

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 29, 2022 (5th Tevet, 5783)



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***We wish you Happy and a prosperous New Year.
Shalom and God Bless, Rabbi Robert Solomon and Jeffery Blalock***

Poll: Majority of Americans Favor Jesus over Santa on Christmas; Out of 1,000 U.S. American adults polled between December 8-12, 57 percent “believe Christmas should be more about Jesus Christ than about Santa Claus.” Only 22 percent put Santa first and 20 percent are undecided. “Two years ago, 63 percent said Christmas should be more about Jesus. Support for Jesus as the primary reason for the holiday which celebrates His birth has ranged as high as 76 percent in 2012,” according to the poll, which has a ± 3 percentage points with a 95 percent level of confidence. Ninety-percent of adults celebrate Christmas in their family, an increase from 85 percent two years ago. Out of those Americans, 52 percent celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, while 37 percent view it as a secular holiday. Eleven percent are unsure. The overwhelming majority of every political affiliation celebrate Christmas in their family, including 97 percent of Republicans, 89 percent of Democrats, and 86 percent of unaffiliated. However, Republicans (73 percent) are far more likely than Democrats (47 percent) and unaffiliated voters (40 percent) to view Christmas as a primarily religious holiday. Older Americans are also more likely to celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday than younger Americans. Sixty-one percent of Americans between the ages of 40-64 and 71 percent of those 65 and older believe the holiday is more about Jesus than Santa.

Abbas' Military Arm: We Will Persist in the Fight Against Israel - Regardless of the Price; The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the terrorist wing of the Fatah organization, praised the terrorists who confronted IDF soldiers as they were securing the entrance of Jewish worshipers to Joseph's Tomb in Shechem (Nablus) overnight Wednesday, December 21. "The defeated government is watching us and brags to the public and the people about its imaginary victories in order to raise its profile on the Israeli street, but we and you know the failures that occur with every assault on the Balata refugee camp near Joseph's Tomb and on our city of Nablus," the organization said in a statement it published on Thursday. "Everyone saw the intensity of the pressure the occupation was under for the shooting and explosive

charges that injured several soldiers, and as usual it denied any injury," the statement said. "Today, the government and the Zionist media claim that the prayer at Joseph's Tomb was safe, and therefore, we warn the occupation against any foolish act it may commit against our Palestinian people, wherever it may be, as the reaction will be overwhelming," the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades warned. "As we swore, we will not deviate from our focus on the occupation, regardless of the price that will be charged to us," it stated.

Israeli Forces Nab Hamas Member over Northern West Bank Shooting Attack; Israeli security forces on Wednesday afternoon, December 21, arrested a member of the Hamas terror group suspected of being involved in a shooting attack in the northern West Bank over the previous weekend, police and the Shin Bet security agency said. On Friday, December 16, Palestinian gunmen opened fire at an Israeli-owned car near the unauthorized outpost of Havat Gilad, south of the West Bank city of Nablus. The Israeli motorist was unharmed in the shooting, but the gunfire — at least four shots — shattered the car's windows and struck the driver's headrest. Border Police troops on Wednesday entered Nablus to arrest Mujahid al-Talfiti, 25, over his alleged involvement in the attack. Two other suspects were arrested over the attack earlier that week. Palestinian media reports said al-Talfiti was detained after Israeli forces surrounded a building he was in. Al-Talfiti had been formerly jailed in Israel over various terror activities and his affiliation with the Hamas terror group, according to the Shin Bet. The Nablus-based Lion's Den terror group claimed responsibility for the attack but did not provide any evidence. In recent months, Palestinian gunmen have repeatedly targeted military posts, troops operating along the West Bank security barrier, Israeli settlements and civilians on the roads. The incidents have come amid an Israeli anti-terror offensive, mostly focused on the northern West Bank to deal with a series of Palestinian attacks that have left 31 people dead in Israel and the West Bank since the start of the year.

Mossad Chief Warns of Iran's Growing Advanced Weapons Supply to Russia, Efforts to Enrich Uranium; The chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency has warned that Iran plans to deliver more weapons to Russia, while Tehran continues to deny that it has supported Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. David Barnea, Mossad's chief, spoke to employees at the President's Residence in Jerusalem and stressed that his agency is "still warning about Iran's future and intentions, which it is trying to keep secret," including Tehran's efforts to "deepen and expand the supply of advanced weapons to Russia." Iran has allegedly provided Moscow with weapons over the past few months, starting with a shipment of Shahed-136 "Kamikaze" drones. Tehran has repeatedly denied supplying Russia with any weapons, saying that it "has not and will not" do so. But Barnea said in a speech to his agency's employees that they had shared intelligence with Western allies earlier in the year that proved Iran planned to share the drones with Russia, with plans to prepare more deliveries in the coming months, Persian language UK-based media reported. Barnea also called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — known as the Iran nuclear deal — an "absurd" agreement, echoing criticisms voiced by Prime Minister-Elect Benjamin Netanyahu. In a previous interview, Netanyahu said that the deal is "probably dead" after "the entire world saw what the true face of this regime is."

Iran Criticizes Zelenskyy: Our Patience Is Not Endless; Iran on Thursday, December 22, criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy after he told the US Congress in his speech on Wednesday that Iran is providing Russia with drones for use in the war against Ukraine. "Russia found an ally in this, in this genocidal policy: Iran," Zelenskyy said in his speech. "Iranian deadly drones sent to Russia in hundreds and hundreds became a threat to our critical infrastructure. That is how one terrorist has found the other." "It is just a matter of time [before] they will strike against your other allies if we do not stop them now. We must do it," he added. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said in a statement that Iran has repeatedly responded to "baseless accusations" regarding drones leveled by Ukrainian officials against the Islamic Republic. He once again stressed "that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not supplied any military hardware to any side for use in the Ukraine war." The Iranian Foreign

Ministry spokesman also noted that Iran has always respected the territorial integrity of all countries including Ukraine and added that “Zelensky had better know that Iran’s strategic patience over such unfounded accusations is not endless.” In July, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the US had intelligence indicating that Russia is looking to Iran for UAVs. In August, it was reported that Iran had begun training Russians to use its drones, though it was also noted that Russia is experiencing “numerous failures” and technical glitches with the drones it purchased from Iran.

Iran’s Basij Militia Vandalizes UK Embassy for 2nd Time; Members of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s paramilitary organization Basij on Monday, December 19, sprayed slogans on the British Embassy in Tehran in the second act of vandalism since the previous Friday. According to a report in British media, the “pro-regime group daubed the slogans seemingly in response to UK support for ongoing anti-government protests.” The Basij members wrote on the walls of the UK embassy the slogans “den of spies” and “terrorist center.” According to the same media outlet, “Last Friday, volunteers and passers-by helped the UK Ambassador in Tehran Simon Shercliff, to wipe slogans of ‘death to England’ and ‘close down this spying center’ from the walls - but on Monday morning they appeared again. “ The London-based Iranian media reported that Tehran’s municipality erected a banner near the British embassy that reads: “Shame cannot be erased with paint.” “The Basij militia are the only group believed to have the regime’s blessing to take this type of action against a foreign power, and the language used is a hallmark of its members.” The Basij is a part of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The United States designated both the IRGC and Basij terrorist entities.

Another 110 Business Execs Join Appeal, Warning Netanyahu about Harm to Democracy; More than a hundred senior Israeli corporate executives and fund managers on Tuesday, December 20, joined an appeal initiated the previous week to warn Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu that his coalition’s desired policies are threatening Israel’s image of a stable democracy in the world. One of the signatories, Elah Alkalay, chairperson of IBI Mutual Funds, which manages about NIS 10 billion (\$2.9 billion) in assets, said that the main concern of the business sector is that the looming legislation could alter the country’s checks and balances and lead to a politicization of Israel’s judiciary system, and entrench its principles of democracy. Netanyahu’s incoming coalition bloc plans to curtail the judiciary, make changes to quasi-constitutional Basic Laws and grant sweeping powers in the West Bank to far-right lawmakers. “The main concern is that if the judicial system is politicized, we are regarded by the international community like countries such as Hungary or Poland or even Turkey where political needs preside over economic and judicial considerations impacting transparency, and predictability increasing the risk and the cost of doing business,” Alkalay said. The appeal letter to Netanyahu was initiated by Erez Shachar, co-founder of Tel Aviv-based venture capital firm Qumra Capital, and signed by tech executives and serial entrepreneurs. Among the 110 signatories of the petition are Zvi Stepak, chairman of the Meitav Investment House and its CEO Ilan Raviv; Amit Mashiach, CEO at the McCann Israel advertising company; Israel Makov, former Teva CEO, and others.

Boycotting Judea and Samaria: Norwegian Fund Seeks to Stop Investing in Israel; The Government Pension Fund of Norway, one of the largest funds in the world, has decided to stop investing in Israel, media reported on Thursday, December 22. According to the report, the fund announced that it decided to conduct a probe of the entire Israeli banking system, in order to make sure that the money it transfers to Israeli companies operating in Judea and Samaria will not be used for investments. The Government Pension Fund of Norway manages more than \$1.3 trillion in assets, collects all of Norway’s excess investments and invests around the world. The decision to stop investing in Israel began to be discussed already last year, but gained momentum in recent weeks. An Israeli source with knowledge of the details said that, although the process began before the elections in Israel, the nature of the new government certainly plays a role. The Norwegian decision also came about following the blacklist of

companies operating in Judea and Samaria published by the UN Human Rights Commission, which included 112 companies, including banks. The Government Pension Fund of Norway is conditioning the continuation of its investments on the fact that those blacklisted banks will stop transferring funds to companies operating in Judea and Samaria.

US Congressman: 'Israel Has the Right to Stop Illegal Palestinian Construction'; After the midterm elections, Binyamin Regional Council chief Yisrael Ganz flew to the United States to meet with government officials and members of Congress, in order to promote the settlement of the land of Israel. Ganz presented the Congress members with a map that shows the Arab takeover of land, as well as the European Union's involvement in the Palestinian project to strategically take over land in Judea and Samaria. On the maps, he showed the Arab building plans that choke out the Jewish communities and main roads. Representative and member of the Congressional Finance Committee Dr. Andy Harris (R-MD) stated that "The government of Israel has the full right to stop the illegal construction committed by the Palestinian Authority or any other body in areas under its control. The involvement of any foreign body, including the EU, is not acceptable." In addition, the Binyamin Regional Council chief is working with members of Congress so that the US funding for the Palestinian Authority will be given for the advancement of roads and infrastructure. "If you really want to help the Arab population, you need to designate the funding for building infrastructure. "Today, the Palestinian Authority embezzles the funds and instead of improving the lives of its population, it pollutes the environment and supports terrorism and the murder of Jews. It is better that the American taxpayer at least knows that the money that is going to the Palestinians really serves them. The way to do this is to designate the funding for infrastructure and roads."

Paris Calls Eastern Jerusalem 'Occupied', After Israel Deports Palestinian-French Terrorist; France on Sunday, December 18, denounced as "against the law" Israel's deportation of a former Palestinian security prisoner with French citizenship, and claimed that eastern Jerusalem, where the convicted terrorist resided, is "occupied." Israel's Interior Ministry announced earlier in the day that Salah Hamouri, currently a lawyer and field researcher for the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, a group linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terrorist organization, had been deported from the country. "We condemn today the Israeli authorities' decision, against the law, to expel Salah Hamouri to France" the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement in response. It added that Paris had "fully mobilized, including at the highest level of the state, to ensure Salah Hamouri's rights are respected, that he benefits from all possible assistance and that he can lead a normal life in Jerusalem, where he was born, resides and wishes to live. "France also took several steps to communicate to the Israeli authorities in the clearest way its opposition to this expulsion of a Palestinian resident of [eastern] Jerusalem, an occupied territory under the Fourth Geneva Convention" the statement continued. Hamouri was previously sentenced by an Israeli court to seven years in prison, as part of a plea bargain in exchange for admitting to plotting to murder the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Hamouri was released by Israel as part of the 2011 Gilad Schalit prisoner exchange deal with Hamas.

NGO: Iran to Execute 26 More Protesters; Amnesty International said in a Friday letter (December 16), that Iran intends to execute 26 more protesters. The letter, addressed to Iran's judiciary head Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, noted that 11 protesters have already been sentenced to be executed, and that 15 have been given similar charges that could see them put to death. At least two protesters have already been executed by the Iranian regime. Iranian authorities said two weeks ago that they hanged a protester convicted of stabbing security personnel during a protest in November. Majidreza Rahnavard was executed less than a month after he allegedly stabbed two Iranian officers to death during a protest against the Islamic regime. Rahnavard was said to have been outraged by the killings of non-violent protesters, leading to his deadly attack on security officers during a November 17th protest in the city of Mashhad. In

addition to the two officers who were fatally wounded, Rahmayard allegedly stabbed four other officers. "The 26 individuals have all been denied fair trials, including the rights to adequate defense and access to lawyers of their choosing; to be presumed innocent; to remain silent; and to receive a fair, public hearing" Amnesty said in the letter.

Iran Says It Thwarted Mossad Network Targeting Its Defense Industries; Iran's Intelligence Ministry claimed on Sunday, December 18, that it thwarted a Mossad network attempting to sabotage its defense industries, in either a blow to Israel's spy agency, or a disinformation campaign by Tehran to shift attention from its brutal crackdown on its own people over the last three months. On one hand, the report had an unusual amount of specific and believable details relating to the alleged Mossad operations. On the other hand, Tehran's blatant attempt to try to connect the disclosure to alleging that Israel is behind the months of popular protests, along with a past record of false claims of arrests, left the claim in doubt. According to the Iranian Intelligence Ministry, the Mossad contacted companies that work with the Islamic Republic's defense industries, in order to collect information. The Mossad allegedly began working with a person named "Frank" who works as a sales manager for a company that supplies parts and is in contact with Iranian companies, according to the report. Iranian intelligence claimed that Frank invited his employees to a seminar in Malaysia and introduced them to a man named "Hadrien," who runs a company in Singapore that works with Iranian companies to produce carbon fiber and metal alloys.

Israeli Soccer Fans Rejoice Over Long-Awaited World Cup Win for Messi, Argentina; Israeli soccer fans were among millions worldwide to celebrate Argentina's hard-fought victory over France on Sunday, December 18, in a nail-biting finale game for the 2022 World Cup championship. Fans rejoiced in cities nationwide, waving Argentinian flags and shirts as the team, led by Lionel Messi, beat France 4-2 on penalties in a stunning finale after the game ended 3-3 in extra time. In Tel Aviv, fans poured into Dizengoff Square to sing, dance, and play in the famous water fountain to mark the win. In locales with a strong population of immigrants from Latin America, the joy was palpable. "Messi is our Judah the Maccabee," one fan from Kibbutz Or Haner in southern Israel told media, a fitting reference to the ancient rebel leader of the Maccabees, whose story is told on the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. "We dreamed of this day, we were with them all the way. It's a victory they deserve, the team and the Argentinian people. We deserve this" said the fan, a resident of the kibbutz, which was largely set up by immigrants from Argentina and Chile in the mid-1950s. The sentiments echoed those in Buenos Aires, where fans were also overjoyed by the victory. Throughout the match, many watching in a public square in Buenos Aires chanted the name of the team captain, often considered the world's greatest soccer player who had long talked about how he yearned for a World Cup victory.

NYT Publishes Crossword Puzzle Resembling Swastika; The New York Times released its daily crossword puzzle in the shape of swastika on Sunday, December 18, Democratic Strategist Keith Edwards pointed out on Twitter. In a later tweet, Edwards pointed out that no major media outlet had covered the incident. "So far not one mainstream media outlet has reported on this" he wrote. Another user, @kennedytcooper, said, "Can anyone explain why the Times crossword is a swastika on the first day of Hanukkah." This is not the first time the New York Times Crossword Puzzle has bore a resemblance to the swastika, a symbol used by various cultures but widely associated with Nazi Germany and neo-Nazism. In 2017, the last time this occurred, the Times dismissed criticism, with the New York Times Games Twitter account saying, "Yes, hi. It's NOT a swastika. Honest to God. No one sits down to make a crossword puzzle and says, "Hey! You know what would look cool?"

West Bank's Maccabee Palaces Must be Israeli National Park, Settlers Say; Israeli visitors who want to walk in the footsteps of the Maccabees and see one of the remnants of their seats of power are forced to navigate the geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That's because the site of the palaces

of the Maccabean High Priest Yohanan, also known as John Hyrcanus, and his son Alexander Jannaeus, are located on the edge of the Palestinian city of Jericho. The remnants of the palaces, with their ritual baths and the ancient Hashmonaim synagogue, which King Herod converted into his winter palace, are located in Area C of the West Bank, which is under IDF military and civilian control. Coming and going is restricted, as a result, Israelis have to travel about one kilometer (approximately six-tenths of a mile) through Area A, which is forbidden to them, before they can wander among the ruins, which include remnants of courtyards with pillars and the hall where King Herod's throne was located. At present, Israelis can only visit through organized tours that are coordinated with the army. Foreign tourists, in contrast, can enter through Jericho to see the palaces of the ancient Jewish warriors who were at the heart of events upon which the Hanukkah holiday that began on Sunday night is based. "We expect that the new government will turn it into a national park and open it to the general public," said Binyamin Regional Council deputy chairman Rafal Engel. The ruins are located within his council's boundaries. The council, along with the right-wing archaeological group Shomrim Al HaNetzach, have worked to preserve the site.

New S. Korea-Israel Free Trade Agreement Comes into Effect; A new free-trade agreement between South Korea and Israel came into force in Israel under a Customs Tariff Order and Purchase Tax Exemptions for Goods, published on December 5. The free-trade agreement is more than 500 pages and deals not only with customs-duty exemptions, but also rules of origin, customs procedures, trade remedies, dispute settlements, government procurements, investments, cross-border services, temporary of business persons, telecommunications, e-commerce, intellectual property, the environment, transparency, technical cooperation and more. In 2021, bilateral trade in goods and services totaled around \$3.5 billion, about 35% more than in 2020. Of this, \$1.5b. was exported by Israel, some 42% more than in 2020. According to the Economy Ministry's Foreign Trade Administration, the resulting customs reductions are expected to benefit Israeli purchasers of Hyundai and Kia automobiles, toys and games, soy sauce and much more. Israeli exporters are expected to benefit to the tune of about NIS 500 million. Israeli companies will enjoy a competitive advantage in the Korean market, and Korean investments in Israel will be encouraged. More than 95% of Israeli exports to Korea should be exempted from Korean customs duty, including electrical and mechanical equipment, fertilizers, medical devices, cosmetics, plastics, fruit juices and wine. Korea exports to Israel machinery and parts, refrigerators for industry, medical devices, electronic components, plastic products and chemicals.

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