

Comment

Visit Israel and show solidarity

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CHICAGO - Dudu, a forty-something Israeli who lives in Gilo, asks me a pointed question, for which I have no satisfactory answer. "Where are my brothers and sisters from America?" he asks, rather despondently. "The only tourists I see in Israel are from Asia. Don't they have CNN there, too?" We are sitting in Eucalyptus, a popular Jerusalem restaurant, with a group of 20 journalists, most of them from Jewish papers around the country, who have come here at the invitation of the Israeli Tourism Bureau. Dudu, short for David, is our bus driver this month, and this is his first gig in 14 days. When we leave, he has nothing lined up. And unlike American companies, when there is no work, there is no pay for Dudu and his family.

Dudu explains the importance of tourism to Israel's economy in simple terms. "You see," he explains, "now that you're here, I have work, Ora (our tour guide) has a job, the restaurant owner can open tonight, the waiter can work, and the dish washer in the kitchen works." He need not point out that the hit in tourism knows no ethnic boundaries. The waiter in the restaurant is Arab.

The same idea was put more starkly by Tourism Minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak the previous night at Darna, another posh Jerusalem restaurant, where he tells us that more than 15,000 Israelis have lost their jobs and 10 hotels have closed due to the drop in tourism. The tourism market has dipped by 40 percent since the start of the clashes in late September, a drop that has affected both Israel and towns under the Palestinian Authority, such as Bethlehem and Jericho. "We need our friends to come to Israel now," he pleads. "This is how you can support us. This is a difficult time for Israelis and we need our friends here."

Those friends seem few to me as I stroll around Jerusalem, which feels like a ghost town. The reality of daily life in Israel is more important than misleading headlines about where the violence is occurring. "You have to realize what's going on," an Israeli says, "but the news always shows the fighting points, and that's only in certain places that we don't go to anyway."

I can answer for myself, but I wish I could answer for my fellow American Jews, who seem so convinced that the gunfights are waged in the heart of Israel and who have cancelled their trips all too easily.

(Cont. on page 5. See "Visit Israel".)

Dry Bones



Comment

Arafat backs Sharon

Appears to be doing everything he can to undermine Barak

Arafat is clearly backing Sharon. The fact that the president of the Palestinian Authority keeps stalling on the Clinton proposals for a settlement and that his followers keep shooting at every possible Israeli target effectively undermines any chances of Barak's winning the elec-



YASSER ARAFAT: He keeps stalling on peace proposals.



ARIEL SHARON, Likud Party leader: He has a lead of almost two to one.

ISRAEL UPDATE



By NECHEMIA MEYERS

There are other reasons for the prime minister's poor showing in the polls, in which Sharon has a lead of almost two to one, but the impasse in the peace process is the main one. A great majority of Israelis see no point in Barak's proposals for "painful compromises" if all they bring are more Palestinian demands and increased violence.

Among those at least contemplating a vote for the Likud candidate are people who never in their lives have supported a right-wing leader and who may even be afraid of Sharon. But under the circumstances, they can't bring themselves to vote for Barak; and if they gag at the thought of backing his opponent, they may simply abstain.

An even more important nail in Barak's coffin is the likelihood that he will lose the vote of Arabs, who make up about a tenth of the electorate and without whose backing he can't possibly win. When he was running against Netanyahu, 99 per cent of them cast their ballots for Barak. This time, while very few Arabs will vote for Sharon, a great majority, as things look now, won't support Barak either. This is in line with the position of all the Arab political parties, which have refused to forgive the prime minister for the fact that 13 Arab citizens of Israel were killed by police during demonstrations in October.

The attitude of Israeli Arabs - who

prefer to call themselves Palestinians living in Israel - would probably change were Barak and Arafat to sign an agreement. But since that is most unlikely, they support for the prime minister is very much in doubt.

And if all this weren't enough, even the achievement that Barak emphasizes most, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, has turned sour. The Hizbullah make no secret of the fact that they plan future attacks against Israel, and, worse yet, their success is serving as a model for the Palestinians. The roadside bombs and attacks on vehicles that took such a toll in Lebanon are being emulated here and, in parallel, Hizbullah flags are being waved in Gaza street demonstrations. As they march along, the demonstrators shout: "We can drive the Israelis out of Palestine just as the Hizbullah drove them out of Lebanon."

Such slogans, though far from being realistic, nevertheless have a negative impact on Israeli morale, and clearly influence the 100,000 or so people who supported Barak in 1999 and are loathe to do so this time. It is not that they are so enamored with Sharon, or believe that he has some magic solution to Israel's problems up his sleeve. But they want a prime minister who can convince the Arabs and the world that there is a limit to the degree that Israelis can be pushed around - and Barak doesn't seem to be the man to do this.

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(Cont. from page 4.)

It's something that's confirmed for us by Nachman Klieman, El Al's spokesman. At the airline's headquarters in Lod, he points to all the El Al planes on the ground, about a third of their fleet. "I wish there weren't so many of them planted here," he says. Our last stop on the five-day trip is Eilat for Shabbat, and while I hadn't relished spending Shabbat there, I am thankful that my traveling companions can see a town teeming with tourists and resort lovers. Although Eilat is full compared to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, many of its tourists are Israelis who often spend weekends there and who are now responding to a campaign to get Israelis to travel within Israel

rather than abroad.

Yet, I feel as secure in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Rehovot as I do in Eilat. And the most honest response I could give to my family when they called inquiring about the situation was "It's absolutely fine. Just don't venture to Gaza or the West Bank, and there's no problem."

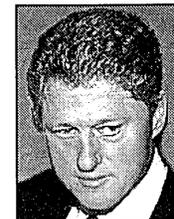
Tourism officials are hoping that American Jews, seen as key in reviving tourism, heed the message that Israel proper is as safe as any other vacation spot.

Brigitte Dayan traveled to Israel last month courtesy of El Al Airlines and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism on a press trip for Jewish journalists and travel writers.

Jerusalem journalist's perspective on Clinton plan

Not so attractive, when you see details

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U.S. PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON: His plan calls for Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem to be ceded to Arafat.

The Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace, unfolded in the twilight days of the Clinton Administration, dictates a simplistic notion for Israel: Only Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem will remain in Israel and Arab neighborhoods should be ceded to Arafat.

The Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace dictates that the Palestinian Authority's Palestinian Liberation Army will take immediate control over Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem that intertwine with all Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

Since the Palestinian Authority has freed convicted murderers of Jews from its jails over the past three months, and since the Palestinian Authority has provided safe haven for thieves and killers who have committed crimes inside Israel and have then escaped to the safe havens of the PA,

The Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace would allow convicted murderers to walk freely in Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and would provide even more accessible safe havens for Arabs to kill, steal and run into new PA havens of refuge for

The Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace dictates that 2.4 million UNRWA refugee camp clients be given the option to move out of their UNRWA refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and to join the 1.2 million UNRWA refugee camp residents in the west bank and Gaza. Since UNRWA, funded in part by the US, has inculcated Arab refugees for more than fifty years to believe that they must reject financial compensation and only be repatriated to the precise geographic vicinities where their villages stood in 1948, The Clinton Plan For Middle East Peace would encourage 3.6 million



A view of Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives: The Palestinian definition of Arab neighborhoods could involve areas that were Arab before 1948. WZPS photo.

UNRWA camp residents to wait impatiently on the hills and plains of the west bank until they are repatriated to the 531 Arab villages from before 1948 that have been replaced by Israeli cities, collective farms and woodlands.

And if the architects of the Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace try to convince the public that the demand for the "right of return" is a bargaining chip or only a negotiating position...

The PLO has now set up a computer terminal at its Orient House headquarters in Jerusalem, whose function is to locate UNRWA refugee camp residents and to document the exact homes of Jews that are to be repossessed, and then to organize their forcible return. That is why the PLO endorses terror attacks in Jaffa, Hadera, Beit Lid and certain sections of Tel Aviv, all of which are defined as "illegal settlements". That is why the PLO has

distributed thousands of maps of the 531 Arab villages that are to be liberated...to all UNRWA camp residents.

In light of the above, it may be surprising to many observers that the Israeli government has accepted the Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace.

The reasoning behind the Israeli government acceptance is that the PLO will never accept the Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace,

since it does not guarantee the absolute "right of return".

Yet what the Israeli government acceptance of the Clinton Plan for Middle East Peace does is to establish that plan as the basis for future negotiations, when Israel would be asked to relinquish more of its sovereignty

A case in point, when Clinton declared that Arab neighborhoods should be ceded to Palestinian sovereignty, many Israelis may have forgotten that the Palestinian definition of "Arab neighborhoods" would surprise many Israelis. In other words, the next stage of negotiations will involve Arab demands for Bakka, Talbia, Katamonim and Deir Yassin, Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem that were Arab villages before 1948, all of whose descendants live in UNRWA refugee camps and await their "repatriation" to West Jerusalem.

Why Israel is different than other countries

Newspaper statistics tell the story

Israelis are avid followers of the news as reported in the press and via television and radio. These days what they read and hear and see doesn't always bring a smile to their faces. But there is also ample opportunity to find another side of the news, and it helps maintain public morale. In recent weeks, for example:

This Does Not Include Latkes. During this past Chanukah Israelis consumed about 32 million sufganiyot (traditional Chanukah jelly doughnuts) according to a food science expert in the Hebrew University Faculty of Agriculture. Since each sufganiyah contains about 450 calories, this means that during the eight days of the holiday Israelis downed some 14 billion, 400 million calories.

Food Stamps. This term may mean something to shoppers in supermarkets overseas, but in Israel it has a different meaning entirely. Not long ago the Postal



An Israeli bakery worker sprinkles sugar on freshly-baked sufganiyot - Chanukah jelly doughnuts. *Isranet photo.*

Authority issued new stamps devoted to popular foods which are depicted in glorious color. And lest the Authority be accused of any ethnic bias, the three stamps picture gefilte fish, couscous and felafel, respectively. They missed adding a suitable flavoring to the gum on the reverse side.

Purely Spontaneous. Knesset member Eliayu Suissa, warning of reactions to the conviction and jailing of Aryeh Deri, told Israel Radio that "we are organizing a spontaneous reaction..."

My Son, the Doctor? The annual survey conducted by the Hadassah Career Counseling Institute in Jerusalem reveals that the first

choice of career by boys is computer expert, followed by business administration, electronics, industrial engineering and management, economics / accounting and engineering.

Among girls the first choice is psychology, followed by communications, computers, business administration, social work, design, alternative medicine and education.

What Does Mama Want? A survey of 500 Israeli mothers, conducted by Rotem, showed that 40 per cent wanted their children to go into high-tech. Medicine was the choice of 15.6 per cent and 11 per cent preferred law. 33 per cent didn't care what, so long as it would make the kids happy.

Looking Ahead. Filing for divorce in the Haifa rabbinical court, a local man demanded that his wife yield up her rights to a plot on the moon, which he had

bought for her when they were in the U.S. some years ago. The wife is battling to retain her ownership rights.

Jews in a Minority. Final figures reveal that Jews were only 24 per cent of the tourists in Israel in 1999. Catholics accounted for 33 per cent, Protestants 22 per cent, and the remainder other faiths or none listed. Whose Holy Place? Jerusalem is mentioned 660 times in the Bible, and not even once in the Koran.

The Power of Suggestion. When it became known that El Al required that its stewards and hostesses must know how to swim, the resultant publicity was bad. That requirement has now been officially withdrawn.

Lulav Cheaper This Year. Israelis who purchased a lulav for their Succot observance were gratified to find that prices were much lower than last year. This was because the government division for monopoly control had cracked down on what they said was a cartel which had previously cornered the market.

An Artistic Response. Experts have proclaimed that the extensive field of huge gas tanks located just north of Tel Aviv at the Giliot Junction constitutes a possible ecological disaster. To this the

operators responded by painting the tanks bright blue and decorating them with colorful, giant size butterflies and tropical fish.

Israel Leads the Milky Way. During 1999 milk production in Israel averaged 11,042 kilograms of milk per cow per year, compared to a 7,798 average for the U.S. and 5,610 average for the cows in the European Union.

What They Read. Exposure of Israelis to the daily issues of the country's three leading newspapers has been given as:

Yediot Ahronot, 50.4 per cent; *Maariv*, 27 per cent; *Haaretz*, 8.1 per cent.

Position Still Unfilled. Israel's Foreign Ministry has received application from one Uri Malachi offering his services, without pay, to fill the post of Israeli ambassador to the moon. He received a formal reply to the effect that while the ministry appreciates his offer, ambassadorial positions are filled only by professional civil servants of the ministry or by political appointment. Evidently, moonlighting is discouraged.

Source of Israeli Vitality. A survey recently completed reveals that 34 per cent of adult Israelis consume vitamin additives regularly.

The writer lives in Haifa, Israel.

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