

ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.

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ISRAELI SATELLITE IMAGES REVEAL: IRAN BUILDS MILITARY BASE NEAR DAMASCUS (Ha'aretz 2/28/18)

Iran has established a military base outside Syria's capital city of Damascus. Fox News published the Israeli satellite photos showing the base eight miles northwest of Damascus on Wednesday.

The images reportedly show two warehouses storing missiles capable of hitting all of Israel. According to the report, members of the Iran Revolutionary Guard's special operations Quds Force are operating the base. Iranian officials openly claim that they are working to build an axis of resistance to Israel and the U.S. in the region. Iranian strategy is based on building ties with local forces who share the same goals.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman responded to the report in an interview with Wednesday morning saying, "There's nothing new under the sun, and there is no need to treat all information in the media as absolute. We are listening and following the events. We will also act in the international arena to achieve everything possible."

Two weeks ago, an Iranian drone that crossed into Israeli airspace was intercepted by the Israel Air Force, sparking a flare-up between Israel and Syria, with an Israeli F-16 shot down and an extensive Israeli strike against Iranian and Syrian targets in Syria.

HAREDI PARTIES THREATEN TO STALL STATE BUDGET OVER NEW DRAFT (Israel Hayom 2/28/18)

Coalition lawmakers are scrambling to avert a crisis after ultra-Orthodox parties conditioned their support for the 2019 state budget on advancing legislation that exempts yeshiva students from military service.

Haredi lawmakers insist that new bill on the matter, which would essentially formalize and streamline an existing arrangement for obtaining draft waivers, be submitted for a preliminary reading in the Knesset plenum as early as this week.

Apart from the cementing the waiver issue, they want to pass a new basic law that would enshrine Torah study as a core state value. Since basic laws are granted the status of a de facto constitution, they believe such a law would prevent the High Court of Justice from forcing yeshiva students to enlist in the military.

A haredi lawmaker told Israel Hayom that the ultra-Orthodox parties are not seeking to provoke a political crisis.

"We are not interested in putting pressure just for the sake of creating hysteria, and we don't mind if this matter is postponed to the next Knesset session, but the budget bill can also be postponed. As far as we are concerned, the conscription bill must pass before the budget bill," he said.

He noted that passing the budget bill would essentially ensure that the government will serve out the remainder of its term, "so this is the only leverage we have when it comes to the conscription bill."

Meanwhile, the haredi news portal Behadrey Haredim featured footage from a recent faction meeting held by the United Torah Judaism faction in which MKs discussed the way forward on the military exemption legislation.

The footage shows MK Meir Porush saying, "Everything should pass together," referring to coupling the state budget bill to the exemption bill.

In the meeting, MKs note it was an opportune moment to make this demand because of the media's focus on the corruption investigations involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's associates.

"This week will be all about Case 4,000 and Case 5,000," one participant said, referring to the cases that made headlines over the past week.

United Torah Judaism MK Moshe Gafni, who chairs the Knesset Finance Committee, raised the stakes on Tuesday when he said he would not let the state budget bill move forward and warned that the haredi parties would stall additional bills if their requests were not heeded.

"I will not let the coalition move forward with bizarre measures," he said.

Yisrael Beytenu, which caters to the largely secular Russian-speaking population in Israel, warned that it would not support the haredi bill.

Party leader Avigdor Lieberman took to Facebook, saying, "Our party is willing to show flexibility and reach compromises on many issues, but not when it comes to the security of the state. This is why any attempt to advance political legislation on this matter will be met with fierce opposition on our part."

KEY US LAWMAKERS WANT TO BOOST ISRAEL'S \$38B DEFENSE AID PACKAGE (Israel Hayom 2/28/18)

U.S. senators who just returned from a trip to Israel called on Tuesday for an increase in the \$38 billion in military aid the United States is currently providing Israel, signaling support for more funds for Israeli missile systems.

Senators Lindsey Graham, a leading Republican foreign policy voice, and Chris Coons, a Democratic member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said they considered the provision of \$38 billion over 10 years, "a floor."

Graham said during a meeting with reporters that he thought provisions in the agreement phasing out an arrangement in which Israel could spend U.S. funds on its own defense industry and the provision of just \$500 million in missile defense funding were "shortsighted."

Coons said tensions in the broader region supported the idea of more funding for Israel, citing the ongoing war in Syria and Iran's recent use of a

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stealth drone.

The United States and Israel signed an agreement in September 2016 to give Israel \$38 billion in military assistance over the next decade, the largest such aid package in U.S. history but one that included concessions by Israel's government.

CHURCH OF HOLY SEPLUCHRE DOORS REPOEN AFTER BRIEF PROTEST (YNet 2/28/18)

The Jerusalem church built at the site many see as the holiest in Christianity reopened on Wednesday after a three-day closure to protest against Israeli measures had left thousands of visitors locked outside.

The two men who act as keepers of the key of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre opened its large wooden doors at around 4:00 am (0200 GMT), ending the protest that began on Sunday at noon.

Shortly afterwards, a group of pilgrims emerged from the still darkened corridors of Jerusalem's Old City to visit the sacred site.

"We prayed in front of the doors every day since Sunday," said Francois-Roch Ferlet, a 29-year-old visiting with a group of 50 people from France, standing near the ornate shrine encasing the traditional site of Jesus's tomb inside the church. They were due to leave later on Wednesday and were relieved they were able to visit.

The church is built where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. Custody of it is shared by the Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Roman Catholic denominations.

The closure seemed to be the longest since at least 1990.

Christian leaders decided to reopen the church after Israel on Tuesday suspended tax measures they strongly oppose.

A proposed law that Christian leaders say would allow Israel to expropriate church land is also to be shelved.

A statement from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said a "professional team" would be appointed to come up with a solution to the tax measures imposed by Israeli authorities in Jerusalem.

Israeli Regional Cooperation Minister Tzachi Hanegbi will also look into the issue of land sales in Jerusalem by Christian bodies, which prompted the proposed law that is now also suspended.

Christian leaders are in part angry over attempts by Israeli authorities in Jerusalem to enforce tax collection on church property they consider commercial, saying exemptions only apply to places of worship or religious teaching.

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat says the city is due 650 million shekels (\$186 million/152 million euros) in uncollected taxes on church properties.

He stresses the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and all other churches are exempt, with the changes only affecting establishments like "hotels, halls and businesses" owned by churches.

Christian leaders say the measure jeopardises their ability to conduct their work, which also includes social services to those in need.

A separate controversial bill seeks to allay fears of Israelis who live in homes on lands previously held by the Greek Orthodox Church and which were sold to private developers, according to the lawmaker proposing the legislation.

The bill would allow certain lands sold by the Greek Orthodox Church to be handed over to the state, which would then compensate those who bought it from the church.

"This reminds us all of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during a dark period in Europe," Christian leaders said in a statement on Sunday.

Recent land sales by the Greek Orthodox Church—a major landowner in Jerusalem—to unknown buyers have drawn fire from both Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians fear the sales will favour Israeli settlement construction in east Jerusalem, while Israelis are concerned over private developers' intentions for the land.

The dispute over the taxes and proposed law is also linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Christians in Jerusalem are mainly Palestinians and Arab Israelis.

The decision to close the church was extremely rare.

Christian sites were shut for two days in 1999 to protest at the planned construction of a mosque near Nazareth's Church of the Annunciation, where tradition holds the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary she was to become the mother of Jesus.

HOW THE IDF IS PREPARING FOR THE NEXT WAR (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/28/18)

"The chances of war in 2018 are growing," a senior IDF officer says. "If we succeed in eliminating Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, this will be a deciding factor."

The senior officer spoke to military correspondents about the possibility that Israel would go to war soon and the nature of the battle in recent years. "The unification of the Technological and Logistics Directorate into the Ground Arm saved the army hundreds of millions and brought about a real improvement in lethal weaponry," says the senior officer. "It's already not the Yom Kippur War with the many divisions, convoys of tanks and heavy trucks. We are in a different reality. The technology has changed, and so has the battlefield."

The officer says that massive defense is required for the fighters at the gathering points prior to embarking into battle, and for this purpose the "Magen Gidon" system, which is actually a ground and point-based Iron Dome, will be activated.

"The other side," says the officer, "is the enemy that has changed too, and is more experienced (Hezbollah after four years of fighting in Syria has learned a lot). It is quickly gaining an advantage, and its decentralization will become increasingly hard on forces."

"We are ready for war," says the officer, pointing out even a target date: "By 2020, we will have all the stocks, all the training and with all the plans." This year we are working on a 17/17 schedule, meaning 17 weeks of training for every 17 weeks of operational activity."

But the army is not only readying for war. The facilities, the bases, and a large part of the camps are old and almost unsuitable for use.

In the next few years, the Ground Arm is going to change everything. 32 emergency stockpile units will be completely upgraded, 6 training camps will be built, and a unified supply center will be established, with the determining rule being a unified viewpoint. It's not the Logistics Directorate alone or the Ground Arm alone. Everything is under one officer (Major General Kobi Barak) and under one command that oversees everything and is in fact today the most efficient arm with the largest amount of resources out of the IDF budget.

The army also relates to the issue of girls' service in tanks, and says that only this summer, when the girls' training is completed, will they decide whether to continue on. The 15 girls who started the course are serving today in the 80th division alongside the mixed-gender Karakal unit, and upon completion of the trial period, the army will examine the necessity and efficiency of the plan.

The investment in the Ground Arm is enormous. Unmanned aerial vehicles for maneuvering forces, sophisticated and advanced missiles, advanced trucks, and even drones that know how to transport supplies to the field and evacuate the wounded as needed.

"The next war will be difficult and no simple matter. It will take between days and weeks, but in the end we will win. Such good and invested manpower guarantees that this will be the case," the senior official concludes.

3D PRINTER USED IN ISRAEL FOR FIRST TIME IN ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY (JPost 2/26/18)

Three-dimensional printing has been used for the first time in Israel at

Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Center to repair congenital malformations in the arm of a patient.

The 13-year-old girl was successfully operated on using a "patient-specific instrument" – essentially a printed bone – giving her full function of the limb.

A new development by the 3D SynergyMed company body-to-body 3D prints with 1:1 ratio accuracy. It is a revolution in the field of surgery for tumor removal, deformation repair, among other procedures, and significantly improves the success rate, a statement from Shaare Zedek said.

The girl arrived at the hospital's hand surgery unit suffering from pain and a limitation in the movement of her right hand due to Madelung deformity.

The results of the CT scan on the girl's arm showed distortions in two places in her right arm that caused severe pain and movement limitation; another one was also detected in her left arm, said Dr. Gershon Singer, head of the hand surgery unit who operated on the girl.

The most common surgeries for the treatment of these deformities include a single incision in the bone axis, reconstruction of the bone and a fixation. This usually resolves the pain problem, but the bone is not fully aligned and the patient's movements remain restricted.

Printing of an accessory to be added to the bone is in three stages: Imaging tests are fed into an advanced system for 3D analysis, allowing the viewing all the angles of the object.

Then, the distortions are precisely located and the printed object is planned. It is then passed on to the company, which specializes in creating a customized accessory that is attached with magnets and placed on the defective limb.

This allows precise cutting and insertion of the screws to fix the bone," explained Singer.

The use of this unique technology was first performed in Israel by Dr. Shlomo Dadia to remove a cancerous growth from the kidneys of a young girl. As a result, Singer decided to adapt the same technology to orthopedics to correct the congenital defect in his patient's arm.

"We performed four incisions at very precise angles, including the placement of three screws that entered perfectly without deviation from the joint or incision. This is very difficult to complete without printing." The surgery was successful, the patient reported a significant improvement in the pain level and the CT scan demonstrated bone fusion. The patient is expected to undergo a similar operation on her left arm and is expected to enjoy full activity and focus on her favorite hobby of learning languages.

AFRICAN STUDENT ASYLUM SEEKERS ASK NOT TO BE DEPORTED (YNet 2/27/18)

Israel's African students' association contacted the National Union of Israeli Students recently and asked it to intercede against the expulsion of asylum seekers from Israel. "It's important for us that you support us and demand the country not expel asylum seekers. Give us temporary protection, at least until we graduate," the African students appealed.

Union Chairman Ram Shefa said in response that he "calls on the state to allow African students to continue and conclude their studies normally. We will do everything to prevent the expulsion of students studying in Israel who were marked for expulsion.

"The state has a moral duty to carefully ascertain the true status of all asylum seekers, and to allow anyone designated a refugee protection in Israel.

"At the same time, a solution should be found for the distress of south Tel Aviv residents, as well as of those residing in other places where Israel chooses to house—so as not to say cast away—the great masses of illegal migrants in Israel."

Of the 37,000 African asylum seekers and work migrants currently in Israel, several dozen study in Israeli academic institutions, including the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Gan College and elsewhere.

Migrants study towards degrees in such fields as governance and political science, business administration and even law.

The African students' representatives wrote to say, "Most of our students face expulsion to either Rwanda or Uganda under the criteria of the current government plan. We're doing our best to defend our students and give them a chance to live out their academic dream, but these are hard, stressful times."

Barik Saleh, a student in the second year of a governance degree at the Interdisciplinary Center, came to Israel ten years ago from Darfur. "The reason I wanted to study governance is that I wanted to make a change," he said Tuesday. "I want to work for values such as democracy, so the next generation is not forced to go through what we have."

Saleh, currently in the middle of a period of tests, may be deported before he has a chance to graduate. "It's very hard going through this period, which is stressful enough as it is, and doubly so when I'm in danger of deportation," he added.

"In six weeks, one of two things will happen: either I manage to renew my visa or I get deported, and then my two years in academia go down the drain," he lamented.

Chairman of the African students' union, Taj Harun, also came to Israel from Darfur a decade ago. He graduated from a Tel Aviv University master's degree program in political science more than a year ago.

"Most African students came here as asylum seekers," he said. "We're exactly the same as Israeli students, and we wanted to let them know that and ask for their support."

"We met with representatives from the National Union of Israeli Students about a week ago and discovered some of them were not even aware there were African students in Israel or that we were even allowed to study," he added.

While most of the asylum seekers studying in Israeli academia have a visa, it usually only permits them to stay in Israel for periods no longer than two months, leaving students in constant fear of their visas not being renewed and subsequent deportation.

"Right now we don't know whether we'll be able to graduate, as most of us face deportation," Harun exclaimed.

The National Union of Israeli Students has decided to create a team to examine handling of the issue, and will continue meeting with their African counterparts.

Chairman of the right-wing Im Tirtzu movement Matan Peleg responded to the matter as well, and said, "It's unthinkable for work infiltrators to wish to complete their studies at the taxpayer's expense when they live in a country that they infiltrated. It's adding insult to injury and every proper country would summarily reject it."

WHY IS ISRAEL SCATTERING MILLIONS OF FLIES AROUND GAZA? (JPost 2/25/18)

Every week, 33 million flies are scattered from airplanes onto orchards and agricultural farmland surrounding Gaza as part of a unique Agriculture Ministry project.

The planes take off with millions of male flies at the peak of their sexual maturity and drop them onto fields in an effort to naturally expel the harmful Mediterranean fruit fly, one of the world's most destructive fruit pests.

The male flies, which are sterile, mate with the female flies infesting the crops, thus preventing the creation of the next generation of fruit flies.

This process is known as the sterile insect technique, an environmentally friendly and chemical free pest control method.

The innovative project is being carried out by Bio-Bee, one of the leading international companies in the field of biologically based pest management, located in Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu in Northern Israel.

As part of the maturing process of the male flies, they undergo sterilization in

a radioactive facility. When they are scattered in the air by the planes, they are exposed to the ambient temperature and spring to life ready to mate with their female counterparts, which prefer them to the male fruit flies in the fields.

The flies are scattered over an area of some 35 dunams of fields and orchards near the Gaza border.

According to estimates, the project prevents the use of some 33,000 liters of chemical pesticides that farmers would otherwise have to spray on land near cities and people, in order to carry out the pest control artificially.

According to Bio Bee, the company's production facility, established in 2005 with support from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was designed to produce about 15 million pupae (male fruit flies) a week, and can now produce five times this amount.

The sterile flies are only part of a series of insects that Bio Bee cultivates, including pollinating bees, predatory insects and parasites that kill pests, for eco-friendly uses to help farmers.

ISRAELI INVENTION PROVIDES AIRCRAFT MISSILE DEFENSE (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/28/18)

Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) introduced a new electronic warfare system designed for aircraft self-defense, the ELL-8270.

The unique system developed by the Elta division of IAI is towed by the aircraft to provide radar-guided missile defense while maintaining an optimal cost-benefit ratio.

The electronic bait is deployed at a safe distance from the aircraft during flight in areas threatened by enemy missiles, transmitting signals that lure the threat towards it while diverting it away from the aircraft.

The uniqueness of the system is that it is completely autonomous and does not require power or signals from the plane. The bait is dragged by a simple tether and its cost is relatively low compared to other solutions of its kind, but at the same time it is highly efficient and effective.

The system is capable of dealing with multiple threats simultaneously, can be adapted to all types of aircraft, it is extremely lightweight and it can be reeled back to the plane or cut loose and discarded if necessary.

The new system is an effective self-defense solution that provides protection against all types of radar-guided missiles including the most modern threats, and can serve as the last layer of defense even if all primary layers of defense fail and a missile is ultimately launched at the aircraft.

WHEN THE 'AGENT OF PEACE' CRIES FOR JIHAD (Dr. Reuven Berko, Israel Hayom 2/28/18)

There are those who claim that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is the last agent of Palestinian peace; that he has conceded the "right of return," is opposed to terror and the religious war "toward which the leaders of Israel are moving." According to this approach, Israel has to grab him tight and not let him go before we can sign a peace agreement, lest he leaves and is replaced by far more objectionable successors.

The Americans' recognition of a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and their intention to transfer their embassy from Tel Aviv in May 2018 – to coincide with the date of the Palestinian "nakba" (catastrophe) and the first days of fasting during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan – has wrenched Abbas from his closet of fraud and pushed him into a confrontational position, assuming of course that "the stranger doesn't understand" what he says in Arabic.

The PA president's most recent speech to the Islamic nation, from Al-Azhar University in Cairo on January 17, was for all intents and purposes a blatant call for religious war against Israel. That speech preceded Hamas' threat that relocating the American Embassy would spark the fuse that will ignite the region, and calls from groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to renew the armed struggle.

Abbas also adhered to an apocalyptic pathos, quoting from the Quran's Surah Al-Isra (The Night Journey), which contains the Prophet Muhammad's vision of the destruction of Israel and Jewish Jerusalem, Islam's impending conquest of the city, and its role as the key to peace and war: "You will work great mischief twice in the land and will become overbearingly arrogant. When the occasion of the first of the two mischiefs came, O Israelites, we raised against you such of our servants who were very mighty and formidable; so they penetrated through all parts of your country. This was a warning that was bound to be fulfilled. ... Then, when the time came for the fulfillment of the second warning [to slaughter the Jews], we set other enemies [the Palestinians] on you so that they might disfigure your faces and enter into the temple [the Temple Mount] just as the former enemies had entered and destroyed whatever they could lay their hands on."

The absurdity is self-evident: On one hand, Abbas denies that we are the descendants of the Israelites and on the other, he calls for our destruction in a religious war, specifically within the framework of the Quran's prophecy about the "Israelites."

According to Abbas, Jerusalem is holy only to Islam and Christianity and time is coming to an end for Israel the usurper. The embrace of Christians in his speech was contradictory and manipulative and enough to make one sick, because he also accuses the hostile Westerners, the alleged descendants of the "Crusaders," of planting Israel as a "foreign object" on Islamic soil to do their bidding.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Palestinians – who have built a fortification on the front lines ("ribat") against Israel and are charged with the godly mission of destroying it – Abbas in his speech called upon the Islamic nation to help in the struggle to "liberate Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Palestine, from the hands of the occupier."

The Palestinian lie molds reality, in both a religious and historical sense. In his pathetic speech "the president" linked the Palestinians to the heretic peoples who inhabited this land over 5,000 years ago, such as the Canaanites and Jebusites – to prove that the Palestinians preceded the people of Israel – while flagrantly ignoring that the land was promised to the Israelites, as the chosen people, in the Quran.

The fact that these ancient peoples were completely eradicated by Joshua while the people of Israel inherited the holy land, to which the Quran attests, is of no matter to the Palestinians. On the contrary, some Palestinians actually claim they are the true Israelites. Abbas' obsession with the identities of his various forefathers, however, raises certain dubious questions about the Palestinians' anonymous matriarch and her behavior.

Meanwhile, because they lack an established genealogical line, the Palestinians are instead trying to negate the Quran's designation of the Israelites as inheritors of the land. In this vein, they call us "Khazars," a rabble, and forgers of history.

Within the framework de-legitimizing Israel, Abbas was willing to include the Christians as his partner with rights to Jerusalem and to grant us a "permit" to visit his holy capital. The PA president has not internalized that the Christians, who are in truth important, have already had their say and that it is pointless to persist with this hypocrisy. He has not understood that even if Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem really happened and the city is in fact holy to Islam, it does not serve as a reason to make it the capital of "Palestine" – just as Mecca is not the capital of Saudi Arabia.

The speeches delivered by Abbas and his ilk fly under our radar, but the messages they contain percolate into the heart of every terrorist with a knife, vehicle, gun and bomb. Lo and behold, Abbas of all people, the long-time "opponent of violence," boasted in his speech that more than 30 "shahids" (martyrs) have fallen on the altar of "peaceful" resistance since Trump's declaration. It is Abbas, by quoting from the Quran, who is motivating the religious war against Israel. Well, for such an endeavor, it is quite enough to have Ramallah as the capital.