

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update February 23, 2026 (Adar 5, 5786)



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Israel-Hamas Cease-fire; The Israel Police arrested at least 34 people overnight into Sunday in the northern Israeli Arab town of Kafr Kana following a string of shootings that escalated after a drone dropped a grenade on a house in the town, wounding four residents.

- *West Bank mosque torched in suspected settler attack*
- *'Reoccupying what is already ours': Far-right minister raises Israeli flag in West Bank*
 - *Dozens rally in Tel Aviv against 'state-backed' settler violence*
- *Iran offers nuclear reduction steps for interim U.S. deal, won't give up uranium or oil*
 - *Settler declare new West Bank settlement deep inside Palestinian Hebron*

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If you are interested in having Yachad Ministries to come your church and share about what is going on in Israel and the Middle East, and how the Bible is unfolding right in front of our eyes.

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Iran Closes Airspace Ahead of Extensive Missile Launches; Iran issued a formal notice to pilots on Wednesday, February 18, warning of planned missile launches across broad areas of the country's south on Thursday. Data from the US Federal Aviation Administration shows that airspace in the designated launch zones will be closed to traffic between 5:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Israel time. The notice is intended to ensure the safety of civilian aircraft passing through the Persian Gulf region and to compel international airlines to reroute flights during the scheduled activity. The closure is being closely monitored in Israel and in Western countries after Iran conducted numerous military exercises in recent weeks. Those drills on Wednesday also led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime choke point for global energy supplies. Separately, the United States on Wednesday announced sanctions against 18 senior officials in Iran's government and communications sector, accusing them of involvement in serious human rights abuses and the suppression of freedom of expression. State Department deputy spokesperson Thomas Pigott said the visa restrictions were carried out at the initiative of Secretary of State Marco Rubio and will also apply to the officials' immediate family members. Washington stressed that the Iranian government continues to restrict its citizens' ability to exercise basic freedoms, noting that 58 individuals have so far been subjected to restrictions under the policy. (YNN/VFI News)

Iran Urges Hezbollah to Enter Potential War, Israel Sends Clear Warning; Iran may not want a war with Israel at this time, but it is exerting heavy pressure on Hezbollah to join if fighting ultimately breaks out. Israel, for its part, is closely monitoring developments and has delivered very clear warnings to Hezbollah that if it chooses to intervene, the blow this time will be extremely painful. Among other moves, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Lebanon last month to ensure that in the next war, Hezbollah will not sit on the sidelines. The IDF has prepared a plan for a significant strike against Hezbollah, following the group's rehabilitation efforts over the past year. Israeli defense capabilities against Hezbollah's missiles and rockets are considered strong, with proven and improved interception rates. The scope of Iranian aid to Hezbollah has reached a peak, surpassing \$1 billion over the past year a record despite Iran's economic crisis. The funds are transferred mainly in cash and gold through money changers and shell companies to circumvent international sanctions. For decades, Iran has invested in building up the terrorist organization along Israel's northern border with one clear objective: to serve as a deterrent in routine times and, in wartime, to act as Iran's second-strike capability if its nuclear facilities are attacked. Iranian officials were deeply disappointed that Hezbollah remained largely on the sidelines during the 12-day war and now appear intent on ensuring that does not happen again. Israel is also preparing for the possibility that additional Iranian proxies could join the fighting if it erupts. (YNN/VFI News)

Trump Gives Iran 10 to 15 Days to Make a Nuclear Deal or Face Consequences; US President Donald Trump said on Thursday, February 19, that Iran has at most 10 to 15 days to reach a deal on its nuclear program, suggesting the United States would attack if Tehran fails to comply. Speaking to

reporters on Air Force One, Trump declared, “We’re either going to get a deal, or it’s going to be unfortunate for them.” Asked about his timeline, the president responded, “I would think that would be enough time—10, 15 days, pretty much maximum.” The remarks came amid a major US military buildup in the Middle East, described as the largest accumulation of American air power in the region since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Poland told its citizens to leave Iran immediately, and Germany pulled its troops from Iraq as precautionary measures. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking at an IDF officer cadet graduation ceremony on the same day, vowed that if Iran attacks Israel, it will face “a response they can’t even imagine.” Netanyahu also declared an end to the era of merely containing threats, stating, “There is no more containment of threats. If you don’t come to the jungle, the jungle comes to you.” The comments signal that Israel under Netanyahu has shifted to a more aggressive posture in the wake of the Hamas-led invasion and massacre on October 7, 2023. Israeli officials are working “side by side” with Washington to confront Tehran. (TOI/VFI News)

Trump’s Board of Peace Convenes for First Time as US Touts Disarmament Prospects; US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace held its inaugural meeting on Thursday, February 19, in Washington, aiming to advance the reconstruction of Gaza despite looming questions over whether Hamas will agree to disarm. The meeting came nearly four months after the Trump administration brokered a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that allowed the release of all remaining Israeli hostages. Trump announced that the US would contribute \$10 billion to the Board of Peace, with other member states contributing an additional \$7 billion. Nearly fifty countries were represented at the gathering, with Israel, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Qatar, and others sending foreign ministers or other senior officials. A senior US official pushed back on the notion that progress in Gaza has stalled, saying, “We are under no illusions on the challenges regarding demilitarization, but we have been encouraged by what the mediators have reported back.” Secretary of State Marco Rubio added, “There’s a lot of work that remains that will require the contribution of every nation state represented here today.” Key challenges remain, including Hamas’s disarmament and the establishment of an international stabilization force. Only Indonesia has offered a firm commitment of troops for the proposed force. Israeli officials have expressed deep skepticism about Hamas voluntarily disarming; with the IDF believing it will ultimately need to act if the terror group refuses. Despite these hurdles, Board of Peace officials expressed optimism that progress is being made. (TOI/VFI News)

Christian NGO Founder Says Tucker Carlson is ‘Totally Wrong’ About Christians in Israel; Shadi Khalloul, founder of the Israeli Christian Aramaic Association and a former Knesset candidate, declared on Wednesday, February 18, that Tucker Carlson is “totally wrong” about the experience of Christians living in Israel. In early February, Khalloul invited the right-wing American commentator to his home in the Galilee to meet with Christian leaders and visit holy sites, but Carlson did not respond. Carlson briefly visited Israel on Wednesday for a filmed interview with US Ambassador Mike Huckabee, but did not travel beyond Ben-Gurion Airport. Khalloul criticized Carlson’s repeated claims of widespread Christian mistreatment in Israel, saying, “He’s speaking about me, about my people who live here in Israel, and it’s totally wrong, total lies.” He emphasized that Christians in Israel enjoy freedom of worship, freedom of movement, and freedom of speech and that women can go out freely without harassment. Khalloul contrasted this with conditions in many Arab and Islamic countries, citing the recent bombing of a church in Damascus that killed 25 worshipers. Regarding occasional incidents of Christians being spat on in Jerusalem, Khalloul said the perpetrators are a “fanatic, tiny minority” and that authorities follow up and punish offenders. He warned that Carlson’s rhetoric is “destroying our alliance as people here together” and actively creating divisions between the Jewish and Christian communities in Israel. “He is hurting our existence,” Khalloul said. (JPost/VFI News)

Qatar's Growing Influence Poses Deepening Threat to Israel's Security; The giant Israeli shipping company ZIM was recently sold to a German entity that subsequently sold significant shares to Qatar, sparking urgent warnings from Israeli strategic analysts. The Institute for Maritime Policy and Strategy published a position paper stating that “selling the shipping company ZIM to foreign hands constitutes a strategic and security threat to Israel’s resilience,” noting that roughly 99% of Israel’s foreign trade passes through maritime supply lines that ZIM helps ensure. Beyond the ZIM acquisition, Qatar has invested an estimated 800 million to 1 billion shekels in Israeli high-tech since 2020, with significant involvement under the radar in cyber, security technologies, and infrastructure protection systems. Israeli defense companies have signed contracts to sell advanced cyber technologies to Qatar, sometimes with the approval of senior figures. Qatar is estimated to be the second-largest Gulf investor in Israeli high-tech after the UAE, despite its education system teaching that Zionists and Jews are enemies. Qatar, whose territory hosts Hamas and other terrorist organizations, has been documented conducting influence operations involving payments to Israeli figures to shift public opinion. The “Qatari Ring of Fire” as strategists now describe it differs from the Iranian military encirclement because it operates from within Israel’s economic and political body rather than from surrounding borders. Analysts warn that this internal penetration may represent a greater long-term existential threat than the military proxy networks. (*JPost/VFI News*)

State Budget Set to Increase Spending on Haredi Education by NIS 1 Billion; Despite failing to teach secular studies in accordance with the law, ultra-Orthodox schools are set to receive nearly a billion shekels (\$322 million) in additional funding in the 2026 state budget currently being advanced in the Knesset. The increases include a jump from NIS 1.64 billion (\$529 million) in 2025 to NIS 2.1 billion (\$678 million) for United Torah Judaism’s Independent Network, and from NIS 863 million (\$278 million) to NIS 1.23 billion (\$397 million) for Shas’s Maayan Hachinuch Hatorani school network. The opposition party Yesh Atid recently petitioned the High Court of Justice to halt the transfer of some NIS 1 billion to ultra-Orthodox schools from the remainder of the 2025 budget. MK Vladimir Beliak stated, “It is clear that every day we know more and more details about the fact that there are practically no core studies in private Haredi education, and certainly among boys. There are no teachers, no syllabus, there is really no infrastructure.” He promised to raise questions and demand legal opinions when the numbers come before the Finance Committee. Degel HaTorah chairman Moshe Gafni responded by accusing the court of bias against the Haredi community, arguing that the majority of students in the school networks most of whom are girls—study all subjects and excel in exams. The increased budget is partly a function of changing budgeting methods, with Haredi schools now receiving the bulk of their funding upfront instead of being supplemented at year’s end. (*TOI/VFI News*)

Israeli Scientists Use Deep-Brain Stimulation to Counter Schizophrenia in Breakthrough Study; In a breakthrough study published on Wednesday, February 19, Israeli scientists announced they have developed a novel deep-brain stimulation approach for patients with schizophrenia. The therapy could restore brain functions that control movement, learning, and decision-making in the estimated 21 million people worldwide who suffer from the severe chronic mental disorder. Dr Nir Asch, who led the peer-reviewed research at Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa, said the study “proposes a new therapeutic direction” for patients who do not respond sufficiently to existing treatments. The research, which appeared in the journal *Nature Communications*, leveraged computational modeling, data analysis, and machine learning. It was conducted under the guidance of 2024 Israel Prize laureate Prof. Hagai Bergman, a neuroscientist from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a pioneer of deep-brain stimulation for Parkinson’s disease. One-third of all schizophrenia patients worldwide are considered treatment-resistant, representing an enormous medical burden. Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder that usually begins in a person’s early twenties and most often becomes a lifelong condition. Symptoms include hallucinations,

persistent delusions, disorganized thinking, and social withdrawal. People with schizophrenia die nine years earlier than the general population on average, often due to physical illnesses such as diabetes. In Israel alone, roughly 70,000 people live with schizophrenia—about one in 143 Israelis. (*TOI/VFI News*)

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