

## ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update March 30, 2023 (Nisan 8, 5783)***



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***Chaos in Israel as Netanyahu Fires Minister: Tens of Thousands Protest in Tel Aviv;*** There were chaotic scenes in Israel on Sunday night, March 26, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu abruptly fired his Defense Minister just a day after he had called for an end to the PM's controversial judicial overhaul. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Tel Aviv and blocked a main highway in front of the Ministry of Defense following the announcement before water cannons were deployed in Jerusalem against crowds. The protesters transformed the Ayalon highway into a sea of blue-and-white Israeli flags and lit a large bonfire in the middle of the road. Demonstrations took place in Beersheba, Haifa, and Jerusalem. The dismissal of the Defense Minister signaled that Netanyahu will move ahead this week with his judicial plan, which has sparked mass protests, angered military and business leaders, and raised concerns among Israel's allies. The judicial plans include increasing sitting governments' and PM's powers to overrule the Supreme Court and reduce the review of new laws - as well as giving the government ultimate control over all judiciary appointments. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant had been the first senior member of the ruling Likud party to speak out against the plan. Hours after the defense minister's removal, a White House National Security spokesperson told Israeli media, "We are deeply concerned by the ongoing developments in Israel, which further underscore the urgent need for compromise."

***Otzma Yehudit: Netanyahu to Postpone Judicial Reform to Summer;*** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has agreed to postpone the judicial reform legislation to the summer, Otzma Yehudit announced in a statement released on Monday, March 27. "Stopping the legislation is the right thing," wrote President Isaac Herzog in a statement following Netanyahu's announcement. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant also released a statement on Monday night in support of Netanyahu's postponement of the judicial reform legislation. Justice Minister Yariv Levin said on Monday that he would respect a decision by Netanyahu to freeze legislation of the government's bill proposal to alter the makeup of Israel's Judicial Appointments Committee. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called his supporters to action in a statement on Monday afternoon. "Friends, under no circumstances should we stop the judicial reform [which will] strengthen Israeli democracy. We are the majority, we must not give in to violence, anarchy...and wild

strikes. Let's make our voice heard," he said. The government will approve at its next meeting a decision to form a National Guard and subordinate it to National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, in exchange for Ben-Gvir's party, Otzma Yehudit, promising not to leave the government over Netanyahu's intention to postpone the legislation of the first judicial reform bill.

***Senior Defense Official: Israel's Enemies See Country 'As Weak' Given Overhaul Rifts;*** A senior defense official said on Sunday, March 26, that Israel's enemies view the Jewish state as weak, due to the ongoing controversy over the government's judicial overhaul. "Our enemies see Israel as weak and limited in its retaliation, especially in light of the weakening of international support," the official told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The internal situation has become a central element, all the players point to the fact that Israel is in a serious crisis that, in their view, could lead to the collapse of Israel. They recognize an opportunity. There is damage to [our] deterrence and there are attacks being planned based on their assumption that Israel is paralyzed," he said. The official said his view was shared by military chief Herzl Halevi, Shin Bet head Ronen Bar, and Mossad chief David Barnea. The official said the IDF was "at full competency," despite hundreds of reservist officers threatening to boycott volunteer duty over the overhaul. "But continuing the legislative process without an agreement will result in competence being damaged."

***Netanyahu: Refusal to Serve Is a Terrible Danger for Israel;*** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded on Friday afternoon, March 24, during a press briefing in London, to the announcement by pilots in the reserves that they will not be attending training flights this week, in protest of the government's judicial reform plan. "Surrendering to refusal to serve is a terrible danger for Israel. Surrendering to refusal to serve will lead to refusal on the other side as well. The state cannot exist without the IDF," said Netanyahu. "People who were responsible for the security of the country suddenly crossed all lines with such cynicism. I'm waiting to see one 'former' [top commander] who will stand up and say no," he added. Netanyahu's comments came after about 200 senior pilots announced they would no longer be participating in reserve duty, until further notice. The group said they made their decision after Netanyahu's televised address Thursday night. During this speech, Netanyahu vowed to get directly involved in the judicial reform, following the passage of the Incapacitation Law, which limits the ability of the Attorney General to declare a Prime Minister unfit for office only to situations in which the premier suffers from physical or mental incapacitation.

***Iran-backed Militants Launch Rockets on 2nd US Base in Syria after Biden's 'Precision Airstrikes';*** Iran-backed militants launched another rocket attack on a US military base in Syria on Friday, March 24, in a tit-for-tat retaliatory exchange after President Biden ordered "precision airstrikes" on their positions. Three missiles on Friday morning narrowly missed a US base in northeast Syria, with two falling in the nearby Al-Omar oil field and another striking a civilian house, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. No casualties were reported from the strike. Three of the wounded troops — who serve as part of a coalition to beat back Islamic State militia groups — had to be medically evacuated to Iraq, according to the Pentagon. The missile attack occurred hours after Biden ordered US Central Command to launch "precision airstrikes" from F-15 fighter jets on groups linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), killing at least 11, including six confirmed pro-Iran militants and two Syrians. Biden's airstrikes came after an Iranian suicide drone killed a US contractor and injured five US military service members and another contractor at a coalition base near al-Hasakah. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin confirmed the airstrikes had targeted the IRGC, which the US designates as a terrorist group. He also said the unmanned drone was of Iranian origin.

***Anti-Semitic Attacks Reach Record High Under Joe Biden;*** New figures released Wednesday, March 22, by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) show that there were nearly 3,700 known anti-Semitic

incidents in 2022 in the U.S., 111 of them violent. The ADL said: In 2022, ADL tabulated 3,697 anti-Semitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking anti-Semitic incidents in 1979. This is the third time in the past five years that the year-end total has been the highest number ever recorded. Incidents increased in each of the major Audit categories: antisemitic harassment increased 29% to 2,298; anti-Semitic vandalism increased 51% to 1,288, and antisemitic assaults increased 26% to 111. The vast majority of anti-Semitic assaults (107 out of 111) were perpetrated without the use of a deadly weapon. There was one fatality. Notably, visibly Orthodox Jews were targeted in 53% of the assault incidents nationally. This year, no assaults perpetrated against the Jewish community resulted in mass casualties. Anti-Semitic incidents were highest in New York and California, where there are large Jewish communities — and which are governed by left-wing Democrats who pride themselves on their commitments to tolerance.

***Netanyahu Assures No Law Against Christians, After Missionary Bill Outrage;*** After a bill punishing Christian missionaries with prison time for any type of proselytization caused a furor among pro-Israel Evangelicals on Sunday, March 19, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly assured that the State of Israel would not pass legislation targeting Christians. "We will not advance any law against the Christian community," Netanyahu wrote on Twitter in both English and Hebrew on Wednesday. United Torah Judaism leader Moshe Gafni also released a statement on Wednesday, noting that the bill would not be advanced at this stage. US Christian leaders and political actors welcomed Netanyahu's response to their concerns. "Prime Minister Netanyahu is an amazing leader of courage," said Sam Brownback, ex-Kansas governor and former US ambassador for International Religious Freedom. "I applaud his quick and decisive addressing of what could have been a major issue." Evangelist Pastor Greg Laurie said on Wednesday that Gafni and Netanyahu's comments were "great news." Penny Nance, head of Christian Evangelical nonprofit Concerned Women for America, also thanked Netanyahu for "standing up for Christians," after she had warned of the repercussions of the bill if it passed. "If this became law, Evangelicals on tour from the US if led by the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel with their tour guide would risk imprisonment."

***Jordan Accuses Israel of Violating Peace Treaty After Minister's Paris Speech;*** Jordan on Monday, March 20, accused Israel of violating the countries' 1994 peace agreement after Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich denied the existence of a Palestinian people. Speaking on Sunday in Paris at an event honoring the late Likud activist Jacques Kupfer, the leader of the Religious Zionist Party said, "Jacques' truth must be told with all our might and without confusion: He said there is no such thing as Palestinians—because there is no such thing as a Palestinian people." Smotrich continued: "We need to tell the truth without bowing to the lies and distortions of history, and without succumbing to the hypocrisy of BDS and the pro-Palestinian organizations." The Jordanian Foreign Ministry on Monday summoned Israel's ambassador in Amman over the comments, and also to protest a map of "Greater Israel" displayed during Smotrich's speech, which showed Jordan and Judea and Samaria within the borders of the Jewish state. "We condemn the racist, inciting, and extremist statements by the extremist Israeli minister against the Palestinian people and its right to exist," a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in a statement. On Monday, the Israeli Foreign Ministry reaffirmed in a Twitter post its commitment to the peace treaty. "Israel is committed to the 1994 peace agreement with Jordan. There has been no change in the position of the State of Israel, which recognizes the territorial integrity of the Hashemite Kingdom," the tweet read. Israel's National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi also did diplomatic damage control, tweeting that he had spoken with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and assured him "of the commitment the Government of Israel has to uphold the peace treaty between our two countries which has strengthened the stability and the security of our region for nearly 30 years."

***Israel Warns Passover Travelers of Iranian Plots to Harm Them Abroad;*** Iran will continue its attempts to harm Israelis around the world, especially in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean, the National Security Council (NSC) warned on Monday, March 20. In its guidance for Israeli travelers ahead of the Passover holiday, the NSC emphasized that Iran and its proxies present a particular threat in countries neighboring Iran, including the United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Bahrain. Cyprus and Greece, popular holiday destinations for Israelis, are also countries where Iran is likely to target Jews and Israelis, according to the assessment. The NSC did not warn against travel to these destinations, but instead called on Israelis “to be aware, to act responsibly in accordance with the level of danger in the country being visited.” The NSC lists Muslim partners Turkey, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt as Level 3 threats, meaning that all non-essential travel should be avoided. Iranian plots have been foiled in several of these countries over the past year. In November last year, Georgian security officials foiled an attempt by a Pakistani citizen to murder an Israeli in Georgia on orders from an Iranian operative. In July, Turkish forces foiled an attempt by Iranian agents to kill Israelis in Istanbul, arresting three men.

***Iranian Regime TV Airs Anti-Semitic Tirade Against IAEA Head;*** The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Ofogh TV station broadcast anti-Semitic remarks by foreign affairs expert Mohammad Ghaderi on March 5, that targeted International Atomic Energy Agency Director Rafael Grossi. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) first reported on the antisemitic comments in a translation on its website. Accusations made against IAEA head Ghaderi told Ofogh, “Grossi is an Argentinian diplomat. He is also a Jew. When he arrived at the scene and was elected as head of the IAEA, he had the full support of the US government – which was the Trump administration – and the personal support of Mike Pompeo himself.” “He had the backing of the Zionist lobby.” Ghaderi added, “Even though his rival had more votes before the election took place, he was eventually elected due to the heavy lobbying on his behalf.” Pompeo was the former US secretary of state during the Trump administration, and he has said that Iran’s regime was the worst state sponsor of anti-Semitism. Alireza Nader, the engagement director for the US-based National Union for a Democratic Iran, told Israeli media, “It’s not surprising to see regime officials resort to anti-Semitic tropes in order to justify their own failed foreign and nuclear policies. The Islamic Republic in Iran is the most anti-Semitic government on earth and the leading propagator of anti-Semitism in the world.”

***‘I Felt the Hate’: German Tourist Mobbed by Palestinians Says He Feared for His Life;*** One of two German tourists attacked Saturday, March 18, by a Palestinian mob while driving through Nablus, told Hebrew media Sunday that he had genuinely feared for his life during the attack, saying the crowd was “full of hate.” The two tourists drove on Saturday through central Nablus, a city in the north of the West Bank, in a rented car with Israeli license plates when they came under attack. “I’ve never encountered a situation like this. It was a very very dangerous situation, and we really thought they wanted to kill us,” Gerald Hetzel said. “Young men came from taxis around us ... and started to knock on our windows, to scream at us in Arabic.” “They were bringing stones and a traffic sign and throwing everything against the car. After one or two minutes they pulled out a knife and stabbed the wheels of the car, and also threatened my friend.” “I didn’t understand what they wanted. We tried to tell them in English that we are tourists, and we are not Jewish Israelis, that we are there to visit and see the town, but they seemed to not understand it,” Hetzel said, “I really felt the hate from their eyes, and from the way they were acting. And they were throwing rocks, maybe double the size of my head,” Hetzel recalled.

***Hezbollah Terrorists Who Killed Israelis in Bulgaria Bus Blast Get Life in Prison;*** The Supreme Court of Bulgaria has confirmed the life prison sentences in absentia for two Hezbollah terrorists for their role in blowing up an Israeli tour bus in the seaside resort town of Burgas, killing five Israelis and their Bulgarian Muslim bus driver in 2012. The Hezbollah operatives murdered Yitzhak Kolangi, 28, of Petah

Tikva; Maor Harush, 26, of Acre; Amir Menashe, 27, of Petah Tikva; Elior Preis, 26, of Acre; and Kochava Shriki, 44, of Rishon Lezion. The bus driver was Mustafa Kyosov, 36, a Muslim from the village of Yurukovo in southwestern Bulgaria, who died in the hospital two hours after the bombing. The two convicted Hezbollah terrorists – Meliad Farah, a Lebanese-Australian citizen, and Hassan El Hajj Hassan, a Lebanese Canadian citizen – fled to Lebanon after the bombing. Israeli media previously reported that Bulgaria urged Lebanon to extradite the terrorists, but Lebanon’s government, where Hezbollah plays a dominant role, rebuffed the Bulgarian authorities. Toby Dershowitz, senior vice president for government relations and strategy at the non-partisan Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said, “The initial findings of Hezbollah’s role in the bombing led Europe to designate Hezbollah’s so-called military wing [as a terrorist entity]. It’s time for both the EU and Bulgaria itself to designate Hezbollah in its entirety, joining the 20 or so countries that have already done so.”

***Two Knesset Members Propose Legislation to Outlaw Sharing the Gospel in Israel and Send Violators to Prison;*** Is it possible that the Israeli government this year could pass legislation making it illegal for people to share the Gospel message in the very land where Yeshua (Jesus) was born, raised, preached, died, buried, and rose from the dead? Unfortunately, yes. As Palm Sunday and Easter approach – the two most sacred days on the calendar for those who follow Yeshua as both God and Messiah – two members of the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) introduced a bill last week that would ban any and all efforts to tell people about Yeshua. The bill would send violators to prison. Should it begin to gain traction inside the Knesset and begin moving towards passage, the bill could create a major new headache for Netanyahu's government by sparking a serious clash with Evangelical Christians in the United States and around the world who are among the biggest supporters of the State of Israel. The bill could also draw sharp criticism from both Republicans and Democrats in Congress, in the executive branch, among U.S. governors, and others who love Israel and have always stood with the Jewish state but would fiercely oppose efforts to silence followers of Yeshua in the Holy Land. The proposed legislation would outlaw all efforts by people of one faith who, in any way, want to discuss or try to persuade people of other faiths to consider changing their current religious beliefs. The punishment for doing so would be “one-year imprisonment.” If the conversation is with a minor – someone under the age of 18 – the punishment would be “two years imprisonment.”

***Biden Lectures Netanyahu on Judicial Reform — After Launching His Own Court-Packing Commission;*** President Joe Biden has warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against pursuing judicial reform — after his own administration considered a radical proposal to pack the Supreme Court with liberal justices. Israeli media reports that Biden “raised his concerns with the judicial overhaul being advanced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government during a ‘candid and constructive’ phone call” on Sunday, March 19. The article fails to note that Biden entertained his own, far more radical, proposals to change the U.S. judiciary after Democrats grew irate at the increasingly conservative composition of the Supreme Court after 2018. For months, Democratic Party presidential candidates pushed proposals to “pack” the Supreme Court by adding four extra seats, then having the president nominate left-wing justices whom the Senate would confirm. Biden dropped his former objections to such ideas and promised to consider them. He appointed a commission to consider the idea of court-packing, among other reforms, and it delivered its draft final report in 2021. Biden has not yet extended an invitation to the newly-elected prime minister to visit the White House — a common courtesy extended to foreign leaders, especially to democratically-elected leaders of close U.S. allies.

***Israel's Pain-related Opioid Consumption Has Overtaken the US;*** Israel overtook the US in 2020 in the consumption of pain-relieving narcotics, including fentanyl, which is 50 times stronger than heroin, a new, 13-page, in-depth study at Jerusalem’s Taub Center for Social Policy Studies has reported, indicating a worrying trend. Written by Prof. Nadav Davidovitch, Dr. Yannai Kranzler, and Oren Miron, the report

presents the hard facts of pain narcotic consumption and its destructive effects. The researchers suggest immediate actions be taken to cut consumption and the use of more medicine than clinically necessary, including safer alternatives for managing pain, improved accessibility to medical treatment, mental health, and social services, and reducing the stigma connected to the use and abuse of drugs. International studies have shown that opioid consumption by outpatients is usually seen in younger patients who do not have serious conditions or illnesses. The studies also found that since 2014, most of the increase in opioid consumption occurred among patients with a low socioeconomic status; meaning that young, healthy, and poor Israelis are among those contributing to the increased consumption of opioids.

***Israel Is the Fourth Happiest Country in the World, New Ranking Shows;*** Israel is the fourth happiest country in the world, according to the 2023 World Happiness Report (WHR), which was released on Monday, March 20. Topping the list is Finland, which leads by a significant margin. Finland is followed by Denmark and Iceland. The publication ranks happiness on a national level each year. This year, Israel earned the fourth spot out of 109 ranked countries: an improvement over last year's ranking of ninth. The survey measures subjective well-being through how people report the quality of their lives to be. Main tools the report uses are called "positive affect" and "negative affect," which essentially refer to positive and negative emotions, respectively. "Positive affect is given by the average of individual yes or no answers about three emotions: laughter, enjoyment, and interest," the report explains. "Negative affect is given by the average of individual yes or no answers about three emotions: worry, sadness and anger." Israeli society is diverse, and more than 20% of the Jewish state's population is Arab. Additionally, numerous religious groups such as Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze are all represented. Nevertheless, the gap in happiness between the top and bottom halves of the country is remarkably small, despite the tensions between various social groups. Strikingly, every nation that precedes Israel in happiness equality is far more homogeneous by nearly every demographic metric available in the CIA World Factbook.



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