

Editorial/comment from Israel

Knesset presidential vote saddening

Shimon Peres' defeat last week in his bid for the Israeli presidency is probably his final humiliation.

The veteran Israeli political figure lost 63 to 57 to Moshe Katzav, a relatively little-known Likud Party candidate, in that election by Knesset members.

Analysts link Peres' unexpected defeat to the declining fortunes of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Peres has been serving as a cabinet minister in that government, and is a member of One Israel, Barak's political party.

Three political parties defected from Barak's coalition government last month, depriving him of a majority in the Knesset, Israel's parliament. They criticized his alleged willingness to offer too many concessions to the Palestinians in peace talks at Camp David.

Peres' 41-year political career has been marked by repeated rejections by the Israeli public. He served as leader of Israel's Labor Party, One Israel's predecessor, from 1977 to 1992. He served as prime minister in 1984-85, and again for a few months as party leader and prime minister, after then-prime minister

Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995.

Peres and his party lost four out of five elections when he served as party leader.

The Israeli public bought opponents' allegations that he was too dovish, in peace talks with the Palestinians.

In fact, Peres was an extremely competent prime minister. Among other achievements, he sharply reduced Israel's hyperinflation in the mid-1980s, when his government introduced price controls. He also later shared a Nobel Peace Prize, as one of the key architects of the Oslo Accords, a framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

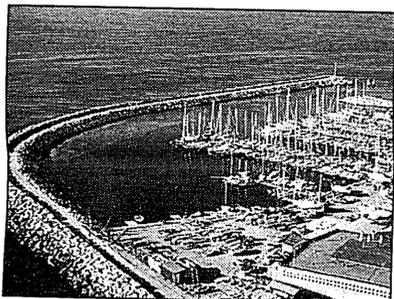
Born in Iran, Moshe Katzav served as mayor of an Israeli development town and as a cabinet minister in several Israeli governments. He is the first Likud Party candidate to win the presidency, and, according to Jewish Telegraphic Agency reports, the first Sephardic Jew.

It's saddening that Knesset members couldn't rise above petty politics, and award Peres the presidency. But the winner appears to be eminently well-qualified.

How to know the real Israel

Back pages of Israeli press offer enlightenment

Do you want to know the real Israel, not just from the headlines? The best way, of course, is to come here on a visit. The next best way is to read the bottom of the back pages of the Israeli press, where you will get enlightenment and education not otherwise available. The following examples will give you an idea of what I have in mind.



Tel Aviv's marina: 40 per cent increase in Israeli yacht ownership over past five years.

INSIDE ISRAEL



CARL ALPERT

Amazing New Export. If the use of chemical pesticides is

frowned upon in agriculture, how do the farmers combat hungry insects? Israel has exported to Spain three million carnivorous fleas which are used by Spanish farmers to eliminate a parasite that has been endangering their

pepper crops. Success reported.

You Don't Have to Be a Millionaire. In the past five years there has been a 40-per cent increase in the number of privately owned yachts in Israel, now numbering about 2,000. They are moored at eight marinas along the coast. Yachts can be purchased for as little as \$30-40,000 U.S. each. A \$10,000 U.S. yacht is also available, but is not recommended for overnight trips. There are about a quarter of a million yachts in the Mediterranean, and the Israeli marinas are campaigning to encourage their owners to visit here as tourists.

Compensation for Employees. Where salaries and wages are fixed by contract, means are often sought to justify added perks. The Bet Shemesh Fire Department has added an extra to the men's pay, labelled "night-time sandwiches". The

Tel Aviv Fire Department calls it "Inconvenience Compensation".

Does Advertising Bring Results? Meir Barnes of Safed, expelled from the Lubavitch movement some years ago for his extremist views, placed an ad in the local papers addressed to the Almighty: "We the disciples of Lubavitch, address you, ribono shel olam. How do you differ from the gods of the goyim? They promised redemption, but have not fulfilled their promises. You promised redemption, and have not fulfilled your promise. WE DEMAND MESSIAH NOW!"

How to Sell Homes. A real estate developer in Rishon Letzion is building an estate with 784 apartment units. They are going like hot cakes. Name of the estate: Nobel Prize Laureates.

As in Days of Old. The 90 members of Kibbutz Naot Semadar, recently established in the Negev, seek to return to the early days of kibbutz idealism and have decided that none of the members will have television sets. They hope to find fulfillment in each other's company, rather than in watching the "tribal campfire", as they term it.

(Cont. on page 5. See "Carl Alpert".)

Dry Bones



KIRSCHEN JERUSALEM POST ISRAEL

Dry Bones



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Comment

Pastrami sandwiches, too

Ethnic restaurants now widespread in Israel

Perhaps the most disappointed visitor to Israel I have ever encountered was a non-Jewish New Yorker who came here some years ago.

ISRAEL UPDATE



NECHEMIA MEYERS

Much influenced by the cultural and culinary environment of her home town, she loved "Jewish food," with particular emphasis on thick pastrami sandwiches. So she expected to have lots of them here. But at that stage there were none to be had, and she argued that we had no right to call ourselves a Jewish State.

Until not so long ago, indeed, there was very little in the way of ethnic food, Jewish or other varieties, in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. Now things are different, very different.

Should that lady return, she could eat pastrami sandwiches from morning to night, though, truth to be told, "Jewish food," and more particularly the Eastern European version thereof, is far from being No. 1 on this country's culinary hit parade. That distinction undoubtedly belongs to Middle Eastern dishes like houmous, tehina, falafel, kabab and shaslik. However, whatever your favorite cuisine, you'll find it in Israel.

As a former Californian, I am pleased that I can have my fill of tacos, burritos, tostadas and chile con carne, both in the style with which I was acquainted in East Los Angeles, and in Tex-Mex versions. In fact, I actually prefer Italian food, which is available at dozens of restaurants, not to speak of the innumerable pizza parlors, which are more common than falafel stands.

Contrary to what most Diaspora Jews believe, a large percentage of eating places are not kosher. That may be either because they serve shrimp and pork, or because they operate on Saturday. The latter is enough to prevent them from obtaining a kosher certificate.

This is not to say that those who observe the dietary laws are limited to home cooking. All the major hotels are kosher, as are some restaurants. For example, among the dozens of eating places that specialize in Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisine, several are glatt kosher, and operate under the watchful eyes of bearded kosher supervisors. Their inability to serve many of the staple dishes of the Far East obviously means that their fare is less than authentic. However, this doesn't seem to bother the kippa-wearing yuppies whose patronage makes them very profitable enterprises.

The success of so many restaurants -



Nelly Shmutz at her Darjeeling Tea House in Rishon Letzion: Israeli demand for ethnic food persuaded her to enter the field.

kosher and otherwise - has persuaded numerous newcomers to enter the field, among them veteran English teacher Nelly Shmutz. Despite the Ashkenazic name she acquired with her marriage, Nelly (nee Din) was born in Calcutta. And so it was only natural that she decided to open an Indian eating place in Rishon Letzion, near Tel Aviv.

Called the Darjeeling Tea House and Restaurant, it is authentic not only in its curry-based dishes, but also in its furniture and textiles. This is because Ms. Shmutz spent the better part of two years going up and down India in search of suitable furnishings, after which she hired several veteran waiters from Calcutta and Bombay.

Nelly is on Sabbatical leave from her teaching job and will soon have to decide whether or not to return to the classroom. She is unlikely to do so, as she clearly has more fun donning a sari and greeting guests at the Darjeeling than she has teaching English to unruly teenagers.

The writer lives in Rehovot, Israel.

Carl Alpert

(Cont. from page 4.)

They Swore It was True. A group of Israeli backpackers driving in Australia reported that they had accidentally run down a kangaroo. They decided to take a picture of themselves with the body, and in a light touch, one of the Israelis took off his jacket and wrapped it around the kangaroo, to show he was one of the chevra. At that point the animal suddenly revived and ran off into the wilds, still wearing the coat which contained the owner's passport and wallet. Skeptics discovered that this is a classical Australian folk tale which has been repeated dozens of times since 1902.

Protecting the Teachers. New insurance policies issued for high school teachers now carry a clause providing for coverage in the event they become hoarse and can no longer teach. Another clause guarantees compensation if teachers are affected by chalk which

Jerusalem, once removed

Diaspora Jews debate city's future from sidelines

By GARY ROSENBLATT
The New York Jewish Week

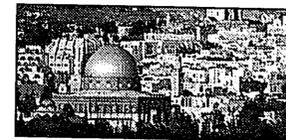
NEW YORK - More than ever, in recent days I have been aware of how powerful symbols are in Jewish culture, particularly when it comes to Israel, and Jerusalem. And I wonder if we have become prisoners of our own rhetoric. What should take precedence, metaphors or reality? Ideology or human lives? For centuries our connection to Jerusalem was more symbolic than real. We prayed for its welfare, for the rebuilding and restoration of the Holy Temple, and for our own return - "next year in Jerusalem."

But circumstances kept us in the Diaspora. And even since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, when we were urged and encouraged to live out the Zionist dream, the overwhelming majority of Jews with a choice - not victims of anti-Semitic persecution - have opted to stay put. Our hearts are with Jerusalem, even our checkbooks, but we debate its future from the safety of the sidelines.

And today, with the days of reckoning at hand regarding the political future of Israel and its place in the Middle East and Jewish history, I am humbled by that awareness. Our Israeli brothers and sisters are well aware of the stakes at hand, how political changes will affect their daily lives, their jobs, their homes, their families. But in some ways we here in America are having a more difficult time grappling with the realities of the situation, unprepared for either the prospect of large-scale territorial sacrifice or the likelihood of renewed warfare.

For us, the issues are about long-held slogans and credos, not how we choose to chart our course. For more than three decades we have spoken of our commitment to Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people. Indeed, such a phrase in a political speech to a Jewish audience is certain to evoke applause, no matter who utters it.

But what does such a pledge really mean? There are Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem most of us would never venture near. That's not a political statement, just a fact. But does that mean if, as part of a peace agreement, the Israeli government gives up sovereignty of such areas, in effect recog-



A view of Jerusalem: We must be prepared to support Israelis, however they vote in any referendum on the city's future, Gary Rosenblatt writes.

nizing the reality of the situation, the agreement should be opposed and nullified? And if that comes to pass, is Israel condemned to Arab violence and international condemnation? For today, at least, these are hypothetical questions.

But not for long. Israelis have the advantage of knowing that their vote, in a national referendum or election, will help decide the future. They know as well that if Ehud Barak returned home from peace talks in Camp David without an agreement holding out hope for the end of the conflict with the Palestinians, he will be viewed as a leader committed to peace who determined the price was simply too high; they will prepare for the results, unpleasant as they may be, more united than they have been in a long time. But American Jewry is adrift.

Not those, perhaps the majority, whose concern for and connections to Israel are positive but superficial. My worry is for the active pro-Israel community whose commitment includes financial, political and emotional support. Unlike many Israelis, who send their children to the army and yearn for their safe return, we cannot grasp the benefits of making a leap of faith to finalize a deal with Yasser Arafat.

Unlike many Jerusalemites, who see their city in municipal as well as mythic terms, we have trouble confronting the issues on a realistic level. Many Israelis - Barak is betting they are the majority - are prepared to make major concessions if they are convinced this will lead to a permanent end to the conflict.

But they are far less prepared to tolerate a partial agreement, deferring not only difficult and unresolved diplomatic issues but also the expectation of an end to the violence. Israelis may choose to hear the biblical verses we quote, speaking of God's eternal love for His city and His people, or they may prefer to tune us - and Him - out, deciding their future course on the basis of their own equations. That's what democracy is all about.

We may not like it, but we had our choice to be players, and voted no. Now we will have to rely on the wisdom of our brothers and sisters who list Israel as a homeland, not a dream. And we must be prepared to support them, however they choose.

Gary Rosenblatt is the editor and publisher of The New York Jewish Week.