

‘Memory is the only (place) from which you cannot be expelled’

Israel News Faxx

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Welcome to the Israel News Faxx Weekly Edition

For July 10, 2017– July 14, 2017

incorporating news, features and opinion

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Israel: Syrian Truce Good for Israel But Subject to Iran's Non-Presence

By DEBKAFfile

In Israel's first comment on the Trump-Putin deal on a ceasefire in southwestern Syria, which went into effect Sunday noon, Minister of Energy Yuval Steinitz said that it could be good for Israel, were it not for Iran's presence in Syria.

Israel was not referred to in the announcement of the deal, even though the areas involved – reportedly Daraa, Suweida and Quneitra - touch directly on its border, and mortar shells from the fighting there regularly explode on the Golan.

Syrian government forces and its allies will reportedly stay on one side of an agreed demarcation line, and rebel fighters on the other side. This line remains to be established, as well as the adherence of both parties and their allies to the planned ceasefire. The Russians claimed they would monitor the ceasefire, while the Americans said this is still under discussion.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said: "We are still learning the details of the deal and its connotations for southwestern Syria and Iran's deepening presence in Syria. We reserve full freedom of action to do what is necessary in our security interests," he said, repeating "full freedom of action."

The minister added that Israel is deeply concerned that the Islamists in flight from liberated Mosul may head west out of Iraq. That concern, he said, is shared by Saudi Arabia and other Middle East nations.

DEBKAFfile reports that many of the jihadists who fled Mosul in the nine-month battle have already headed west, settling in the two eastern Syrian-Iraqi border towns of Abu Kamal and Mayadin and in Al-Qa'im on the Iraqi side of the border.

Whether the ceasefire holds is of less concern to Israel than the military presence of Iranian and Hizbullah forces on its borders. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu made this point at Sunday's cabinet meeting, after putting those concerns before President Vladimir Putin last Thursday and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson before the Trump-Putin encounter at the G20 summit on Friday. Both assured him that Israel's concerns would be considered. But neither spelled out what practical form that consideration would take.

Netanyahu Condemns UN Denial of Abraham as Jewish Patriarch

By World Israel News

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu released a strongly worded video and transferred \$1 million from Israel's UN membership fees to Jewish heritage projects in Hebron, after the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared

Netanyahu read passages from the Bible during Sunday's weekly Cabinet meeting as a refutation of the resolution designating the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Hebron a Palestinian heritage site.

"I would like to read from Genesis 23:16-19: 'And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant... And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre—the same is Hebron—in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the children of Heth,'" Netanyahu read.

"The connection between the Jewish People and Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs is one of purchase and of history which may be without parallel in the history of peoples," Netanyahu declared.

Netanyahu explained that in wake of this resolution, he has decided to cut an additional \$1 million from Israel's UN membership dues and transfer the funds to the establishment of "The Museum of the Heritage of the Jewish People in Kiryat Arba and Hebron." The money will also serve additional heritage initiatives related to Hebron.

Convictions of Three Rabbis for Forced Divorces Upheld by Court

By Israel Hayom

A federal appeals court Friday upheld the convictions of three Orthodox rabbis for their roles in a ring that used brutal tactics to force unwilling Jewish men to divorce their wives. A three-judge panel of the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed arguments by the rabbis that the convictions should be overturned on many grounds, including the right to religious freedom.

Rabbis Mendel Epstein, Jay Goldstein and Binyamin Stimler were convicted in 2015 on charges of conspiracy to commit kidnapping. Epstein, 70, lives in Lakewood, New Jersey, while Goldstein, 61, and Stimler, 41, are from Brooklyn. Epstein, who was accused of being the ringleader, was sentenced to 10 years. Goldstein got an eight-year term, and Stimler a three-year sentence.

The attacks were carried out from 2009 to 2013 in New Jersey, New York City and other locations. Prosecutors said the group used brutal methods and tools, including handcuffs and electric cattle prods, to torture the men into granting the religious divorces, known as gets, which their wives were seeking. Jewish law mandates that the get be presented by a husband to a wife to make a divorce official.

During his sentencing in December 2015, Epstein told District Judge Freda Wolfson that he got caught up in his tough guy image, which he said helped him persuade men to give their wives the religious divorces. Epstein said he was helping the women out of a sense of compassion because they couldn't remarry without it.

Epstein's attorney, Peter Goldberger, argued before the appeals court in January that Wolfson erred during the trial by not allowing evidence that explained the rabbi's religious beliefs. The attorneys also argued that federal authorities didn't get a warrant to obtain private cellphone records and that the evidence against Stimler wasn't enough to justify a conviction. The appeals court judges dismissed those claims.

Israel's Chief Rabbinate's 'Blacklist' of American Rabbis Released

By JTA and IsraelNationalNews.com

The Israeli Chief Rabbinate allegedly has a list of some 160 rabbis it does not trust to confirm the Jewish identities of immigrants. The list was reportedly compiled and later published by a department manager within the Chief Rabbinate, who acted without authorization from either the two Chief Rabbis or the Director-General of the Chief Rabbinate.

To marry in Israel, immigrants must prove they are Jewish to the Chief Rabbinate, often via a letter by a congregational rabbi attesting to the immigrant's Jewish identity. This list comprises rabbis whose letters were rejected during 2016. Rabbis from 24 different countries appear on the list, which includes several prominent American Orthodox leaders. It does not state whether the Orthodox are from the controversial Open Orthodox movement, termed neo-Conservative by leading modern Orthodox rabbis, but Rabbi Avi Weiss, founder of that ultra-liberal stream, is said to be on the list.

The Chief Rabbinate's standards for proving Jewish identity are unrelated to the State of Israel's requirements for the purposes of immigration. They have bearing on marriage, not citizenship. JTA obtained the list from ITIM, an organization that guides Israelis through the country's religious bureaucracy, which has called the list a "blacklist." Chief Rabbi David Lau expressed outrage over the publication.

Hareidi Cult Leader Drowns in Mexico

By YnetNews.com

Rabbi Shlomo Erez Helbrans, 55, leader of the "Lev Tahor" ("Pure Heart") ultra-Orthodox sect, was found drowned in a river in the Mexican state of Chiapas on Friday, according to local media. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement saying the reports were being looked into by the Israeli embassy in Mexico.

According to local media, Helbrans' body was pulled from the river by rescue forces on Friday afternoon after the rabbi was swept away by strong currents while swimming before Shabbat. Helbrans was the head of a group of 40 ultra-Orthodox families who entered the state of Chiapas about three weeks ago, after crossing the border from Guatemala.

Helbrans was born Shlomo Elbarnes into a secular family in Jerusalem, only becoming religious as a young man. He studied at the Itri Yeshiva in Jerusalem before founding the Lev Tahor sect in the 1980s.

Lev Tahor is an ultra-Orthodox sect comprised of predominantly Israeli Haredi extremists who leave their families behind in Israel as part of a wider boycott of Zionism. The group is widely considered to be a cult for its extreme conduct which adheres to the strict word of Jewish scripture.

In the 1990s, the movement was under investigation by Israeli authorities for allegedly collaborating with Islamist elements against state security. Helbrans fled to the United States along with several students who were smuggled out of Israel with fake passports. As such, an additional investigation into Helbrans for kidnapping was launched.

Whilst in the United States, Helbrans was arrested and served two years in prison for kidnapping after assisting a 13-year-old boy go into hiding from his secular mother. After his release from prison in the US, Helbrans was to be deported to Israel, but instead fled to Canada where he was granted refugee status after claiming persecution in Israel for his religious and political beliefs.

According to estimates, the sect numbers about 230 people, of whom about 150 are children. About three and a half years ago, Canadian authorities blocked the group from transferring underage members to Guatemala after Canadian courts issued a decree requiring some children to be transferred to foster families after being found to have been severely abused.

Welfare officials in Ontario and Quebec claimed that they had evidence of abuse involving beatings, underage marriage, and illegal education. However, the sect succeeded in transferring many of the children to Guatemala giving rise to a legal battle over the last few years to expel them back to Canada.

In September 2016, at the request of Israeli authorities, Guatemalan law enforcement raided the Lev Tahor compound and arrested its leaders on suspicion of child abuse. The raid prompted its members to leave the site to a new location in eastern Guatemala, and complain that they were being persecuted due of their faith. Helbrans and the group had crossed the Guatemalan border into the Mexican state of Chiapas several weeks ago.

Racist Music in the US

By IsraelNationalNews.com

Famous American rapper Jay-Z's new music video "The Story of OJ" contains the line "Credit. Have you ever wondered why Jews control all property in the US? Here's how they did it."

Leaders of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) harshly condemned the video, saying it perpetuates historical stereotypes that Jews control money and property. "We do not believe it was Jay-Z's intent to promote anti-Semitism," ADL said. "On the contrary, we know that Jay-Z is someone who has used his celebrity in the past to speak out responsibly and forcefully against the evils of racism and anti-Semitism."

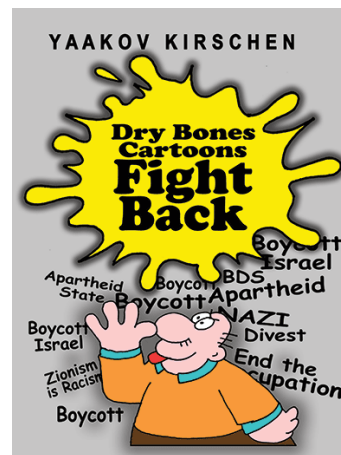
"However, the lyrics play into deep-seated anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews and money. The idea that Jews 'own all the property' in this country and have used credit to financially get ahead are odious and false. Yet, such notions have lingered in society for decades, and we are concerned that this lyric could feed into preconceived notions about Jews and alleged Jewish 'control' of the banks and finance."

Neither Jay-Z nor his representatives have responded to the accusations, but sources close to Jay-Z rejected the claims that Jay-Z holds anti-Semitic beliefs. According to entrepreneur and music company owner Russell Simmons, Jay-Z intended to compliment the Jewish community on its financial conduct.

"Mischievous makers would like to take Jay's statements about the culture and practices that exist within some parts of the Jewish community... The fact is this culture that promotes good business and financial wellbeing is and has been a guiding light to the black and specifically the hip-hop community," Simmons tweeted.

"From music to film, television, fashion, technology + financial services, the hip-hop community including myself have partnered with Jews where there were no blacks to partner with... Jay Z was celebrating that bond that was built when no other community gave and continues to give us as much support in our fight for liberation in this very white country."

Madonna's manager, Guy Oseary, wrote on Instagram, "If you read the lyrics out of context I can understand why people are jumping to that conclusion.. But if you listen to the song in its entirety you will hear that the whole of the song is based on exaggerated stereotypes to make a point. He's attempting to use the Jewish people in an exaggerated way to showcase a community of people that are thought to have made wise business decisions... In my opinion, Jay is giving the Jewish community a compliment. "



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Syrian-Hizbullah Offensive Defies Ceasefire

By DEBKAfile

Less than 24 hours after the US-Russian sponsored ceasefire went into force in southwest Syria, it broke down early Monday, July 10, when large-scale Syrian army and Hizbullah forces launched a general offensive on Syrian rebel forces in the Al Suweida province. This region was listed with Quneitra and Daraa as one of three demilitarized locations to be covered by the truce.

DEBKAfile's military sources report that the Syrian's army's 5th Armored Division led the offensive which the Syrian army's general command designated "Operation Big Dawn," to mark it as the opening of a new phase in the war in southern Syria.

Our military sources described the attack as focusing on the northern rural areas of Al Suweida province to provide the Syrians and Hizbullah with a pretext for claiming they are not part of the town and therefore not part of the ceasefire agreement reached by Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in Hamburg last Friday, July 7.

In the early hours of their drive forward, Syrian and Hizbullah troops captured 11 villages and small towns, including Tal Asfar and Al-Qasr, which lie 33km from the town of Suweida, 70km from Daraa on the Jordanian border and 78km east of Quneitra and the Israeli Golan border. They forced the rebels defending them to retreat; most belonging to the Syrian Democratic Forces, who were trained and armed by the US and Jordan.

According to our sources, Damascus decided to terminate another short-lived ceasefire in the six-year Syrian war when the Jordanian army and intelligence took advantage of the pause in fighting to transfer large quantities of weapons and military equipment to allied Syrian rebel forces defending Daraa. Under no illusions about the sustainability of the US-Russian ceasefire deal, Jordan moved fast to bolster its Syrian allies for the next round of fighting.

The Assad regime, for its part, felt free to resume combat because the Trump-Putin deal had not set out demarcation lines as dividers between the opposing armies, leaving that task to US and Russian officers on the ground to take up.

Israel, Palestinians Reach Power Deal for Northern West Bank

By VOA News

Israeli and Palestinian officials have signed a rare agreement to provide additional electricity to Palestinian residents of the northern West Bank.

Under Monday's deal, Israel's national electric company will sell an additional 60 megawatts of electricity to the power-starved Jenin area, with an option to more than double the supply.

The electricity will be distributed through a Palestinian-operated substation. The Palestinians are building a total of four substations, with backing from the European Investment Bank.

Israel's energy minister, Yuval Steinitz, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and other top officials attended a ceremony near Jenin. Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, who heads Cogat, the Israeli defense body for Palestinian civilian affairs, said such agreements are "significant components of stability." Hamdallah called the project an "impressive accomplishment."

Knesset Bloc Unveils its Plan for Peace: Total Palestinian Surrender

By JTA

Israel has already defeated the Palestinians. All that's left is for them to surrender. That, at least, was an argument being made in Jerusalem this week. Led by the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum, pro-Israel leaders and analysts gathered here to highlight local support for their aim of reframing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict internationally.

"After more than a century, the conflict is really over," Daniel Pipes, the forum's president told JTA. "As an American, I would like my government to say to the Israeli government, 'Do what you need to do to convince the Palestinians they lost.'"

Pipes on Sunday night held an English-language event at the Begin Heritage Center to cheer Tuesday's launch of a Knesset lobby committed to forcing the Palestinians to admit defeat. He said he hoped the Knesset Israel Victory Caucus — along with a public opinion poll he released Sunday to JTA — would help them convince U.S. policymakers to "let Israel win."

In an article in the December 2016 issue of Commentary, Pipes described the things Israel might do to "encourage Palestinians to accept Israel and discourage rejectionism." They include charging the Palestinians Authority for material damage from terrorism; blocking P.A. officials from returning to the West Bank if their colleagues incite violence; quiet, anonymous burials for Palestinians killed attacking Israelis, and shutting off water and electricity supplies to punish violence by Palestinians.

"Inducing a change of heart is not a pretty or pleasant process," wrote Pipes. However, he continued, "Wars usually end when failure causes one side to despair, when that side has abandoned its war aims and accepted defeat, and when that defeat has exhausted the will to fight."

Israeli, US and British speakers took the stage one-by-one to advocate a zero-sum vision of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The Zionist project was to build Israel. The Palestinian national purpose was to destroy Israel. Only one side could win, and it had been Israel.

Now, they argued, Israel's allies – most importantly the United States – must dispense with long-unsuccessful peace negotiations and allow Israel to finish the job, by forcing the Palestinians to concede defeat. Despite their shared view of the end of the conflict, the speakers evinced widely divergent worldviews and priorities.

In his opening remarks, Pipes said that by “losing” the conflict, the Palestinians might gain even more than Israel because they could “move on to something better, more constructive, built their own polity, economy, society and culture.”

Like Pipes, Richard Kemp, the former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, said that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would require changing attitudes in foreign capitals. “I think the key here is not Israel. Israel obviously must play a significant part in it. But the key is the international community. It's the international community that by its actions continues to encourage aggression against Israel,” he said.

But Yehuda Glick, an Orthodox Jewish activist and Knesset member for the ruling Likud party, argued that Israel was responsible for its own destiny. By making itself “a light to the nations,” Israel would bring “shalom upon the region and the world,” he said. “Yes, of course, they have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Of course, they have to stop anti-Semitism. But that's not what we have to deal with. We have to deal with what's good for us, and we have to continue.”

Einat Wilf, a former left-wing Israeli lawmaker, said she had over time given up on making peace with the Palestinians. She suggested that the conflict would only end when Arabs were forced to reinterpret the role of Zionism in their history.

“We rewrite our lives to turn our defeats into triumphs, right? That's what humans do,” she said. “So, the Arabs and the Palestinians will one day rewrite their history, their theology to acknowledge the Jewish presence here as part of their view that the Jews came here because that's how it should have been by Islam.”

Meanwhile, a June poll commissioned by the Middle East Forum found that 82% of Israelis do not believe the Palestinian leadership will recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people under any conditions. A plurality of Israelis said this was the biggest obstacle to peace. The margin of error was 3.7%.

In his recent book, “The Only Language They Understand,” Middle East analyst Nathan Thrall argued that both the Israelis and Palestinians have historically only made concessions when forced to, by either violence or politics. But he said Israel has benefited from the peace process and would be unlikely to push for an end to it, nor would world powers.

“It allows the perpetuation of the status quo. When there's an absence of talks, people start to get restless. The world doesn't want to support indefinite occupation,” he told JTA. “It's entirely implausible that the U.S. or the international community are going to adopt a position in support of 'Israeli victory.' It sounds to be like this group is just putting on a show and asking for some kind of rhetorical shift.”

Christian Hit with \$12,000 'Shariah Fine' for Not Removing Shoes

By IsraelNationalNews.com

John Alabi, 53, is a Christian and a landlord who lives in the Toronto area and is being ordered to pay a fine of \$12,000 by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal because he failed to remove his shoes when he entered the apartment he was renting to a Muslim couple, according to World Net Daily. His crime, according to the tribunal, is religious discrimination.

The tenants were planning to move out of his rental home, and he says he gave the couple the required 24-hour-notice that he would be showing the apartment to another tenant. They told him not to come while they were praying, and to text first. He agreed. But when they stopped answering his text messages, he showed up at the apartment.

The Muslim tenants waited eight months before filing their grievance with the human rights tribunal, where they receive free representation, the Toronto Sun reported. The couple even searched his Facebook page and found a joke they considered offensive and used it to bolster their case. The tribunal agreed he harassed them and failed in his duty to accommodate their religious needs – and awarded them \$6,000 each – plus interest. Alabi says he does not have the money to pay the fine and doesn't know what he's going to do.

Mikva Peeping Rabbi Play Takes the Stage in Washington DC

>TX By The Jerusalem Post

It's a tale that shocked and shook up the American Jewish community. Now, two years later, playwright AJ Campbell's dramatization of mikva-peeping Rabbi Barry Freundel is currently part of the Capital Fringe Festival in Washington.

In late 2015, police arrested Freundel for secretly videotaping dozens of women who had come to immerse in the mikva, or ritual bath. The former leader of the Keshet Israel Synagogue in DC pleaded guilty to 52 counts of misdemeanor voyeurism, and was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison.

As she watched the scandal unfold “in dribs and drabs,” Campbell was moved to write her play, *Constructive Fictions*, which premiered last week. “It was just shocking,” Campbell told The Jerusalem Post. “I found myself looking at the apology letter when he finally published it and being incredibly unsatisfied by it... What we need to do is hear from him, we need to know what was in his mind and have a real explanation of why he did it.”

Constructive Fictions is set in Freundel's jail cell where he is confronted by four different women who force him to listen to their accusations and testimonies. “The names of the characters are based on the matriarchs in the Bible – Rachel, Rebecca, Leah, Sarah,” said Campbell. She said the four women represent the “composite structures” of his 152 victims, many of whom fell outside of the statute of limitations.

While she notes that the play is “clearly a work of fiction,” Campbell said she spent a great deal of time doing research on the story to ensure every detail would be correct. “I spent three months just doing solid research, reading court documents, reading transcripts, articles, anything I could get my hands on,” she said. Campbell said she reached out to Freundel twice – once through his lawyer and once through a personal connection – but he declined to speak to her.

The play has been performed three times already and will hit the stage again for two more shows on July 20 and 23. Campbell said she grew up in a Modern Orthodox community, but today identifies as Conservative after a period of not practicing. “I could have gone to Keshet and seen Rabbi Freundel, and he probably would have told me there was a problem with the conversion of my great grandmother,” she said.

She noted that her friends and family have all been supportive of the play, and that she sees how the community “still struggles with these ideas of conversion and essentially what it means to be a Jew, and who gets to tell you you're a Jew.”

Campbell said she drew on “my own personal experiences in the community and life experiences and put it into composite structures.” And she promises a shocking, surprise ending that keeps people in their seats after “the lights come back on and the actors have left the stage. People have all sorts of questions,” she said. “I don't think people have ever seen a story like this packaged this way.”

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Israel's Labor Elects Newcomer Gabbay as Party Leader

By VOA News & Israel Hayom

Israel's Labor Party has elected political newcomer Avi Gabbay as its new leader, with hopes to revive its fortunes after 16 years in the opposition. Gabbay, 50, defeated Amir Peretz, a former party leader and defense minister, by a small margin in a runoff vote Monday.



Gabbay served a brief stint as environment minister under Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, but later resigned. A former telecom executive, Gabbay stresses his humble beginnings. He was the seventh of eight children born to immigrants from Morocco.

Labor, the party of David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin, dominated Israeli politics in the decades after independence, but has languished in the opposition since 2001. The next national election is scheduled for late 2019. Labor currently polls as Israel's fourth or fifth-largest party.

Ehud Barak, the last Labor prime minister, tweeted, "Revolution!" He added that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "is sweating and rightly so." In a video he posted to Facebook, Barak praised Gabbay and said: "Gabbay won because members of the Labor party want victory, not slogans.

Transportation Minister Envisions Railroad Across Middle East

By Israel Hayom

Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz is pushing a plan to build a region-wide train network that he says could link Israel and the Palestinians to much of the Arab world. He told foreign reporters that Israel is already pushing forward with plans to extend an existing train line to the Jordanian border and into the West Bank. The projects would give Jordan and the Palestinians greater access to Israel's Haifa Port.

Katz showed a map of a hoped-for rail network stretching through Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the Persian Gulf. Israel does not have formal relations with Saudi Arabia, but Katz suggested that the issue has been quietly raised through back channels, and said the Trump administration is "very active" in promoting regional "normalization."

The plan centers on two main elements: Israel as a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean Sea and between Jordan and the east, and Jordan as a regional center for rail-based land transport. The Jordanian hub would connect Israel, the Mediterranean Sea and Europe in the west, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states and Iraq in the east, and the Red Sea, via Aqaba and Eilat, in the south.

Rabbis Defend Lawmaker for Auschwitz Video

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The Coalition for Jewish Values, an Orthodox rabbinic organization which represents hundreds of Orthodox rabbis in the US, issued a statement in defense of a US Congressman who recorded a video inside a gas chamber at the Auschwitz death camp, the Jewish News Service reported.

The CJV wrote a letter to Rep. Clay Higgins (R-La.), saying that he "deserves thanks from the Jewish people" for "detailing and dramatizing the atrocities of the Holocaust," and speaking about the need to ensure "that the United States is protected from the evils of the world."

Higgins, a first-term House Republican and former police officer, produced an edited, five-minute video of himself touring parts of the camp and narrating in somber tones, including inside one of the former gas chambers. "A great sense of dread comes over you in this place...Man's inhumanity to man can be quite shocking."

The video was criticized by some as being political. Among those to criticize was the Auschwitz Memorial, which tweeted, "Everyone has the right to personal reflections. However, inside a former gas chamber, there should be mournful silence. It's not a stage." Higgins later apologized for the video and removed it.

Legislators Warn Arabic's Future as an Official Language in Israel at Risk

By The Jerusalem Post

Elimination of Arabic's status as an official language as is being proposed in a draft of a bill recently approved by the Ministerial Committee on Legislation would constitute "another nakba [catastrophe]" for Arabs, MK Yousef Jabareen (Joint List) said on Tuesday.

"It will be another nakba, the nakba of our language," he said, using the Arabic term that refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians during the War of Independence. It would allow more degradation of Arabic in the public sphere and its disappearance from the public sphere, affecting our identity and status," Jabareen added.

Since the state's inception Arabic has held official language status although in practice it is not treated equally to Hebrew or even English, which is not an official language, said Yonatan Mendel, director of the Center for Jewish-Arab relations at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. Arabic "is treated as inferior," he said.

Mendel added: "English is a mandatory subject for school matriculation, while Arabic is not mandatory. Many official services are not in Arabic as well as many websites. It's official on paper only. Israel understands its being official in a narrow way. Its status is fragile and weak."

Canceling Arabic's official status might accentuate the problem of government offices not using the language or having it on their websites, he said. "But its worst implications are political and moral. For Arabs the erasure of Arabic will be parallel to erasure of their status as equal citizens. They might understand it as a step toward taking away their citizenship rights. It will not contribute to relations between Jews and Arabs."

MK Oren Hazan (Likud), who supports ending Arabic's official status, told The Jerusalem Post there is room for only one official language – Hebrew. "We need a framework that will safeguard Jewish identity and the [Hebrew] language. The State of Israel is the state of the Jewish people and Hebrew has to be safeguarded as the only official language." He said he supports Arabic having a "special status" without being official and is promoting legislation that would require the teaching of spoken Arabic in Jewish schools from first grade.

The Ministerial Committee on Legislation in May approved a new version of the "nation-state bill" that states "the national language is Hebrew" and demotes Arabic from being official to having a "special status." The bill says Arabic speakers have the right to linguistically accessible state services.

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Battle in Jenin as Palestinians Use Guns, Bombs Against IDF Troops

By DEBKAFfile & YnetNews.com

Palestinians opened fire on IDF troops from several directions and hurled dozens of bombs at them as the force engaged in an operation to arrest terror suspects in the Jenin refugee camp early Wednesday morning. The troops returned fire. Two Palestinians were killed and several others were wounded. There were no casualties among the troops. Saad Salah, 20, was killed instantly, while a second, Awss Salameh, 17, was seriously wounded and later succumbed at the hospital. A third was hit in the leg.

The overnight assault in Jenin came at the heels of a terror attack on Monday in Gush Etzion, when a Palestinian terrorist rammed his car into a pillbox post near the settlement of Tekoa, where Artillery Corps soldiers were stationed, lightly wounding one of them. The terrorist then left his car brandishing a knife and tried to stab the soldiers. He was shot and killed.

Terrorists Take Advantage of Israel's Postal System

By IsraelNationalNews.com

Terrorist organizations and "lone wolf" terrorists are taking advantage of the Israel Postal Service to obtain advanced weapons they order via the Internet and are then used for terrorist attacks, security services have discovered, according to a report on Channel 2 News on Wednesday.

The discovery was made during an operation by Israeli security forces in the cellars of the Israel Postal Service's sorting center in Jerusalem. Following a series of recent deadly terrorist attacks using improvised weapons manufactured in Palestinian Authority-assigned areas of Judea and Samaria, the police and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) concluded that the terrorist organizations - and even a few extremist activists engaged in terrorism - acquire weapons on the Internet that they receive by mail.

Security forces then decided to examine suspicious packages that were sent from abroad and intended for residents of PA-assigned territories. Searches conducted in the sorting center in Jerusalem revealed various parts, intended to be delivered to residents of the PA, that can be used to produce improvised rifles of the type used in many deadly attacks carried out in recent years.

The investigators also discovered advanced weapons, laser sights for weapons, explosive devices, metal detectors, as well as advanced means of observation, including multicopter drones designed to collect intelligence about the activities of security forces.

Police sources told Channel 2 News that the threat that arises from these items and the means that were exposed is "amazing." According to the sources, there is no doubt that this early detection has already helped thwart attacks that were in advanced stages of planning.

ACLU 'Stands with' Anti-Israel Sharia Advocate Linda Sarsour

By IsraelNationalNews.com

The American Civil Liberties Union is doubling down on its endorsement of a radical anti-Israel, pro-Sharia law advocate who recently called for a "Jihad" against President Donald Trump. Last August, the ACLU published a piece by Ali Gharib, a far-left anti-Israel blogger, which praised Linda Sarsour, portraying her as a latter-day civil right activist. The article was largely ignored until Sarsour publicly declared "Jihad" against President Trump at an Islamic Society of North America convention.

"I hope, that when we stand up to those who oppress our communities, that Allah accepts from us that as a form of Jihad, that we are struggling against tyrants and rulers not only abroad in the Middle East or on the other side of the world, but here in the United States of America," Sarsour said.

In the days following her comments at the Islamic Society convention, the ACLU's 2016 profile of Sarsour drew attention on social media, with critics questioning the organization's support for Sarsour given her comments vis-à-vis the president, as well as past statements attacking Zionism and the Jewish state, and her vitriolic comments aimed at female critics of Sharia law.

Sarsour once praised Arab stone-throwers in Judea and Samaria, calling their attacks "The definition of courage." She also expressed her disgust for Zionism, calling it "creepy", and dismissed anti-Semitism, saying it doesn't "exactly compare" with Islamophobia. In 2011, Sarsour mused about sexually mutilating Sharia law critics Brigitte Gabriel and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, saying they "don't deserve to be women" in tweet she later erased.

In April, Sarsour drew further criticism after she shared the stage with Rasmae Odeh, a terrorist bomber responsible for the murder of two Jews in a 1970 supermarket bombing. During the April 2nd event in Chicago, Sarsour praised the terrorist, saying she was "honored and privileged to be here in this space, and honored to be on this stage with Rasmae." Nevertheless, the ACLU said it would continue to "stand with" Sarsour.

Fox News Gaffe: Jared Kosher

By JTA

On Fox News' morning show "Fox & Friends" Wednesday, a hilarious typo on the ticker referred to Jared Kushner — President Trump's senior adviser and Jewish son-in-law — as "Jared Kosher."



The typo comes amid an FBI investigation into Kushner's meetings with Russian figures. Perhaps the Fox employee responsible for the ticker was subtly suggesting a new career path for Kushner — mashgiach, anyone? — or perhaps he or she had imbibed one too many "mazel tov cocktails" the night before.

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Netanyahu: Anyone Who Raises a Hand Against Us Faces a Powerful Response

By DEBKAFfile & IsraelNationalNews.com

During a ceremony on Thursday marking three years since Israel's operation in Gaza against Hamas, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said that Israel will not accept any violation of its sovereignty, "not in the south, not in the north, not anywhere."

He said that "anyone who raises a hand against us will face a resolute and powerful response. Our enemies know this." He also repeated his promise that Israel will not deviate from its effort to bring back the remains of two IDF soldiers who fell during Operation Protective Edge, Lieut. Hadar Goldin and Staff Sgt. Oron Shaul, which are still being held by Hamas.

The annual ceremony at Jerusalem's Mt. Herzl national cemetery is held in memory of the 68 IDF troops who lost their lives during the 2014 operation.

A senior Hezbollah official warned on Wednesday that the Lebanon-based terrorist group will "surprise the Israeli military" in any future armed conflict. The official, Hashem Safieddine, made the comments during an interview that was televised on Hezbollah's Al-Manzar TV and was quoted by the Al-Masdar Al-Arabi news website.

Safieddine claimed that his organization has been changing and developing their tactics over the last decade. He added that Israel's assessment of Hezbollah's weaponry is highly inaccurate, despite their prevalent reports on the Lebanese organization's arsenal. The interview with Safieddine aired on the 11th anniversary of the Second Lebanon War.

Hizbullah officials continue to issue threats against Israel. Most of these threats come from the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, who has been forced to live in an underground bunker since the 2006 war – though he denies this fact. Nasrallah several weeks ago warned Israel against attacking Lebanon or Syria, claiming that "hundreds of thousands" of Arab and Muslim fighters would be ready to strike back.

In February, he warned Israel to "count to one million" before waging a new war on Lebanon, stressing that Hizbullah will not abide by any "red lines" in any future confrontation. A year ago, Safieddine said in an interview that "Israel is closer than ever before to its demise" and warned that "the time for operations will come."

'Ecological Terrorism': Stream Overflows with Sewage from Gaza

By YnetNews.com

Over the past week, the amount of sewage flowing by the Palestinians to the Hanun stream, which crosses Israel and the Gaza Strip, has increased, and Israel is feeling the impact of the pollution. Following the electricity crisis and the collapse of sewage treatment plants in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians are dumping their sewage into the Hanun stream.

At first the sewage flowed relatively slowly, and the vacuum trucks managed to overcome the hazard. In the past week, however, the amount of wastewater drained into the stream has increased significantly, causing it to be flooded with polluted water to the point of overflowing, causing the vacuuming of sewage water to be no longer effective.

In recent days, the IDF has blocked the stream from the Gaza side with mounds of dirt in an attempt to stop the flow of sewage, but the Palestinians broke through the mounds and returned to dumping sewage into the stream.

Hundreds of vacuum trucks operated in recent days to reduce the level of sewage, but without success. In addition, inspectors fumigated the area against the mosquitoes that started breeding there because of the accumulation of polluted water.

Hof Ashkelon Regional Council head Yair Farjun said: "What we're seeing here is an ecological terror attack. The Israeli government must immediately resolve this crisis and not leave Hof Ashkelon Regional Council to deal with it alone. The dozens of trucks that operate are no longer effective, warning that "the water level rises daily and if the situation remains as it is—the stream will overflow. Beyond the visible pollution, the sewage water also pollutes the Coastal Aquifer very severely."

Cuban Jewish Leaders Call on American Jews to Strengthen Ties

By JTA

Leaders of Cuba's Jewish community sent an open letter to the U.S. Jewish community calling for a strengthening of ties and expressing concern over a reversal of policy by the United States toward the island nation. The Jewish community of Cuba numbers about 1,000.

"The Jewish Community of Cuba, since its founding, has maintained ties of friendship and brotherhood and sisterhood with the Jewish people of the United States, even in moments when diplomatic relations between both countries did not exist," said the letter issued Wednesday.

"North Americans played a substantial role in the reestablishment of relations between Cuba and the United States, and some of them have even visited our synagogues in Havana. There is a permanent desire to promote the continual development of this relationship and to strengthen the benefits that are starting to take shape, mainly for our people," the letter continued.

"Knowing that the Jewish communities and institutions of the United States have an interest in the relations with the Jewish people of the world, and especially towards Latin America, we request that we work together so that our countries do not go backwards in what has been accomplished and assure that the Cuban and American people enjoy a peaceful and prosperous future."

Seven major Jewish leaders in Cuba signed the letter, including Adela Dworkin, the community's president; David Prinstein, its vice president; leaders of the Sephardic center in Havana, and the country's Jewish community coordinators.

Havana has three operating synagogues, including one Orthodox. The government has been supportive of the community in recent years, with President Raul Castro attending Chanukah ceremonies at Beth Shalom Synagogue, according to the Engage Cuba coalition, a nonprofit group working to end the trade and travel embargo of Cuba that is helping the Jewish community distribute its letter in the United States and get the word out.

Mayim Bialik Time Travels in New SodaStream Commercial

By JTA

Mayim Bialik's latest acting gig has her traveling in time — and promoting environmentalism. In a humorous commercial for Israeli seltzer company SodaStream, the Jewish actress (“The Big Bang Theory”) and neuroscientist stars as an anthropologist in the year 2136 recalling an encounter with a near-extinct species: “The Homoschlepiens.” *See <https://youtu.be/Z-yfuSnUz6Q>*

The Homoschlepiens — among them actor Kristian Nairn (Hodor from “Game of Thrones,” in a very Hodor-like role) — are defined by the fact that they cannot drink water that doesn't come from a plastic bottle. Bialik talks about the species to a group of school kids who are gathered at “The Museum of UnNatural History;” the children, who live in a world without plastic bottles, are shocked.

Bialik then touts the benefits of the SodaStream machine to make sparkling water at home — no plastic bottles needed. The commercial, which was shot in Ukraine, was a good fit for the Jewish actress, who is passionate about the environment. “As a species, we have evolved so much, but much as we know plastic bottles pollute our environment and kill marine life, we continue to use them,” Bialik, 41, told JTA in an email.

SodaStream isn't without controversy. The Israeli company — and its spokesperson at the time, Scarlett Johansson — was the target of boycotts due to having its main factory in a West Bank settlement. In 2015, SodaStream closed its West Bank location and moved its operations to southern Israel.

Southern Israel Blooms with Fields Harnessing Solar Energy

By Israel Hayom

Israel has so far invested upward of 3 billion shekels (\$850 million) in new solar energy projects in the Negev desert. One major project is nearing completion in Ashalim, a small community south of Be'er Sheva, and a second project is in the works near Kibbutz Sde Boker.

Megalim Solar Power has recently completed the construction of the world's tallest solar tower in the Negev. Plot B, the thermo-solar power station in Ashalim is one of the biggest projects of its kind in the world, and it is also Israel's first commercial thermopower facility to be based on solar tower technology.

The project includes 50,600 computer-controlled mirrors with a surface area of more than 20 square meters (215 feet) each, covering an area stretching over 3 square kilometers (1.2 square miles).

The mirrors, or heliostats, are designed to follow the sun in two axes and keep reflecting sunlight toward a predetermined target, in this case a water heater placed on top of a 250-meter (656-foot) tall tower that generates high-temperature, high-pressure steam. The steam is pumped into a generator turbine that produces electricity. The 2,500 tons, 40-meter (130-foot) tall heater was placed on top of the solar tower earlier this month in a complex engineering feat.

The facility is expected to supply a total of 320 gigawatts of electricity a year to Israel's power grid, and a Megalim official said the facility should be fully online before the end of the year. “We are proud that we are part of achieving the [government's] goal of having 10% renewable energy in Israel by 2020,” Ramat Hanegev Regional Council head Eran Doron, who headed the efforts to establish a solar power station in the area, told Israel Hayom

“The Ashalim solar energy complex includes two thermo-solar projects and a photovoltaic project, which together will produce nearly 300 megawatts of electricity a day, and in the future produce 2% of Israel's electricity — about one-fifth of the national target. “I think [Israel's first Prime Minister David] Ben-Gurion may be turning in his grave — but with joy,” he said.

Israel to Host Reenactment of 1947 Partition Vote at United Nations

By The Jerusalem Post

Almost seventy years have passed since the United Nations voted for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. This fall, to commemorate the anniversary, the Israeli Mission to the UN has decided to step back in time.

On November 29, the day the resolution was passed in 1947, Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon will host a reenactment of the historic vote, where it happened, in the main gallery of the Queens Museum, which hosted the UN General Assembly back then. “We prepared ourselves for this year, because it is the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, and we have the 70th anniversary of this important resolution,” Danon told The Jerusalem Post.

“I had a few talks with my colleagues in the UN and they love the idea,” he continued. “There is a lot of excitement about it because it's a positive event, and we will continue to have a positive agenda while the Palestinians, probably on the same day, will have their usual event of the 29th.”

Although it is a celebratory day for Israel, November 29 also marks International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, observed annually by the United Nations. On that day last year, the General Assembly passed six resolutions condemning Israel and supporting the Palestinians. “While they will continue with their hatred and incitement, I think we should take pride in that resolution and especially what we have accomplished in the last 70 years,” Danon said.

Hosting the reenactment, he told the Post, is also a way to remind the UN of the role it had in creating the State of Israel, and telling the story of the past seven decades. Diplomats from nations that voted for the establishment of the state will take part in the event along with their colleagues from around the world. Jewish community leaders and pro-Israel activists will attend as well. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Israeli officials have also been invited.

Finding the original hall in which the partition plan was adopted was a key element of the organization of the event, Danon said. During the reenactment of the vote, the hall will be redesigned to appear in its original state, with a giant map of the world on the wall, a podium, and three seating sections. Delegates of member states will sit in their designated seats from 1947.

“When we walked in, seeing the original hall, it was very impressive and we decided it will be an amazing event to do it in the original place,” Danon said. “We have videos of the original vote, and we will try to recreate the atmosphere as it was back then. We will try to make sure it is as close to the original as possible.”

In the 1947 vote, 33 member-states voted in favor of the Partition Plan, 13 against it and 10 countries abstained. Danon said that despite the ongoing battle Israel faces at the UN, the event will allow people to see the support the country received in the days of its establishment.

“Every time we're in the Security Council, I feel that the Palestinians are rejecting any attempt to negotiate with Israelis, but when you analyze what happened 70 years ago, it started back then, when they decided to leave the room and not to accept the Partition Plan,” he said. “It might be different leaders, but still it's the same approach of not accepting any agreement.” The event will be “symbolic not only to the people who will take part in it, but also to everyone that supports Israel around the world.”

Baby Crocodiles Hatch in Southern Israel

By IsraelNationalNews.com

Two baby crocodiles hatched from their eggs Wednesday at the Crocodile Farm in the Arava in southern



Israel, joining the more than 2,000 crocodiles at the farm. Orit and Ofer, the owners of the farm, say the crocodiles' hatching season begins in the early summer.

See <http://media-ios.a7.org/a7radio/misc/video/17/jul/TANIN.mp4>

The farm is open to visitors, who can get a close look at the aquatic reptiles — and even get to pet some of the smaller ones. The baby crocodiles which hatched Wednesday were 25 centimeters (9.5 inches). Fully grown, crocodiles can reach up to six meters (20 feet) in length and weigh more than a ton.