



## Update from Israel

February 26, 2026

### Indian Prime Minister Modi in Israel, as Tensions with Iran Mount

#### Iran

- The United States and Iran opened a **third round of indirect, Oman-mediated nuclear talks in Geneva today**, framing the discussions as a final diplomatic window even as Washington continues a major military buildup in the region. The US is being represented by Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.
- Public messaging from both sides has remained sharply divergent: President Donald **Trump reiterated that he prefers a diplomatic solution** but that Iran will not be permitted to retain the ability to produce nuclear weapons. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said a deal was “within reach” if diplomacy is prioritized but insists that Iran will not abandon uranium enrichment for civilian purposes.
- Nonetheless, Iran continues to insist that **talks center only on its nuclear program**, while the US wants to discuss Iran’s ballistic missiles, its support for terror proxies in the region, and the regime’s handling of protests.
- It appears that, even on the nuclear discussions, the positions of the two sides are **very far apart**. Most commentators say the chances of a deal being reached are slim.
- The talks are taking place alongside **continued pressure measures**, including repeated warnings from US officials that military options remain on the table if negotiations fail; Iranian officials, in turn, have said that US bases in the region would be legitimate targets in the event of an attack.
- Iran has also sought to **underscore the risks of escalation**, with senior officials warning that a renewed conflict could quickly spread across the region, while reiterating that Tehran does not seek war and would respond only if attacked.
- Yesterday, the **United States deployed 12 F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jets** to an Israeli Air Force base, marking a rare forward positioning of the US-only air-superiority aircraft.

- The placement marks a historic shift: the **first deployment of American offensive weapons on Israeli soil**, breaking a long-standing US and Israeli taboo. For decades, Washington avoided stationing US forces in Israel to preserve basing and operational flexibility in the Gulf, relying instead on limited deployments such as missile defenses or coordination centers.
- The F-22 deployment is part of a **broader US force buildup**, which includes the world's largest naval ship, the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (which is operating in the eastern Mediterranean), the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier group, and more than 300 US military aircraft.
- The situation on the ground in **Israel remains calm**, and the IDF's Home Front Command has not issued new precautions or restrictions. Nonetheless, the civilian population remains cautious; many are expecting war to break out.
- Last night, **KLM announced the temporary suspension of flights** to Israel, while all other carriers continue operations to and from Tel Aviv as normal.

## Western Wall

- A private **"Holy Places" bill** introduced to the Knesset by MK Avi Maoz would place all prayer arrangements at the Western Wall, including the egalitarian/southern section, under the exclusive authority of the Chief Rabbinate, effectively eliminating pluralist oversight and potentially affecting ceremonies at the egalitarian platform, or in the broader Kotel Plaza.
- The bill **passed a preliminary reading** (56–47) largely due to election season dynamics, but it is not a government bill and it lacked support from both Prime Minister Netanyahu and Knesset Speaker Ohana.
- Many Israeli commentators say that the bill does not reflect government policy and is **expected to die in committee** or be dropped when the Knesset dissolves ahead of elections.
- The bill was **introduced following a Supreme Court** ruling that ordered implementation of long delayed infrastructure upgrades to the egalitarian prayer area, without revisiting broader questions of prayer rights or the Kotel compromise.
- See [this piece](#) from today's Jerusalem Post, for further reading.

## Modi Visit

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra **Modi arrived in Israel yesterday** on a historic, two-day state visit, his second as prime minister and the first since the outbreak of the Gaza war.
- At the conclusion of the visit, **Israel and India signed 16 bilateral memoranda of understanding**. The agreements cover areas including agricultural innovation, advanced technologies, civilian drones, satellite data, irrigation and fertilization management, pest control, greenhouse cultivation and the transfer of advanced agricultural know-how. They were announced during a joint press conference in Jerusalem between the two prime ministers. India is currently the largest buyer of Israeli defense industry products.
- Modi became **the first Asian leader ever to address the Knesset**. He began, "I bring with me the greetings of 1.4 billion Indians and a message of friendship, respect and partnership." He then condemned the October 7 Hamas attack, expressed solidarity with Israel and said "terrorism anywhere threatens peace everywhere," while also backing efforts toward a Gaza peace initiative.
- Modi's Knesset visit went ahead despite a **threatened opposition boycott** over the exclusion of Israel's Supreme Court president. Opposition MKs walked out during speeches by the speaker and prime minister but returned for Modi's address, with opposition leader Yair Lapid telling him the protest "had nothing to do with you."

- During meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Herzog, the two sides reviewed the India–Israel strategic partnership, with discussions **focusing on defense and security cooperation**, technology and innovation, trade, agriculture, water management and people-to-people ties.
- On the economic front, the **government is preparing a Knesset decision to advance Israel’s role in the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC)**, committing the state to the infrastructure, regulatory and diplomatic framework required to turn Israel into a key transit hub between India and Europe. The plan includes a first-ever rail connection to Jordan, a major expansion of border-crossing capacity for freight traffic, and the development of logistics hubs, “dry ports,” storage facilities and freight terminals. Beyond generating hundreds of millions of dollars in annual transportation revenues and broader economic spillovers, the project carries strategic significance: it embeds Israel physically and economically in a regional network that requires practical cooperation with Jordan and the Gulf, marking a historic break from Israel’s decades-long physical isolation from its neighbors since 1948.
- Israel has placed great **importance on the visit**, at a time of some geopolitical isolation of the Jewish state. India, with some 1.44 billion citizens, is the largest country in the world by population and a strong regional power.
- Modi was awarded the **Speaker of the Knesset Medal**, a rare parliamentary honor, recognizing his role in strengthening bilateral ties between India and Israel.
- Israeli media have noted that the visit was marked by **exceptionally warm and personal treatment** from Israeli leadership, including a full ceremonial welcome. Netanyahu greeted him personally at the airport, traveled with him together throughout the visit and hosted a private dinner; these are gestures that Israeli officials framed as reflecting a “special relationship” rather than routine protocol.

## Other News

- Israel’s President Isaac Herzog concluded an **official state visit to Ethiopia** today, underscoring Israel’s renewed diplomatic push in Africa and longstanding ties between the two countries. During his visit to Addis Ababa, Herzog met with Ethiopian President Taye Atske Selassie and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. He also engaged with leaders of the local Jewish community, highlighting what he said was “the central role of Ethiopian Jewry in Israeli society.”
- Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer was ranked **seventh best hospital in the world** in Newsweek’s 2026 World’s Best Hospitals rankings, marking the highest placement ever achieved by an Israeli medical institution. The No. 7 global ranking places Sheba alongside institutions such as Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins and Massachusetts General Hospital. The Newsweek–Statista ranking evaluated more than 2,500 hospitals across 32 countries, using a methodology that emphasizes hospital quality metrics, peer recommendations from medical professionals, patient experience data and implementation of patient-reported outcome measures. Sheba’s rise in the rankings is credited to a combination of clinical performance and medical innovation, including large-scale adoption of AI and digital health systems, precision medicine and its global health-innovation platform.
- The government of Israel approved a decision to fast-track **construction of large-scale AI data centers**, framing AI leadership as a core pillar of Israel’s national power and security. The move removes regulatory barriers to accelerate planning and construction of server farms, positioning Israel to become a global AI hub by leveraging its human capital, connectivity and competitive energy costs. Officials noted that data centers totaling 1 gigawatt have already entered planning in the past three months—totaling over 5% of national energy consumption—promising thousands of jobs and billions in revenue, alongside a parallel plan to double new power-plant construction using both gas and renewable energy.
- **Tucker Carlson’s much-touted “visit” to Israel** consisted of a brief stop at Ben Gurion Airport, where he conducted a filmed interview with US Ambassador Mike Huckabee and then departed within hours without entering the country. Despite his claims to the contrary, Israeli authorities, the US Embassy and Huckabee himself confirmed that Carlson experienced only routine security screening, with no detention or interrogation. The airport interview followed a public challenge from Huckabee after Carlson accused Israel of mistreating Christians — claims that Huckabee directly rebutted on camera, citing official data showing that Israel’s Christian population has grown steadily and that Israel remains one of the few places in the region where Christian communities are expanding rather than shrinking.
- A senior Shin Bet officer has been indicted in what authorities describe as the **largest Gaza smuggling case uncovered to date**, after investigators reportedly found about \$2.1 million in his possession that is believed to be proceeds from illicit transfers into the Strip. The case is part of a wider

series of recent indictments involving smuggling networks that moved prohibited but commercially valuable goods (including cigarettes, smartphones, batteries and spare parts) into Gaza, sometimes exploiting access to sensitive facilities and crossings. While the items themselves were largely civilian, the gravity of the affair lies in the involvement of senior security and intelligence personnel, raising serious concerns about oversight and trust.

- Israeli Muay Thai fighter Ahavat Hashem (whose name means “Love of God”) Gordon, 19, secured a **decisive victory over Turkish fighter** Ali Konyuncu on Saturday night in Lithuania, stopping the bout after two rounds to remain undefeated at 11–0. Gordon, who grew up in the Samaritan settlement of Shilo and later trained extensively in Thailand, entered the arena to Israeli music, draped in an Israeli flag and wearing a kippah. After a tense pre-fight weigh-in and an aggressive exchange, the match ended when Gordon landed a powerful shin strike that left Konyuncu unable to continue, prompting the judges to halt the fight. The image of Gordon standing victorious, visibly and unapologetically Israeli, was widely noted as a moment of sporting achievement and national pride.

## Rebuild Israel

- Rebuild Israel is Jewish Federation's system-wide, multi-year framework to support Israel's recovery and help Israeli society flourish in the aftermath of October 7 and two years of war.
- For the first time in Israel, an academic degree program in prosthetics and orthotics has launched in southern Israel at the Kayley Rehabilitation Medical Center in Adi Negev. The program is supported by Jewish Federation Los Angeles and a grant from Jewish Federation of North America's Israel Emergency Response Committee. Eleven students are currently completing their first semester. The field previously relied on non-academically trained technicians to serve Israel's more than 30,000 amputees (many due to diabetes complications and war-related injuries, including a significant spike since October 7<sup>th</sup>). The new program aims to professionalize the field, improve care and reduce the need to send patients abroad for complex fittings. It was created after a 12-year effort, with support from Ben-Gurion University, the Ministry of Health, Jewish Federations and others. Experts say the field has become more technically complex today and requires formal academic training. See more in [this article in Hebrew](#).

## Further Reading

- [Bnei Brak clashes reflect long-building tensions within haredi society](#)
- [Who Will Rule Iran if the United States Kills Khamenei?](#)
- [The Path to Fixing Israel's Electoral System](#)

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