

# הארץ The Weekly Israel News Update

Artzeinu ◦ [www.artzeinu.org](http://www.artzeinu.org) ◦ Vol. 19 No. 640 ◦ May 2, 2020

## COVID-19 tally improves as infected numbers fall

The number of people who have recovered from the coronavirus continued to outstrip the number of active infections for the second day in a row on Thursday, Ynetnews reports.

Among Israel's 15,946 confirmed cases, 8,561 were found free of the disease, leaving less than half -- a total of 7,163 -- still battling the virus.

The number of patients receiving respiratory assistance dropped to 82 during the previous 24 hours, the Health Ministry said, while the number of patients in serious condition dropped to 105.

Another 79 people were in moderate condition and 6,979 showed minor symptoms.

There were currently 329 people being treated in hospitals across the nation, while 4,200 were being treated at home and 1,759 people were recovering in specially designated hotels.

## Coordinated cyberattack on water system thwarted

Israel thwarted a major cyberattack on its water infrastructure last weekend, *Algemeiner* reports.

Israel's National Cyber Directorate uncovered "attempted attacks on command and control systems of wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, and sewage."

The Directorate called on the relevant companies and institutions to change their internet passwords immediately, reduce their internet connections, and ensure they were updated to the latest versions of their

control software.

Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot* reported that the Directorate and Israel's Water Authority, in a follow-up statement, said that the attempted attacks were "handled" and "it should be emphasized that there was no damage to the water supply." The statement added that the attacks, which took place on Friday and Saturday throughout Israel, appeared to have been coordinated, according to *Yediot*.

## IDF attacks Syrian targets

Israel shot five rockets from the Golan Heights over the southern Syria border southern Syria border in the Quneitra region on Thursday night, *The Jerusalem Post* reports, citing Syrian State News.

According to the Syrian reports, IDF choppers were seen firing rockets at numerous targets and caused damages alone. Some reports from Syrian media additionally claim that the targets belonged to Hezbollah.

The previous attack by the IDF in Syria was on Monday night, during which at least seven Syrians were killed, including four terrorists and three civilians.

## Biden says if elected, U.S. embassy stays in Jerusalem

The Democratic Party's presumptive presidential candidate, former vice president Joe Biden, said Wednesday that the U.S. Embassy would remain in Jerusalem if he is elected in November, *Ynetnews* reports.

Speaking to potential donors via an online fundraiser, Biden said that relocating the mission back to Tel Aviv would have little impact on Israeli-Palestinian peace talks moving forward.

"But now that it's done, I would not move

the embassy back to Tel Aviv," Biden said.

Biden initially described U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to move the Embassy "short-sighted and frivolous."

The Trump administration's decision almost immediately led to the Palestinians cutting off ties to the White House, with the Palestinian Authority complaining of clear bias towards Israel.

Biden also told donors Wednesday that he would, if elected, preserve the progress made on the two-state solution and make efforts to find an end to the conflict.

"I've been a proud supporter of a secure, democratic Jewish state of Israel my entire life," Biden said.

## ICC chief prosecutor insists tribunal has authority to investigate Israeli conduct

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, insisted on Thursday that the Palestinian Authority can be considered a state and hence the court has jurisdiction if would like to conduct a full-fledged investigation into the conduct of alleged Israeli and Palestinian war crimes beyond the Green Line, *Israel Hayom* reports.

Bensouda said that the pro-Israeli countries such as Germany who have asked the court to refrain from conducting an investigation based on complaints filed by the PA were wrong.

According to Bensouda, the Oslo Accords signed between the PA and Israel gave the court the legal jurisdiction to proceed and conduct such an inquiry.

In December Bensouda, said a preliminary examination into alleged war crimes in the aforementioned territories,

mainly involving the construction of Jewish settlements, opened in 2015, had provided enough information to meet all criteria for opening an investigation.

Member states Germany, Australia and the Czech Republic have stipulated their objection to the court's jurisdiction.

A decision on whether to pursue an investigation into Israeli and Palestinian conduct for possible war crimes is now at the hands of the pre-trial chamber at the ICC, whose judges will evaluate Bensouda's legal opinion and other briefs filed by various organizations. The judges do not have a deadline however a decision is expected within the next 120 days.

## **With Health portfolio up for grabs, coalition talks are thrown for a loop**

Coalition talks were expected to resume Thursday but the process, which appeared to be on track, was thrown for a loop just before Independence Day, as the Health portfolio, previously earmarked for the Ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, was again up for grabs, Israel Hayom reports.

Lacking the political "luster" of the Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Finance portfolios, the allocation of the Health Ministry, though a major office, is not usually one to throw a wrench in wheels of coalition talks.

Under the coalition deal inked between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz, Likud and Blue and White rotate the Defense and Foreign Affairs portfolios. Blue and White will control the Justice, Immigration and Absorption, Culture and Sports, Communications, Agriculture, Strategic Affairs, Tourism, Social Equality, and Diaspora Affairs portfolios, while partner Labor will receive the Economy and Welfare portfolios.

Likud will receive the Finance, Public Security, Transportation, Housing, Education, Environmental Protection, Energy, and Jerusalem Affairs portfolios.

Ultra-Orthodox Likud partners United Torah Judaism and Shas were meant to

control the Health and Interior portfolios respectively, but last week UTJ head Yakov Litzman asked Netanyahu to be appointed construction and housing minister in the next government. Now, Blue and White wants Health.

As under the coalition deal the Health portfolio is part of Likud portfolios' parcel, it has the option of naming a Likud lawmaker to the post, offering it to another of its coalition partners or giving it to Blue and White in exchange for one of its portfolios.

One of the possibilities floated over the past week has been offering the Health portfolio to Yamina leader Naftali Bennett.

"Blue and White want the Health portfolio, the question is – will they know how to match its value," one Likud official explained

## **As it turns 72, Israel's population stands at 9.2M**

Israel's population now numbers nearly 9.2 million, the Central Bureau of Statistics announced this week ahead of the country's 72nd Independence Day, The Times of Israel reports.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel's population grew by 171,000 people, or 1.9%, since last Independence Day and is projected to reach 11.1 million in 2030. By 2048, when Israel turns 100, the CBS predicted a population of 15.2 million.

Over the course of the past year, 180,000 babies were born, 44,000 people died, and 32,000 people immigrated from the Diaspora. The CBS described Israel as having a "young population," with nearly 950,000 children under the age of four there. Around 28% of the population is

aged 0-14 while 12% is aged 65 or older. There are currently 6.8 million Jews, accounting for 74% of the population, while the 1.93 million Arabs in Israel make up 21% of the population. Another 454,000 people defined as others account for the remaining 5%.

## **And the winner is...**

Ruth Cohen, a 16-year-old student from the southern Israeli village of Mercaz Shapira, won the 2020 International Bible Contest held in Jerusalem on Wednesday, becoming the first female student in a decade to win the prestigious contest, Israel Hayom reports.

The Bible quiz is held annually on Independence Day. Like all other Independence Day events, the contest was held without an audience over the restrictions imposed on public gatherings due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Participants from outside Israel took part via video link.

Seventy teenagers from 39 countries answered a host of trivia questions about various details from the most obscure biblical books.

Moshe Giladi, from Alon Shvut, southwest of Jerusalem, won the second place, American Chaim Nosson Shildes came in third, and fourth place went to Miriam Sharam from Mexico.

"We need this connection just as we need a tradition that connects our shared history, present and future," said Knesset Speaker Blue and White leader Benny Gantz. "Jewish heritage is the source of our cohesion. It is the introduction to the State of Israel and the power of the Jewish people."

