficult recovery. The patient who came to us urgently needed a valve transplant and no accepted and common

options were suitable for him due to various diseases from which he suffered. The case presented us with a real challenge and we realized that we had to think outside the box in order to save his life." The physicians decided to implant the valve using a unique approach through the cervical artery (carotid artery), a procedure that has never before been performed in Israel. In a collaborative effort between Dr. David Planer, Dr. Gabby Elbaz-Greener, Dr. Amit Korach, Prof. Ronen Beeri, Director of the Echocardiography Unit and a Senior Anesthesiologist, and Dr. Tamer Abu Jreis, the valve was successfully replaced with this unique catheterization approach. Dr. Planer said, "Thankfully, the operation went smoothly, without complications, and we are proud to be the first team in Israel to carry it out and pave the way for an additional therapeutic option for these seriously ill patients. The patient was discharged to rehabilitation and we wish him a full recovery."

***Nir Barkat Insisting Salary Total of One Shekel per Year;*** Likud MK Nir Barkat, former mayor of Jerusalem, is insisting that his salary as an MK not total more than one shekel per year. Currently, the back pay owed to Barkat totals over two million shekels. On Monday, May 23, Barkat appeared before the Knesset's Wages Committee, since he had refused to withdraw his salary and the Knesset's accountant did not know what to do with the enormous sum owed to him. During the meeting, Barkat explained to the Committee members that working for one shekel a year is his basic right and that he has no intention of changing the custom that he has adopted throughout his 14 years in public office. "It is a great merit for me to serve the People of Israel for one shekel a year – as I did during my decade as Jerusalem mayor, as I am doing now as an MK, and as I will do in any public office that I hold in the future," Barkat said. "My father blessed me in my youth that I should pay a lot of taxes to the State and that in the merit of this, I should be able to serve in public office for one shekel a year. Thank G-d, I have merited that his blessing has been fulfilled. I explained to the Committee members that I have no intention of receiving the salary and that this is my basic right. The public's money is holy to me. I thank the members of the Knesset's Wages Committee and believe that they will accept my position."

***Arab Israeli Wins Kickboxing World Championship in Turkey;*** Israeli kickboxer Loai Sakas won a gold medal on Wednesday, May 18, at the world championships in Turkey. Sakas, a Christian Arab from the northern town of Kafr Yasif, draped himself with the Israeli flag as he stood in the ring after he defeated his Slovakian opponent in the under-75 kilogram (165.3 pound) weight class of K-1 style kickboxing. "I'm first and foremost an Israeli citizen," he said. "I do not care about Judaism, Islam, Christianity, or Druze — I represent the country and want everyone here to live in peace with each other." "The Moroccan delegation, along with their entourage, also shouted at us all sorts of things during the fight and made a small demonstration, but of course, I did not react to it," he said, recounting the incident. Sakas said that his being a Christian Arab was not a reason for him not to wave the Israeli flag after taking the gold. "I expect every Israeli citizen to wave the Israeli flag. I do not try to rile up people or anything like that, I wave the flag because I am an Israeli citizen," he said. While he noted that he had received some backlash from people in his town for representing Israel, he stressed that they or their remarks did not matter to him. "I also get a lot of support from a lot of people for what I do and I concentrate on that. People can think what they want — I am Israeli. If I walk down the street and I see someone attacking a Jew, I will protect him," he added.

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