

Ynet-News, December 19, 2020 – Saturday

12.19.20 – Sa - - - News Placed in Dec 19 spot – Saturday

Israel MKs hospital staff & at-risk population began using the Pfizer vaccine  
Saturday

12.17.20 – Th - - - News Placed in Dec 22 spot – Tuesday

Decade of Arab Spring played by foreign powers sparked civil wars & no loyalty

12.17.20 – Th - - -

Iran lift of sanctions has too many breaches at 12 times the nuclear deal cap

12.18.20 – Th - - - News Placed in Dec 18 spot – Friday

Saudi TV series shows harmony in Jewish, Muslim, and Christians of the 1940s

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Israel MKs hospital staff & at-risk population began using the Pfizer vaccine  
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12.19.20

Netanyahu becomes first Israeli to receive coronavirus vaccine

'One small vaccination for man, one giant leap for mankind's health,' PM says as he receives vaccine at Sheba Medical Center; prime minister immediately followed by Health Minister Edelstein as both seek to 'encourage Israeli public to get vaccinated'  
Ynet, i24NEWS | Updated: 12.19.20 , 20:27

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, 72, became the first Israeli to receive the Pfizer vaccine for coronavirus on Saturday evening, followed immediately by Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, 62.

The two received the vaccine on Saturday evening at Sheba Medical Center, Israel's largest hospital.

"One small vaccination for man, one giant leap for mankind's health," Netanyahu said as he received the vaccine from his personal physician, Dr. Tzvi Berkowitz.

The vaccinations were broadcast live to "encourage the Israeli public to get vaccinated," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

President Reuven Rivlin will be vaccinated on Sunday, when the country's hospital staff and health professionals will also start receiving the inoculation.

Health officials estimate that Israel could be the first country in the world to vaccinate its at-risk population as it launched its inoculation drive Saturday evening.

From Monday, the elderly and at-risk population will be able to be vaccinated at their local HMO after setting an appointment with their doctor.

According to Channel 12, Israel may be the first country in the world to complete a nation-wide immunization of all of its at-risk population.

This is **due to** the **relatively small population** of the country, which currently stands at just over 9 million, compared to the high ratio of vaccines per capita that it already has on hand and is expected to receive in the coming weeks.

Edelstein told Channel 12 that Israel could **complete the first round** of vaccinations for those at risk **in about two weeks**.

They will then have to return for a **second injection 21 days later**, which means Israel could **complete** immunization of its at-risk populations **by the end of January**.

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12.17.20

**Decade of Arab Spring played by foreign powers sparked civil wars & no loyalty**

12.17.20

**Broken dreams of Arab Spring a decade on**

Today, many across Arab world blame 2011 uprisings for opening floodgates to violence and economic ruin, leaving millions of refugees and displaced, while countless others have had their lives blighted by chaos

AFP| Published: 12.17.20 , 20:09

"The revolution showed me that everything is possible," said Ameni Ghimaji, remembering the heady days of the **Tunisian protests that sparked the Arab Spring** uprisings **a decade ago**.

She was just 18 when **Tunisian dictator** Zine El Abidine Ben Ali **fell from power**, the first **casualty of** wave upon wave of **demonstrations** across the Middle East and North Africa which saw some iron-fisted leaders tumble, some brutally cling on and nations convulse in years of upheaval, **conflict and civil war**.

"We had **no plan for the future**, **but** we were sure of one thing: **anything has to be better than this**," added Ghimaji.

Ben Ali was ousted just hours after she was photographed, shouting and pumping her fist in the air, at a massive Tunis anti-regime rally.

Her picture swept the front pages and she became an iconic image of the youth in peaceful revolt.

The Tunisia protests were **triggered when an impoverished street vendor set himself alight on December 17, 2010, weighed down by despair**.

His shocking act of self-violence ignited long simmering tensions among young people, angered by Ben Ali's corrupt, nepotistic regime and hungry for new opportunities.

Less than four weeks later, Ben Ali had fled into exile, ended his 23-year rule and, drawing courage from his ouster, protesters began gathering elsewhere.

Revenge

Today across the Arab world, the 2011 uprisings have been blamed for opening the floodgates to violence and economic ruin, leaving millions of refugees and displaced, while countless others have had their lives blighted by chaos.

But for those who were there, the early demonstrations were times of exhilaration and hope.

On January 14, 2011, social networks were flooded with footage of lawyer Abdennaceur Aouini defying a curfew to stand in the iconic Avenue Habib Bourguiba of central Tunis, shouting: "Ben Ali has fled!"

It felt like "revenge. Since I was 18 I'd been hassled and imprisoned," Aouini, now aged 50, said.

But today, he admits he feels "disappointed".

"There is always hope. But I was in a dream, today I have come to my senses," added Aouini.

Despite the political freedoms Tunisians have won, they still face grinding unemployment, inflation and inequality.

"People thought that Ben Ali's departure would fix things, but that will take 20, 30 years," said ex-activist and entrepreneur Houeida Anouar.

"I'm not sure that within my lifetime I'll see a Tunisia with a political scene worthy of the name, but I'm optimistic."

Change inevitable

While Tunisia does have a hard-won constitution, a flawed but functioning parliamentary system and free elections, state repression has descended again on Egypt after a brief flirtation with democracy.

"Ten years on, you can see that the hopes are still there within the younger generation, a generation that were little kids at the time of the uprising," said Mohamed Lotfy, 39, executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms.

But "the government is doing everything it can to kill that dream of January 25" 2011 when thousands marched in Cairo and other cities, demanding the departure of President Hosni Mubarak and "bread, freedom and dignity".

Worse still is the situation in Libya, Yemen and Syria, where initially peaceful uprisings sparked civil wars that have laid waste to cities and killed hundreds of thousands of people.

But that's not how it started, according to Majdi, a 36-year-old Libyan, who took part in protests against dictator Moamer Kadhafi a decade ago.

"We were watching what happened in Tunisia and Egypt," he said. "It was our turn, change was inevitable."

Protesters' demands were "just a bit more freedom, some justice and some hope for the young people who didn't have any," he said.

Initially "there was no talk of overthrowing the regime."

But the regime's bloody response provoked a call to arms.

Kadhafi's killing while on the run in October 2011 plunged the country into a decade of violent chaos.

"With hindsight, I don't think we knew how much damage Kadhafi had done to the foundations of the state," Majdi said.

Yet he insists he has no regrets: the revolution "was necessary, and I still believe in it." Dead either way

"We were only demanding reform," said Dahnoun, a Syrian.

He joined some of the country's first protests against President Bashar al-Assad, and recalled "no chants were calling for division, or fighting, or war. On the contrary, it was very peaceful."

"I remember, we used to chant 'freedom, freedom, freedom' and nothing else," Dahnoun told AFP by phone from Idlib city.

But the movement was met with unremitting violence, including on some occasions the once taboo use of chemical weapons by Syrian regime forces, charges that Damascus denies.

"During that first protest we were attacked by regime thugs and security forces," said Dahnoun, who was 15 at the time.

As in Libya, the worsening situation in Syria drew in outside nations, seizing both an opportunity to boost their sway and minimize regional turbulence.

"We were played by foreign powers, and now Syrians have zero say and external players have the last word," he said.

"I don't have hope... Syria is not ours anymore."

A crushing 2015 intervention by Russia to prop up the Syrian regime saw Damascus claw back swathes of territory that had been held by opposition forces, and Assad now controls over 70 percent of the country.

But a brutal economic crisis, accentuated by Western sanctions, has seen the government criticized from all sides, even those who did not support the revolution.

Abu Hamza, a teacher from Daraa where the first demonstrations of the Syrian revolution began, says people have "no loyalty" towards the regime.

"When you are hungry, you have no more fear," the father-of-three told AFP by phone from Daraa.

"I'm dead either way. I'll either be killed by tanks or by hunger."

12.17.20

Iran lift of sanctions has too many breaches at 12 times the nuclear deal cap

12.17.20

New agreement needed to revive Iran nuclear deal under Biden, IAEA chief says

U.S. President-elect says Washington will rejoin accord 'if Islamic Republic resumes strict compliance' with agreement that imposed rigid curbs on its nuclear activities in return for the lifting of sanctions

Reuters| Published: 12.17.20 , 18:01

Reviving Iran's nuclear deal under U.S. President-elect Joe Biden would require striking a new agreement setting out how Iran's breaches should be reversed, UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi said.

Biden, who takes office on Jan. 20, has said the United States will rejoin the deal "if Iran resumes strict compliance" with the agreement that imposed strict curbs on its nuclear activities in return for the lifting of sanctions.

After President Donald Trump quit the deal and reimposed U.S. sanctions, Iran responded by breaching many of the deal's restrictions. Tehran says it could quickly reverse those steps if Washington first lifts its sanctions.

In an interview with Reuters, Grossi, who heads the International Atomic Energy Agency that polices Iran's compliance, said there had been too many breaches for the agreement to simply snap back into place.

"I cannot imagine that they are going simply to say, 'We are back to square one' because square one is no longer there," Grossi said at IAEA headquarters.

"It is clear that there will have to be a protocol or an agreement or an understanding or some ancillary document which will stipulate clearly what we do," he said.

"There is more (nuclear) material, ... there is more activity, there are more centrifuges, and more are being announced. So what happens with all this? This is the question for them at the political level to decide."

Full circle

Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium is more than 2.4 tons, 12 times the cap set by the deal, though still far below the more than eight tons Iran had before signing it. Iran has been enriching uranium up to 4.5% purity, above the deal's 3.67% limit though below the 20% it achieved before the deal.

Iran is enriching uranium in places where it is not allowed under the deal, such as at Fordow, a site dug into a mountain. More recently it has started enriching with advanced centrifuges at its underground plant at Natanz, where the deal says it can use only first-generation IR-1 machines.

"What I see is that we're moving full circle back to December 2015," Grossi said, referring to the month before the deal's restrictions were put in place, after which large amounts of material and equipment were swiftly removed.

"If they want to do it (comply), they could do it pretty fast. But for all of those things we had a charted course," he said.

12.18.20

Saudi TV series shows harmony in Jewish, Muslim, and Christians of the 1940s

12.18.20

## Saudi TV show shifts perception of Israel- Gulf normalization

Period drama showing co-existence of three faiths was seen by more than 140 million people throughout the Arab world, and hoped to show Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious harmony in the Gulf of the 1940s

The Media Line | Published: 12.18.20 , 09:08

An award-winning Saudi television drama series may have helped shift public perception of the historic normalization agreements that were reached between Israel and Gulf countries in August, one of the show's co-creators believes.

Bahraini brothers Ali Shams and Mohammad Shams are the screenwriters who, along with their creative team, won the America Abroad Media award this year for their historic dramatic series Um Haroun (Mother of Aaron), which drew a massive audience base and aired on Saudi Arabia's state-sponsored MBC.

The show first began airing during Ramadan earlier this year in Arabic-speaking countries and explores the relationships between Muslim/Christian Arab and Jewish communities.

"All the Arab people in the Gulf and especially Egypt – some 141 million people saw Um Haroun," says Ali Shams, one of the series co-creators. "Some accepted it and some didn't."

Shams believes that the timing of the show's release was particularly significant since it was broadcast only months before the signing of the Abraham Accords, which saw ties normalize between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

"I saw a lot of Jews and Israelis coming to Bahrain prior to Um Haroun's release," Shams says.

"This big drama is not the same as a plan between countries but it affected it for the people and how they received the news of normalization. Before Um Haroun and not knowing Jews, [the public] would have been shocked."

One of the things Shams was hoping to showcase in the show, he said, was how different the Gulf was in relation to people's religions back in the 1940s. The drama is based on a true story.

"The Gulf in the '40s was very different than what is today; no one asked you [about] your religion," Shams says. "This is history. A lot of my friends in Bahrain where I live are Jewish."

Shams is already onto his next series called Margaret, which is also based on a true story about a powerful woman from the UK who lived in the Gulf for 50 years.

The woman in question was related to Queen Elizabeth, according to the screenwriter, and the show is due to be released in April 2021 during Ramadan.

Abdulmohsen Al-Nemer, the Saudi actor who plays the role of Rabbi Daoud in Um Haroun, believes that the series came out at a "very sensitive time" because of the normalization agreements between Israel and Gulf countries.

"It wasn't planned," he says. "We are artists looking for human interest stories. The series was made up of 30 episodes and people started speaking about it from the first episode."

One of the goals of the series, Al-Nemer says, was to show **Jews, Christians and Muslims living together in peace** and put a spotlight on a lesser-known piece of the region's history.

When asked if he could envision Israelis acting alongside an Arab cast from varying countries if and when normalization takes place with Saudi Arabia, the actor was not certain the time is right.

“As an artist, you have to be in the same distance as everyone,” [editor's note: meaning all equal] Al-Nemer says. “These days, anything can happen.”

Shams and Al-Nemer were speaking on the sidelines of the America Abroad Media's (AAM) annual awards gala, which this year was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

AAM is a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., that honors creative leaders in film and television from around the globe. This year the organization presented a special award to Um Haroun's creative team.

Dr. Aaron Lobel, founder and president of AAM, believes that the show exemplifies **Saudi Arabia's shifting attitudes** towards normalizing ties **with Israel**.

“[The series] is evidence that a [Saudi]-owned channel, and the largest pan-Arab channel in the region, is willing to tackle stories involving Jewish characters,” Lobel said.

“Moreover MBC aired the series during Ramadan, the most important month for television in the Arab world.”

The opening of the gala itself presented another milestone in warming Israel-Gulf ties, as Israeli singer Dudu Tassa and Emirati singer Mohammed al Shehhi released a new song they recorded together in Dubai. Tassa had traveled to the UAE in late November to record the song.

Unfortunately, **due to the pandemic**, such in-person artistic **collaborations are likely to be few and far between** in the near future.

“Hopefully that will change by summer 2021,” Lobel says. “In the meantime, however, we are organizing creative workshops – bringing Hollywood and **Middle East writers** and directors together – via Zoom. While not ideal, it still **allows for genuine creative interaction**.”

In February, AAM will be **releasing a six-part podcast and public radio series** in joint collaboration with the Louisville, Kentucky-based **Muhammad Ali** Center, a nonprofit museum dedicated to the **famed boxer**.

The series, which will air across the United States and Arab world, will focus on Ali's winding spiritual path.

“Ali is a hero across the Arab and Muslim World and in the United States, and yet his **journey – from Baptist Christian youth to the Nation of Islam, and ultimately to a more Sufi-influenced Islam (and a Jewish son-in-law) – has not been adequately explored in the many documentaries and films** about him,” Lobel says.

“Our series will be hosted by Academy Award-winning actor Lou Gossett Jr.,” he concluded.

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