

Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update April 23, 2026 (Iyyar 5, 5786)



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Israel; 100 Murders in 111 Days: 35 Year-old Man Shot to Death in Northern Israel

- *Lebanese journalist killed in IDF strike on Wednesday*
- *Israeli strike near Gaza mosque reportedly kills five, including three children*
 - *Reports: IDF shoots, kills 16-year-old in raid on West Bank city*
 - *Germany and Italy block EU push to reconsider trade ties with Israel*
- *Four killed in Arab communities as Israel's 2026 homicide toll nears 100*
 - *1,100 artists call to boycott Eurovision 2026 unless Israel is banned*

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Standing with Israel!

Distress Call Captures Tanker under Fire as Iran Shuts Hormuz, Trapping Thousands of Sailors; Hundreds of commercial tankers remained stranded on both sides of the Strait of Hormuz after Iran shut the critical chokepoint on Saturday, April 18, halting traffic and leaving crews trapped amid reports of gunfire and what maritime authorities described as “traumatic experiences” on board. The Strait of Hormuz is considered an international waterway under international law, through which ships have the right of transit passage under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Audio released by maritime monitoring group TankerTrackers captured the moment a vessel and its crew came under fire while approaching the strait, including a distress call from a crew member. “Sepah Navy! Motor tanker Sanmar Herald! You gave me clearance to go... you are firing now. Let me turn back!” the crew member could be heard saying. Iranian state media confirmed that shots were fired near vessels to force them to turn back. Hapag-Lloyd, one of the world’s largest container shipping lines, activated a crisis team as its crews remained stuck in the region. “Approaching the Strait of Hormuz will be considered cooperation with the enemy, and any violating vessel will be targeted,” the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said in a statement carried by Iranian state media. The United States imposed a blockade on Iranian ports to pressure Tehran to reopen the strait, with U.S. Central Command saying the measures are being enforced “impartially against all vessels.” U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyers are among the assets executing the blockade mission impacting Iranian ports, underscoring the risk that any miscalculation could ignite a broader regional crisis. (*FOX/VFI News*)

Iran Attacks Indian-Flagged Vessels after Granting Clearance to Cross Hormuz; Radio transmissions suggested that two Indian-flagged vessels, attacked while attempting to cross the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, April 18, had been granted permission to make the journey by the Iranian regime, a maritime intelligence company assessed. “You gave me clearance to go! My name second on your list, you gave me clearance to go! You are firing now! Let me turn back!” an individual could be heard pleading in the radio transmission as his vessel came under Iranian fire. The two Indian-flagged vessels were attempting to carry crude oil across the strait when they came under attack, India’s External Affairs Ministry confirmed in a statement. One of the attacked vessels was identified as the Sanmar Herald, with an Indian government source confirming the crew was ultimately safe. The incident marks a dramatic escalation of Iran’s campaign of pressure against neutral shipping and raises new concerns over the safety of the Persian Gulf as a vital energy corridor for the nations of Asia and beyond. Tehran’s ambassador to New Delhi, Mohammad Fathali, was called in for a meeting with India’s Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, during which Misri conveyed India’s “deep concern” over the shooting incident. Misri urged the Iranian ambassador to relay India’s view to Iranian authorities and to resume, at the earliest, the process of facilitating India-bound ships across the strait. Fathali said he would convey these views to Iranian authorities in Tehran and report back to New Delhi on the regime’s response. (*JPost/VFI News*)

Islamic Guard Takes Full Control of Iran, Sidelines Moderates; Iran's hardline Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps leader has effectively taken control of Tehran's military and negotiation team over the weekend of April 18–19, analysts assessed Sunday, April 19. IRGC Commander Maj. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi and members of his inner circle have taken charge of the Islamic Republic, as evident by Iran's attacks on ships attempting to sail through the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran's refusal to join peace talks with the United States this week, the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War think tank found. The sudden shift to a hardline stance also shows that more moderate members of Iran's leadership, including Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi, have been sidelined. Araghchi had initially agreed to open the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend after reaching a consensus with the Trump administration, but the IRGC demanded it remain shut in the face of the American blockade on Iranian ports. Vahidi reportedly received the backing of Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, Iran's Supreme National Security Council secretary and an IRGC veteran, to control the strait further cementing Vahidi's grip on Iran. The IRGC's fast attack ships remain Iran's main naval force in the key waterway after U.S.-Israeli airstrikes sank more than 150 vessels of Tehran's conventional navy during the war. Iran attacked at least three ships attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend, signaling that the oil chokepoint remains closed off as hundreds of ships sit stuck in the Persian Gulf. Vahidi's alliance has ultimately made him the top decision-maker in Iran apart from Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, who has yet to make a public appearance since being injured during the initial U.S.-Israeli airstrikes. *(NYP/VFI News)*

Trump Administration Weighs Unfreezing \$20 Billion in Iranian Assets as Peace Deal Nears; The United States is considering releasing \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets as part of a first phase in a potential deal to end the war with Iran if certain conditions are met, a source familiar with discussions confirmed on Friday, April 17, with the potential to ultimately release a total of \$20 billion. The first phase would unfold over the course of two to three years, with the full \$20 billion release contingent on even further conditions. The \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets originating from oil sales to South Korea are currently being kept in Qatar. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, insisted Friday that the regime had agreed to hand over its enriched uranium stockpile while forcefully maintaining that “no money would be exchanged.” “The U.S.A. will get all Nuclear ‘Dust,’ created by our great B2 Bombers No money will exchange hands in any way, shape, or form,” Trump posted to Truth Social. It remains unclear what conditions must be met for any of the assets to be released, and alternative arrangements could involve giving Tehran access to Iranian overseas revenue currently frozen by Washington. The United States may also allow Iran to access around \$15 billion in money owed to it by Iraq for electricity. Washington and Tehran are working through mediators to establish a deal that could be completed in a second round of negotiations in Islamabad, Pakistan, with travel arrangements potentially confirmed within days. If approved, it would not be the first time the United States has unlocked assets for Iran during the Obama administration, officials secretly arranged a plane delivery of \$400 million in cash to Iran on the same day Tehran released four American prisoners and formally implemented the 2016 nuclear deal. *(NYP/VFI News)*

Iranians Fear Fresh Government Crackdown after War: ‘There’s Fire under the Ashes’; Iranians striving to maintain a semblance of normal life after weeks of U.S. and Israeli bombing and a deadly crackdown on protesters in January remain daunted by the future as damage from airstrikes and internet blackouts take their toll. With talks expected on extending a truce and agreeing on an end to the conflict, shops, restaurants, and government offices have stayed open. On sunny spring mornings, city parks are busy with picnicking families and young people playing sports, while others gather at street-side cafes. But behind such peaceful scenes, Iran's economy lies in tatters, and people are fearful of a new government clampdown and angry about the destructive airstrikes. The difficulties that spurred the mass unrest leading to the bloody crackdown in January look likely to worsen. “Yes, people are enjoying the ceasefire for now but what comes next? What are we supposed to do with a regime that has become even

more powerful?” said Sara, 27, a private teacher who declined to give her family name or location for fear of reprisal. Thousands were killed when authorities crushed weeks of protests in January, prompting U.S. President Donald Trump to say he would come to the aid of Iranians. But while Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu both said early in the war that they hoped it would topple the ruling clerics, that goal faded as the bombing went on. Popular frustration may start to mount after the war ends, and people grow less afraid of being labelled traitors. “There is a lot of fire under the ashes,” one Iranian analyst observed. *(TOI/VFI News)*

Lebanese Maronite Leader Geagea Denounces Hezbollah as Cause of Violence and Displacement; Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Maronite Christian Lebanese Forces political party, denounced Hezbollah as the reason for violence and displacement in Lebanon in a post to X on Saturday, April 18. Geagea argued that Hezbollah and its weapons are the reason Lebanese civilians need a ceasefire, adding that the armed terror group is the cause of “an Israeli occupation.” “If it weren’t for Hezbollah and its weapons, we wouldn’t have prisoners, displaced people, or need reconstruction,” he added. Meanwhile, Hezbollah Secretary-General Naim Qassem spoke to Iranian media, laying out five conditions the terror group requires for a ceasefire with Israel. The first step would be a “permanent cessation of aggression,” Qassem said. Secondly, the “Zionist enemy” would need to completely withdraw from Lebanese territory to the international border. Thirdly, Israel would need to release all prisoners held since the outbreak of the war, a demand aimed at leveraging captured fighters as political currency. Fourth, Lebanon’s displaced residents would need to be able to return to their cities and villages in the southern border areas that bore the brunt of recent fighting. The fifth step is to begin reconstruction, with support from the international and Arab communities, as well as what Qassem described as “national responsibility.” Hezbollah is “ready for the highest level of cooperation with the Lebanese government within a new framework for realizing national sovereignty,” Qassem added, even as his movement continues to bind Lebanese society to Iranian interests. *(JPost/VFI News)*

Ahead of Its 78th Independence Day, Israel’s Population Stands at 10.244 Million; Ahead of its 78th Independence Day, which begins Tuesday evening, April 21, Israel’s total population stands at 10.244 million people, per figures released Sunday, April 19, by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The number is some 146,000 higher than last year, representing an increase of 1.4 percent. This growth includes 110,000 more Israelis and 36,000 more foreign residents, reflecting both natural increase and continued immigration to the Jewish state. Of the total population, 7.790 million, or 76 percent, are Jewish and “others” meaning non-Jewish, non-Arab citizens while 2.157 million (21.1 percent) are Arabs, and the remaining 296,000 (2.9 percent) are foreigners. Independence Day begins on Tuesday evening with the conclusion of Memorial Day, and celebrations continue through Wednesday evening, April 22. Over the past year, approximately 177,000 newborn Israelis drew their first breath, while at the other end of life, 48,000 drew their last. A further 21,000 new immigrants arrived from abroad to make Israel their home. Since 1948, more than 3.5 million people have immigrated to the country, though four out of five Israelis today are “sabras,” or native-born. Over a quarter of the population, 27 percent, are children aged 14 or under, while around 13 percent are over 65, giving Israel one of the youngest demographic profiles in the developed world. The second largest concentration of Jews globally is in the United States, with 6.3 million, or around 40 percent of the worldwide total of 15.8 million; Israel now holds roughly 45 percent of the world’s Jewish population. *(TOI/VFI News)*

Four-Day Pride Festival to Be Held at Dead Sea, Largest in Middle East History; Israel is set to host the Middle East’s largest-ever LGBT festival at the Dead Sea in June 2026, organizers announced Sunday, April 19. The new event, called Pride Land, intends to transform a portion of the Judean Desert into a colorful pride city from June 1 to June 4. Organizers say the event aims to create an experience broader than parties or performances, instead providing a space that operates 24 hours a day across the

festival's duration. The festival plan includes 15 hotels, beach complexes, parties, and a central performance arena, all operating around the clock. Alongside the nightlife, Pride Land will feature cultural and art complexes, relaxation and scenic areas, and family-oriented sections with children's activities, workshops, and customized events. The organizers say they hope to create a multigenerational "Pride City," not simply a party celebrating pride but a full destination experience. "This is not just another festival, it's the biggest thing we've done here," explained Aaron Cohen, the main producer and initiator of the festival. The event also aims to highlight the Dead Sea region as a permanent destination for LGBT tourists, emphasizing that Pride in Israel extends beyond the key hub of Tel Aviv. Pride Land's main stage will host Harel Skaat, Dana International, Ran Danker, Shahar Tabuch, and Ivri Lider, alongside DJs drawn from the Israeli LGBT community, and ticket and package sales are expected to open soon with hotel accommodations, daily admission, and premium options available. (*JPost/VFI News*)



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