

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update July 7, 2022 **(8th Tamuz, 5782)**



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Facing Hezbollah Threat, Israel Ramps up Bomb Shelter Construction in North; The Defense Ministry on Tuesday, June 28, announced that it had begun reinforcement work on dozens of homes in Israeli communities close to the Lebanese border — those that are most likely to be hit by rocket fire in a future conflict with the Hezbollah terror group. The effort, dubbed Shield of the North, officially began in October, when the ministry’s Engineering and Construction Division, along with the Israel Defense Forces’ Home Front Command, started installing new bomb shelters in homes in the community of Kfar Yuval, northeast of Kiryat Shmona. In the coming months, dozens of bomb shelters will be built in homes in the northern town of Shlomi, which were constructed in the 1970s without reinforced rooms, the ministry said. Separately, the ministry published a tender for the construction of 110 bomb shelters in Misgav Am and is set to publish similar tenders for the towns of Margalioth and Manara in the coming weeks. The ministry said it was in the “architectural planning phase” of bomb shelters in 12 other locales, totaling some 1,000 homes.

Israel Has Drastically Damaged Iran’s Intelligence Operations, Iranian Officials Say; Israel has deeply infiltrated and drastically shaken Iranian intelligence operations in recent months, a senior Iranian official said. A report published on Wednesday, June 29, cited the recent ousting of the intelligence chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the secret arrest of a senior commander accused of spying for Israel as examples of the growing levels of distrust in Iran. Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president of Iran who lives in Tehran and still maintains close ties with top officials, told the newspaper that Israeli operations had seriously damaged trust within the country’s security establishment. “The security breaches inside Iran and the vast scope of operations by Israel have really undermined our most powerful intelligence organization,” he said. “The strength of our security has always been the bedrock of the Islamic Republic and it has been damaged in the past year,” Abtahi said, telling the newspaper that the Iranian defense establishment would now be looking for a new approach. The report said that unnamed Iranian officials also admitted that “Israel’s spy network has infiltrated deep into the rank and file of Iran’s security circles.” Israel has allegedly stepped up its attacks on Iran’s nuclear program in recent months.

Israeli officials told the Times that this was a deliberate tactic to expose failures by the IRGC, generating conflict between Iran's political and defense establishments.

Opposition Obstruction Delays US Visa Waiver for Israel; US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides implored Knesset members to set politics aside to pass legislation that would advance Israel's membership in the US Visa Waiver Program as the opposition obstructed related bills, likely delaying progress until at least next year. "I've been working around the clock since I arrived to help Israel meet all the requirements to join the Visa Waiver Program," Nides tweeted. "Don't lose momentum now." The ambassador emphasized that "this will help Israeli citizens travel to the US – put them first!" Though the bills were not previously controversial, the opposition is seeking to deny Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked this achievement, which he had previously said that Israel would accomplish by early 2023. The Likud and its allies refused to include the bills – one that would grant the US access to information from Israelis' passports and another to allow American authorities to see the criminal records of up to 1,000 Israelis who wish to enter the US – in the package of legislation to be passed by consensus before the Knesset was dispersed overnight on Tuesday, June 28.

Fuel Prices Set to Spike Drastically in Israel; Gas prices will be going up once again as of July 1, from NIS 7.72 to NIS 8.08 per liter of 95-grade octane, the Energy Ministry announced on Wednesday, June 29. This is the latest in a series of fuel-price hikes, this one constituting an extra 36 agorot per liter. Gasoline prices broke an eight-year record high in February alongside prices of oil due to the war in Ukraine. March saw a decrease in oil prices worldwide, but Israel's prices remained unchanged. Fuel-price spikes are currently being felt worldwide, and Israel is also beginning to feel the repercussions.

Israel First to Pipe Desalinated Water into a Natural Lake; Early next year, Israel is set to become the first country in the world to channel desalinated water into a natural lake — the Sea of Galilee. One of the lowest-lying bodies of water on Earth, the Sea of Galilee is Israel's largest freshwater lake and its emergency water store. The national water company, Mekorot, plans to complete the construction of a 13-kilometer (8-mile) underground pipe by the end of this year, followed by weeks of tests before it goes into operation around the end of the first quarter of 2023. The pipe will connect the lake to infrastructure that in turn links to five desalination plants on the Mediterranean coast. The water will enter the lake via the Zalmon stream, which drains into the Sea of Galilee near Kibbutz Ginosar on the northwestern shore. Tests carried out by scientists indicate that the project will not have any significant deleterious effect on ecosystems, and will even help them by keeping water levels stable. But, conceded Dr. Gideon Gal, head of the Kinneret Limnological Laboratory, which was tasked with carrying out several tests, "all the decisions are accompanied by a certain concern and a wish that we didn't have to do this." Still, he added, "If you balance the advantages and disadvantages, I think that the former outweigh the latter."

Israel's Problem: Lots of Jobs, Not Enough Workers to Fill Them; Turn on your television and you will see ads aimed at recruiting preschool teachers. Pick up a newspaper and you'll read how Israel granted permits to 3,500 Palestinians to work in manufacturing jobs. Stand in line waiting to check-in at Ben-Gurion Airport and you will realize there are not enough security screeners. Wherever you turn, you are bound to notice that Israel is facing a severe labor shortage. Unemployment is at a two-year low of 3.6%, the exact same as in the US but less than the 6.8% average in the EU countries and the 5% rate in the OECD. However, the employment rate, meaning the number of people in the 15-64 working-age population who are actually employed, is lower in Israel – 66.6% at the end of 2021, according to OECD statistics – than the OECD average of 67.7% and the EU average of 68.3%. In the US, the number stood at 69.4%.

Israeli Firm Commits to Shipping 200,000 Cans of Baby Formula to US to Help Solve Crisis; An Israeli-based company hopes to fill the void as the baby-formula shortage in the United States continues with parents continuing to find store shelves bare, particularly for those seeking specialty formulas. Three weeks ago, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued emergency guidance enabling the import of infant formulas produced abroad. Tel Aviv-based MyOr—an Israeli health-tech company—is among companies seeking FDA approval as its Mexican subsidiary, AlphaCare, produces and markets MyOr formulas from a plant in north-central Mexico. “We have 200,000 cans of formula ready to be shipped right now, with a capacity to produce another 250,000 a month,” said MyOr co-founder and chief technology officer Michael Brandwein. Once it receives FDA approval, he said, the company will be able to ship formula to homes and distributors in a matter of days, as many back-end arrangements have already been made. Among the formula products AlphaCare makes, are specialty ones in very short supply. “These are for premature babies and for infants dealing with food allergies and sensitivities,” said Brandwein. “They are produced by fewer companies and in smaller batches.” He said the company remains hopeful that “approval will come in the next few days,” describing the process as akin to the frantic early approval process for COVID-19 vaccines.

Israeli Scientists Work Towards Curbing Candida; Candidiasis is a widespread fungal infection caused by a yeast (a type of fungus) called Candida, and the most common type is Candida albicans. It normally lives in small amounts on the skin and inside the body – in the mouth, throat, gut and vagina – without causing any problems. The yeast is present at low levels in the bodies of most healthy people, forming part of the microbiome – a diverse spectrum of microbes that reside peacefully in the gut and on the skin. The bacteria living on and inside the body combined with the efforts of the immune system help keep Candida populations under control. However, this distant cousin of baker’s yeast is notorious for causing various types of thrush that can be a major nuisance. An overgrowth of the fungus can be painful, itchy, annoying and even – in extreme cases – be deadly. In these severe cases, it can spread to the bloodstream and from there to the kidneys. Such life-threatening infections may occur when a person’s immune system has been weakened, for example, by AIDS or by immunosuppressive drugs such as cancer chemotherapy or steroids. In a study published on Monday, June 27, in the prestigious journal Nature Immunology, a research team at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot headed by Prof. Jakub Abramson uncovered a previously unknown defense mechanism employed by the immune system in fighting Candida infections. These findings open up new directions of research that in the future could help develop new treatments for severe Candida and possibly for other fungal infections. The newly discovered mechanism might, for example, help produce large numbers of Candida-fighting T cells to be used in cell therapy. And if one day, scientists identify the signals by which Aire-ILC3s boost T cell proliferation, these signals themselves might provide the basis for new therapies.

Yair Lapid Officially Becomes Prime Minister of Israel; Yair Lapid officially became Israel’s prime minister on Thursday, June 30, after the Knesset dispersed itself and scheduled a November 1 election. "Congratulations to Yair Lapid, Israel’s new Prime Minister, and thank you to Alternate Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for your friendship over the past year," US President Joe Biden congratulated Lapid. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also offered "warmest congratulations" on Thursday night. Lapid will lead the interim government until a new coalition is formed. In accordance with the coalition agreement, Naftali Bennett stepped down from the premiership, becoming alternate prime minister, a title Lapid held for the past year. Lapid will remain foreign minister, as well.

Israel, Middle East Countries Crafting Deal to Build Regional Defense Network; Israel is in consultations with Middle Eastern countries to install Israeli-made defense systems on their territory, a report said Wednesday, June 29. Several countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have reportedly negotiated with Israel to obtain a network of sensors that will combat the potential missile

threat from Iran, according to Breaking Defense. A shared communications network would theoretically allow participating states to alert others when incoming missiles trigger the sensors, the report stated, citing Israeli officials. The possible deal follows Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz's announcement of a regional security cooperation agreement in a June 20 speech, saying Israel had already employed the network to intercept Iranian missile attacks.

Iran Executes a Gay Man Under Label of Sodomy; Iran executed ten people on Wednesday, June 29, including a gay man, in Karaj, the capital of the Alborz Province, just outside of Tehran. News organization Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reported on Thursday about the latest wave of executions in the Islamic Republic. According to HRANA, the identities of two of the executed people, Iman Safari Rad and Mehdi Khalgoldi, have been verified by HRANA. Iman Safavi Rad had previously been sentenced to death on charges of "sodomy" and Mehdi Khalgoldi on charges of "rape." According to experts, Iran's regime frequently uses the charge of sodomy to impose the death penalty on gays and lesbians.

Iran Is Dominant Rival in Cyber; Iran has become our dominant rival in cyber together with Hezbollah and Hamas, Israel National Cyber Directorate (INCD) Chief Gaby Portnoy said on Tuesday, June 28. Speaking at Tel Aviv University's Cyber Week, he said, "We see them, we know how they work and we are there." Portnoy made his comments a day after Iran's steel industry took one of its biggest cyber hits in history, bringing it to a grinding halt, and only days after an Iranian cyberattack on Israel's siren early warning systems in Jerusalem and Eilat. The INCD chief said Israel is building a "cyber iron dome" which will elevate cybersecurity by using new mechanisms with cyber parameters that will "reduce cyberattacks, provide new big data and an AI overall approach to synchronize nationwide real-time detection... for ongoing cyber defense efforts." He said, "we are moving faster from resilience to proactive defense," trying to come after cyber attackers in their digital safe havens where they had planned attacks in the past without interference. Further, he said we "need cybersecurity protocols for infrastructure" to be also used for the wider public, including extending tools and skills to the entire private sector and down supply chains. Even smaller businesses need help understanding cyber threat intelligence and capacity building for their defense to contribute to the national cyberdefense.

Israelis Favor US over China; Nineteen countries have a more positive view of the United States and its president Joe Biden than China and its president Xi Jinping, but more people believe China's influence is growing than America's, a survey released on Wednesday, June 29, by Pew Research Center found. Conducted between February 14 and June 3, the survey included over 24,000 adults in 19 countries. The poll found that most people in the majority of countries had a favorable view of the US, while fewer than a third had a favorable view of China. However, these views varied widely in the Asia-Pacific region. In South Korea, for instance, 89% of respondents had a favorable attitude toward the US, while 19% had a favorable attitude toward China. On the other hand, in Singapore, 51% of respondents viewed the US favorably while 60% viewed China favorably. Furthermore, the survey found that many more people had a favorable view of US President Joe Biden than Chinese President Xi Jinping. In Poland, where this is most pronounced, it was 82% vs 11%. In Israel, 60% of respondents had a favorable view of Biden while only 20% had a favorable view of Xi.

Antisemitism Largely Eliminated from Textbooks in Saudi Arabia; Antisemitism has been largely eliminated from Saudi textbooks, The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) revealed in its annual report on education in Saudi Arabia. The report, released on June 27, found that content portraying Jews as disobedient and teachings of anti-Semitic tropes such as Jewish wealth were removed from the Saudi curriculum. Qur'an verses describing Jews being turned into monkeys were removed, as was the anti-Semitic myth that one of the goals of Zionism is a "global Jewish

government.” In addition, Qur'an verses prohibiting friendships with Jews and Christians and condemning homosexuality have all been removed in the past three years. In 2021, several lessons demonizing Jewish people, Christians, and other "non-believers" were removed from the curriculum. An entire textbook unit on jihad was taken out of the curriculum. A year prior, a chapter called “the Zionist danger,” which dealt with various topics regarding the delegitimization of Israel's right to exist was removed. However, Israel is still omitted from maps shown in textbooks, and Zionism is still described as "racist". Saudi students are falsely taught that “Zionists” deliberately tried to burn down Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, a lie that was removed from Qatar's curriculum. A Qur'an verse comparing Jews to "book-carrying donkeys" also remains, while students are taught that women are to blame for male sexual harassment.

Jewish Population of Australia Close to 100,000 for First Time; The Jewish population of Australia hit a new record in the latest census figures for 2021. The data released on Tuesday, June 28, showed there were 99,956 Jews in the country, a 9.8 percent increase from the last figure in 2016 of 91,023, the Australian Jewish News reported. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures released from the 2021 Australian Census showed a historic record, with the Jewish population nearly at 100,000 for the first time, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) stated. ECAJ co-CEO Peter Wertheim told the news outlet that he believed the number of Jews was undercounted with some Holocaust survivors not comfortable with marking down their religions and the “no religion” option at the top of questions attracting a number of non-religious Jews. He estimated that there were likely around 120,000 Jews in Australia currently. The census data found that Victoria continues to be the state or territory with the most Jews at 46,645, with New South Wales in second with 40,249. The two states make up 85 percent of the Jewish community in Australia. The census also found that there were 55,860 Jews born in Australia, with the second most common birthplace of Australian Jews being South Africa.

Israel's U19 Squad Tops France in Euro Semis, to Face England in Final; The Israel Under-19 soccer National Team defeated France 2-1 on Tuesday night, June 28, to move into the European Championship final, where it faced England on Friday night in Slovakia. This was the first time one of the country’s junior national teams was playing in the final of a major tournament, as the only previous time one of the squads came close, was back in 1996 when the Under-17 squad led by Israeli great Yossi Benayoun took third place in the European Championships. “We all gave our heart and now we have to be prepared for the final,” said Israeli midfielder Gloukh. “We will be ready and we all hope that we can win the final. The most important thing is that everyone here believes that we can do just that.” Goal-scorer Kacepolsky also commented about the win. “We did something incredible and we were able to get the result that we wanted. I can’t even describe the goal I scored in words.”



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