

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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AS NEW YEAR APPROACHES, ISRAELIS SAY THEY ARE HAPPY, HEALTHY (Israel Hayom, 9/5/18)

As the nation prepares to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and welcome in the 5779th year of the Hebrew calendar, Israel's population stands at 8,907,000, of whom 6,625,000 (74.4%) are Jews, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported Tuesday. Since Rosh Hashanah last year (marking the start of the Jewish year 5778), Israel's population has increased by some 162,000 – a population growth rate of 1.9%, which is similar to what the country has seen in the past few years.

About 175,000 babies were born in Israel this past year, and 43,000 Israelis died. Some 25,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel – 62% from Russia and Ukraine, 12% from France, and 10% from the United States.

Arabs in Israel number 1,864,000, 20.9% of the population, and other religious minorities and those without a religion account for 4.7% of the population. According to the CBS, Israel's population is projected to reach 10 million by the end of 2024 and 15 million by the end of 2048. But dry demographics don't tell the whole story. 89% of Israelis polled said they were happy or very happy with their lives.

The average monthly household income stood at 15,700 shekels (\$4,330).

THE SECRECY IS UNVEILED: A RACE TO DESTROY IRANIAN FACILITIES IN SYRIA (YNet 9/5/18)

An entire system of pilots, officers, analysts, and officials has been working around the clock to execute the strikes. The attacks included the dropping of 800 bombs and missiles by the Israeli Air Force—an amount that adds up to half used in a “real” war. Some were launched to long ranges.

In almost all such operations that are meant to take place under the radar, all participants know very quickly or even in real time whose fist gave the punch, hundreds of kilometers from Israel.

And so, one of the purposes of these inter-war attacks is to send a message of power through the Middle Eastern arena, alongside establishing Israeli deterrence, postponing the next war and preventing Israel's enemies from arming themselves with advanced weapons.

Behind heavy secrecy, that was lifted yesterday, the IDF has been trying to eradicate Iranian presence in Syria even at the cost of an incident that could trigger a war on the northern border.

This agenda is led by Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot who was the commander of the northern border in years when Hezbollah was growing stronger.

According to the IDF, the Iranian plan to establish its presence in Syria was discovered two years ago by intelligence officials. Back then, the Russian blitz on the rebels was strengthening Assad, and in Tehran leaders were already looking forward to what is to come after the war.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards concocted a long—range plan: the establishment of army bases, naval and air bases around Syria. These bases were supposed to include, according to the IDF, thousands of soldiers and local Shiite militias, faced as an army in front of the Zionist enemy.

The IDF's recommendation for government officials was clear: destroying any Iranian move in the Syrian arena, without claiming responsibility. Secrecy worked up until February of this year. Then, circumstances led to the surfacing of this secret confrontation, when an Iranian drone penetrated Israel and was shot down above Bik'at HaYarden by an Apache helicopter.

The IDF then openly attacked the T-4 base in Syria, from which the drone was launched. Shortly after that came an intensive 24 hours, when an Israeli

F-16 was shot down over the Galilee by Syrian Anti-aircraft warfare.

The confrontation between Israel and Iran became public, violent and dangerous, and reached its climax when three months later over 50 Iranian targets were destroyed around Syria, in Operation House of Cards. The excuse for this vast operation, the largest since 1974, was the launching of 32 rockets towards the northern Golan Heights, most of which falling in Syrian territory and several intercepted by the Iron Dome.

Following the nightly commotion, the Quds Forces led by Major General Qasem Soleimani stopped for assessment. However, it was a short stop, and ever since then Tehran has been galloping through Syrian territory and trying to work its way around Israeli intelligence.

The IDF has a reason to be pleased regardless of its efforts against Iran: US forces have been pushing Iranians out of the 55 kilometer strip along the Syrian-Iraqi border around the Euphrates river. They are also more vigorously active against Iranian moves in the region. However, Russia is competing with Tehran over reconstruction contracts for war-torn Syria, and have thus pushed Iranians to at least 80 kilometers from the Israeli border.

According to the IDF, they are “sometime performing these operations a few times a week, also throughout Cyber tools. The Iranian understand that they have poor infrastructure and an intelligence gap, and our response to their entrenchment in Syria has caught them a year to a year-and-a-half too early. “Still”, said the IDF report, “Iraq is more important to Iran than Syria, since 64 percent of Iraqi population is Shiite, and they are thus organizing more militias there.”

NETANYAHU TO SHUT DOWN ISRAELI EMBASSY IN PARAGUAY (YNet, 9/5/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is also the foreign minister, ordered

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the closure of Israel's embassy in Paraguay on Wednesday hours after the Latin American nation said it had decided to return its embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.

The United States and Guatemala also moved their embassies to Jerusalem in May and Netanyahu has attempted to persuade other countries to follow their lead. "Israel views with great severity the unusual decision by Paraguay that will strain the ties between the countries," a brief statement from the Prime Minister's office said. According to the Palestinian foreign ministry, the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki was responsible for Paraguay's decision to move back the embassy to Tel Aviv.

The ministry added Paraguay had said it would move its embassy back to Tel Aviv two weeks ago during al-Maliki's visit to the country. Explaining the new Paraguayan move, the country's foreign minister, Luis Alberto Castiglioni, said: "Paraguay wants to contribute to an intensification of regional diplomatic efforts to achieve a broad, fair and lasting peace in the Middle East."

Former Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes travelled to Israel to inaugurate the new embassy in May. He was replaced last month by Mario Abdo, also a member of the conservative Colorado party.

ISRAEL'S GROUNDWATER LEVELS DROPPING TO DANGEROUS LOWS (Ha'aretz 9/4/18)

Israel's main aquifers are nearing their red lines, or are even below them now, as the end of the summer approaches. At the same time, the amount of water flowing in the streams feeding the Jordan River is continuing to drop, says the monthly report on Israel's water sources issued by the Hydrological Service in the Water Authority.

Israel's two large groundwater reservoirs are the Coastal Aquifer and the Mountain Aquifer. Measurements of the water levels in both aquifers carried out on September 1 show that the Mountain Aquifer is only two centimeters above its red line in the south, and four centimeters above it in the center. If the groundwater level falls below the red line, there is a risk of saltier water penetrating into the aquifer from deeper geological levels. This will reduce the water quality and could make the aquifer unfit for drinking or for agriculture use.

Part of the southern section of the Coastal Aquifer is already below its red line. This is particularly dangerous because seawater can now seep into the depleted freshwater.

The groundwater basin under the Tel Aviv area, which is part of the Coastal Aquifer, has been observed to be sinking – relative to neighboring regions. The reason for the formation of this depression is widespread construction, including the work on the light rail project. As part of this digging, it is necessary to pump out groundwater to build the tunnels. The existence of the hydrological depression creates a risk that polluted water will enter the groundwater from nearby areas with a higher water table.

The Western Galilee has another aquifer that is important for supplying water to the region. The levels in this basin rose during the winter because of a relatively large amount of rain. But over the past few weeks, the groundwater levels have fallen below the red line here, too. After a few months in which natural water flowed from the springs in the nature reserve in the area of Nahal Na'aman, the water has since stopped flowing and the reserve is now being supplied with water from a well that has been drilled in the area.

Last month, the amount of water in the streams that feed the Jordan River fell again. The flow measured at the Dan Springs at the very northern tip of Israel was 3.12 cubic meters per second, compared to the multi-year average of 7.2 cubic meters this time of the year. The flow of water measured at the Baniyas stream was 0.43 cubic meters per second, compared to an average of 1 cubic meter per second this time of year.

The water level in the Sea of Galilee continued to drop and fell by 27 centimeters in August. On September 1, the level of the lake was 1.22 meters below its lower red line. At the same time, the salinity level of the lake continued to rise because as the volume of water drops, the amount of salt

remains the same and as a result the salinity rises.

Over the past four years, the salt concentration in the Sea of Galilee has risen by 17 percent, a result of consecutive years of drought. The increasing salinity could make it more difficult to use the lake as a source of irrigation and drinking water.

DERI: EUROVISION ON SHABBAT IS OK, OPEN BORDERS ARE NOT (JPost 9/5/18)

Interior Minister Arye Deri said on Wednesday that he will regretfully tolerate next year's Eurovision Song Contest holding activity on Shabbat.

But he said in an interview with Ynet that the demand of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to allow free entry to participants and visitors was more problematic. The minister said the fact, despite his personal opposition, that "movie theaters, cafés and restaurants – and the Eurovision – operate on Shabbat hurts me as a Jew. But I know where I live."

Deri also said allowing the competition to go forward – and to operate on Saturday – was not dependent on him. Pushed to elaborate by the interviewer, the minister said it wasn't fair to compare the Eurovision with the construction of a bridge in Tel Aviv, which was postponed last month after outrage from haredi (ultra-Orthodox) lawmakers about work done on Saturday.

"You can't compare the bridge to Eurovision," he said. "I'm not prepared for Shabbat to become a workday and a shopping day in Israel. The people who are hurt are the lowest classes in society, who have to work seven days a week and become servants."

Deri was reacting in part to reports this week of a letter sent by the EBU to the Israeli government with a list of conditions for next year's competition. Among the conditions is a requirement to allow and support work on the competition all week long – including Saturday. The list also reportedly calls for the host country to allow entry to all participants and visitors regardless of their political opinions.

The EBU said Tuesday that the missive was "a typical letter we send every year, regardless of country."

But Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said Tuesday that he would not tolerate "these ridiculous demands... those who seek to harm [us]: of course Israel won't allow them in." Erdan, who has worked in conjunction with Deri to ban Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement supporters from entering Israel, said he hopes "the prime minister will not accept these delusional conditions."

Deri also expressed concern Wednesday about free entry to visitors and participants in the contest.

"The State of Israel – our doors are open, there are tons of people who come and go," Deri told Ynet. "But regardless... if there are security reasons, or people who come to incite against the State of Israel or do things that will damage us – I will act like the most enlightened countries in the world [and not allow them in]," the interior minister said. "Have you ever tried to enter the United States? If there's a problem, they'll send you right back on a plane."

The issue over Eurovision activity on Saturday is thought to be a significant factor in the decision on a host city for next year's competition.

The EBU is slated to announce the host city this week, and is most likely to do so on Thursday. Holding the contest in Tel Aviv is expected to arouse less haredi opposition to activity and rehearsals held on Saturday. Many also believe that holding the competition in Tel Aviv will be less politically divisive than in Jerusalem. However, a range of Israeli politicians have said the contest should and must be held in the country's capital.

While several locations in Israel were discussed to host the 2019 competition, only Jerusalem and Tel Aviv remain in the running.

PHILIPPINES, ISRAEL SIGNED \$83M IN DEALS THIS WEEK (Ha'aretz 9/4/18)

Over 20 agreements worth nearly \$83 million dollars were signed between

the Philippines and Israel during Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's visit this week, Philippine Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez announced on Wednesday, according to the government's official newswire service.

The Philippine News Agency reported that 14 memorandums of agreement and understanding between the two countries were signed, as well as eight letters of intent from Israeli firms interested in investing in the Philippines.

"These agreements are a clear indication of the enormous business and investment opportunities in the Philippines available to Israelis," the agency quoted Lopez as saying. "The Philippines is committed to pursue several growth opportunities by strengthening partnerships with emerging economic partners like Israel. Our engagement with them allows us to reinvigorate ties and increase trade between our countries."

Lopez said the Philippines is eyeing technologies that Israeli firms have developed for the agriculture sector. He noted in particular farming, drip irrigation, and milk production among others. He added his country is also interested in artificial intelligence technologies, electronics, and water management, including desalination and recycling.

Some of the deals were signed at an economic forum in Jerusalem on Tuesday, which was billed as the biggest business conference ever between Israelis and Filipinos.

Over 150 Philippine entrepreneurs and a similar number of their Israeli colleagues congregated for the event, which President Duterte attended. The visitors represented the fields of technology, telecommunications, electronics, agriculture and water, technology education, food, energy, defense and medical equipment.

The deals also included one between the Israel and Philippines national chambers of commerce. The agreements stressed the sharing of technology and the engaging in joint production ventures in the Philippines.

Likewise, there was an agreement between the Jerusalem and Manila chambers of commerce. Additionally, Duterte on Tuesday signed an oil exploration license that is being granted to the Israeli-owned company Ratio Petroleum, which Haaretz first reported would happen on Sunday.

JERUSALEM MAYOR: 'I'M REMOVING UNRWA FROM JERUSALEM' (Arutz-7 9/5/18)

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat reiterated Monday's announcement of his intention to expel the UNRWA organization from Jerusalem and replace the services it provides with those of the municipality.

In a tweet, Barkat wrote: "I am removing UNRWA from Jerusalem and replacing their failing services with successful municipal initiatives. Wherever the municipality operates, the Arab public is more satisfied & less violent. Removing UNRWA will reduce incitement & terrorism, and promote unity & sovereignty."

The organization has been responsible for about 30,000 residents in the Shuafat refugee camp and provides them with municipal services as well as caring for their education and welfare since 1965. Barkat said he "instructed the municipality's professional staff to prepare a work plan that I will present to the Prime Minister for evacuating UNRWA from Jerusalem.

The Mayor said that rather than rehabilitating East Jerusalem's Arab population, UNRWA had a consistent track record of causing the residents' relationship with the State of Israel to deteriorate.

ONLY 30% OF HIGH SCHOOLERS KNOW LYRICS OF NATIONAL ANTHEM (Israel Hayom 9/5/18)

A poll conducted by Israel Hayom before Israeli high school students returned to school this week points to a disconcerting lack of general knowledge and familiarity with many subjects that are covered in their textbooks or appear frequently in the media.

514 students from the 11th and 12th grades in the Jewish sector was asked various questions pertaining to civics, history and current events.

The sample pool was divided equally along gender lines (257 boys, 257

girls). Among those questioned, 51% were from secular schools, 28% from national-religious schools, 13% from ultra-Orthodox schools and 7% from private schools. None of the questions were multiple-choice.

It might be a little hard to believe, but only 30% of the students were able to precisely write the first four lines of "Hatikvah."

Around two-thirds of the students questioned didn't know that the U.N. voted to recommend the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states on November 29, 1947; nearly half were unfamiliar with the Green Line, and almost half couldn't name the five books of the Torah.

The fewest number of students, just 7%, knew the date of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination (Nov. 4, 1995).

CANADIAN TRADE MINISTER SEES GREAT POTENTIAL IN CANADA-ISRAEL RELATIONS (JPost 9/6/18)

Jim Carr, Canada's recently-appointed Minister of Trade Diversification, fondly recalls his first visit to Israel in the early 1990s. The descendent of Jewish-Russian immigrants who arrived in Canada in 1906, he traveled the length and breadth of the country in a non air-conditioned rental car in the sweltering Israeli summer heat.

"It was a terrific first experience. Israel has changed, the world has changed. When I was growing up Jewish in Winnipeg, I would put 10 cents in the pushka [charity box in Yiddish], knowing that it was going to end up planting a tree in Israel," Carr recounts as he spoke to The Jerusalem Post at his Tel Aviv hotel on Wednesday.

Nearly three decades after that first visit to the Jewish state, Carr has made Israel only his fifth foreign destination since assuming his new ministerial role less than two months ago. Visiting Israel soon after taking office is not surprising given that Carr identifies great potential for further growth in the already-thriving trade relations between Israel and Canada.

Bilateral trade totaled C\$1.7 billion in 2017, having more than tripled in the two decades since the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA) entered into force in 1997.

In May, Israel and Canada signed a protocol expanding and modernizing CIFTA, producing one of the world's most liberal trade agreements to date, including clauses recognizing women's rights and gender equality in trade.

"Israel is very important to Canada because of the close personal ties that we have, in families, communities, politically and the values that we share," said Carr.

"We are very proud of the changes we have made to the free trade agreement. "In 2018, the brainpower, energy and creativity of women has not been utilized to its potential. We're very happy to recognize among our Israeli partners that that is an ambition for both nations." In addition to CIFTA, the countries boosted their commercial relations in 2012 with the implementation of the Canada-Israel Agreement on Bilateral Cooperation in Industrial Research and Development.

The agreement commits both countries to invest C\$1 million annually in industrial research. Carr is not only in Israel to promote Canadian trade, he explained, but also to learn from Israeli excellence in innovation and technology, and to evaluate how "the Israeli experience" might inform Canadian economic decision-making. "The essence, the energy, the sense of entrepreneurship and innovation and of creation and creativity is very strong in this country. It's a very powerful way of understanding what drives individuals and individuals together in nation-building, which is as powerful today as it has ever been."

In recent weeks, the Canadian government has relaunched its "Invest in Canada" investment promotion body, inviting potential foreign direct investment into Canada, including from Israel.

"Many of the values that promote Canada as a place to invest are shared with Israelis. This is a place with a very stable political system, a competitive tax environment and a skilled and diverse workforce," Carr said, adding that he hoped to see positive Canadian-Israel relations serve as a platform to

work hand-in-hand with the private sector in both countries, thereby creating increased wealth, growth and jobs.

NEW REPORT TRAILS THE RISE OF ISRAELI FINTECH (CTech 9/5/18)

Over the last 18 months, 16 multinational financial firms started operating in the Israeli tech system, or increased their local footprint through strategic partnerships and investments, according to a new report by Start-Up Nation Central (SNC), a nonprofit working to promote Israeli tech.

Newcomers include French insurance firm AXA SA, Bank of Montreal, Fosun, TD Bank, AmTrust, and Mastercard. In early 2017, AXA partnered with the Israeli venture capital firm Jerusalem Venture Partners (JVP) to sponsor an insurtech startup competition in Israel. Also in 2017, New York-based insurer AmTrust Financial Services, Inc. hired a local scout, Yair Smith, to spearhead the company's search for Israeli technology.

Credit company Visa Inc. launched a technology scouting office in Tel Aviv in February. In June, Visa announced a \$100-million venture investment fund focused on startups in Europe and Israel.

The fund will look for technologies in areas like payments, information security, fraud prevention, and e-commerce, Visa said. In March, Euronext-listed bank BNP Paribas SA made an undisclosed strategic investment in Viola Fintech, an Israeli \$150 million fund.

Growing international interest is echoed by a rise in the number of new startups. According to the report, 76 fintech startups were founded in 2017, with an additional 30 companies launched in the first half of 2018. The first half of 2018 saw Israeli fintech companies raise a record-breaking \$422 million in investments, 33% more than the previous half year period, the report said.

Of some 480 fintech companies operating in Israel today, social trading company eToro Group Ltd. has raised the most so far in 2018. In March, eToro announced a \$100 million Series E round led by China Minsheng Financial Holding Corporation Limited, a diversified holding company, with participation from Tokyo-based SBI Group, and Korea Investment Partners. While unique in its scope, the eToro deal was indicative of the growing foreign interest in the Israeli fintech sector. According to SNC's report, 73% of all venture capital-backed investment into Israeli fintech startups this year has involved foreign money.

STOP TALKING ABOUT THE SETTLEMENTS (Mordechai Smith, Arutz-7 9/5/18)

It was George Orwell who popularized the idea that one's choice of words can have an effect on the way people think. We can see many examples today. 'Abortion' sounds like a pretty horrid and destructive experience, yet 'reproductive choice' is a cause which people can root for.

Similarly, the concept of same-sex marriage was once thought to be so beyond the pale of normality, that no mainstream politician (including Barack Obama when running for his first presidential term) would ever support it. Yet when phrased as 'marriage equality' it became much more difficult to argue against.

Which brings us to 'the settlements'.

From the point of view of the Zionist pioneers, settling the land of Israel has always represented the ultimate fulfillment of their ideology. The 'settlement enterprise' is the pride and joy of nationalistic Israelis. Yet today, to most of the world, the term 'settlement' has become synonymous with an illegitimate squatting on someone else's land.

Arguably, this view does have some basis. After all, some definitions of the term 'settlement' can imply a form of colonialist presence.

An example is the 'British Settlement' in Shanghai from 1845 (which became the 'International Settlement' when the Americans joined in 1863). Whether we like it or not, 'settlement' has become a negative word. Especially when it's an Israeli one. When a European sees 'settlement produce', he knows it comes from those Zionist colonialists.

To most of the world, forcibly removing the inhabitants of a village and razing it to the ground would be considered a war crime. Yet to do that to an Israeli 'settlement' would represent amazing progress in the quest for regional peace. While the anti-Semites a.k.a. anti-Zionists will always find reason to criticize, perhaps we should not let them have the linguistic advantage.

Why do we refer to towns and villages within pre-'67 Israel as... towns and villages, yet we call those in Yehuda and Shomron mere 'settlements'? When we distinguish between a 'settlement' and a bona fide town or village, we are complicit in encouraging an attitude that the former's existence has a different status. How can we expect to get the rest of the world on side, when we ourselves discriminate linguistically against the towns and villages in Yehuda and Shomron?

Just as we use the biblical and historic names to refer to those regions, rather than 'the West Bank' (what a huge bank for such a narrow river!), why not refer to the towns and villages within them as - towns and villages! It's time to abolish the s-word from our vocabulary. While we can't expect the rest of the world to instantly change their attitudes, the onus will be on them to justify why these towns and villages have a different status or are any less legitimate than any others in Israel or elsewhere. Let's not make their job any easier.

IN THIS WAR, EVERYTHING GOES (Yoav Limor, Israel Hayom 9/5/18)

Efforts to solidify its foothold and place missiles in western Iraq, arms shipments to Lebanon, and the precision missile factories that were attacked in Syria on Tuesday – are all just a fraction of Iran's activities in the region.

These steps (which have been reported; we can assume there's quite a bit more that is known but hasn't been revealed) point mainly to one thing: Iranian determination to pursue the course of action plotted by the regime in Tehran. This plan is executed by the Quds Force under the command of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani – unquestionably unrivaled as the most dangerous person in the world.

Standing between Iran and the successful implementation of its plan is Israel. More than a few players are helping it, chief among them the United States, but the brunt of the work, as we saw yet again on Tuesday, is done by Israel. It has hit around 200 Iranian targets in Syria since January of 2017, with some 800 missiles and bombs.

In this war, everything goes. From attacks such as the one attributed to Israel on Tuesday – which curiously took place in broad daylight – to the various reports that have appeared in the foreign press, which we can assume don't reach those news desks by chance. The bottom line is that Iran is the source of evil in the region, and comprehensive action is required to stop it.

Behind these actions, it isn't hard to spot Israel's growing concern, not to mention frustration, over the fact that Iran is adhering to its plan of action to solidify its presence in the area. Amid the backdrop of the severe economic crisis in Iran and intensifying criticism from home is a real debate over the Quds Force and its activities, including within the regime's more conservative wing – but as of now, there's no change in this policy which saps billions of dollars a year.

In the meantime, and we should hope into the future as well, Israel has the upper hand. The Iranians are still far from reaching their goals, mostly in Syria, and despite their declared intent they have also failed to exact a price from Israel for its overt and covert countermeasures. The nature of these types of conflicts, however, is that they don't end quickly or in a final score. Required are fortitude, endurance and the willingness to exact and pay the cost of victory, even if it isn't complete.

Hence, things will continue as they were. From the security aspect, over the past year, the Israeli public's attention has mostly been diverted to incendiary kites and balloons from Gaza, but the defense establishment has largely remained fixed on Iran. We can assume this will continue to be the case throughout the coming year and will continue to be the main task of the IDF's next chief of staff, slated to replace Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot on January 1.