

# HEADLINERS

BY LIZA ROZENBERG

## ISRAELI JOURNALISTS CAUSE STRIFE IN LEBANON

Commemorating the one-year anniversary of last summer's Second Lebanon War, Israeli journalists Lisa Goldman and Rinat Malkes traveled to Lebanon to report on how the country is faring one year on. Goldman, who has dual Israeli-Canadian citizenship, and Malkes, who has dual Israeli-Brazilian citizenship, flew into Beirut's international airport on their foreign passports. Both journalists, whose stories were covered in both the print and broadcast media in Israel, have since made headlines in Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world, as Hizbullah's Al-Manar television station and Web site covered the story, pressing the Lebanese government to explain how two Israeli journalists managed to breach airport security and enter Lebanon.

## GAYDAMAK MARCHES IN

Businessman Arkadi Gaydamak recently launched his own political party, which came as no surprise to an Israeli public that has been watching him buy his way into the hearts of citizens around the country. During last summer's Second Lebanon War, he erected a tent city for displaced persons. More recently, Gaydamak has come to the rescue of the citizens of Sderot, whose city has fallen victim to Kassam rockets.

While most Israelis can't help but admire his willingness to help out in situations where the government is either unwilling or unable to do so, this admiration is tempered by the transparency of his intentions. One wonders whether Gaydamak, who recently announced his intentions to run for mayor of Jerusalem, hopes the public will forget his allegedly questionable past, or whether he will take the time to learn Hebrew before trying to take over the country politically, socially and economically.



Israeli tanks in Lebanon last year

## SUDANESE REFUGEES STILL AWAITING FATE IN ISRAEL

More than 1,000 refugees from war-torn Sudan have managed to cross the border from Egypt into Israel. But these men, women and children have found themselves at the center of a storm involving the government, the military and various local municipalities in the South. Differences of opinion on the subject abound as the government tries to come up with a solution for these individuals, many of whom are being billeted in Israeli prisons due to a lack of alternative housing.



Sudanese refugees in Israel bearing boxes

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The porous border in Sinai, combined with difficult conditions in Egypt, has created a situation where reaching Israel is seen as a most desirable option. Different alternatives being discussed include deporting the refugees back to Egypt; assisting them to move to a third country; or allowing those already here to stay, while discouraging others from trying to enter Israel. Aid groups and a number of individual Israelis believe that Israel has an obligation to do whatever is necessary to help these people. They assert that the Jewish state should not turn refugees away as Jewish refugees were turned away during World War II.

Meanwhile, aid groups continue to provide food and shelter while the government decides what it will do.

### NEW LEADERSHIP FOR LABOR

Voting irregularities at a select number of polling stations aside, Ehud Barak was elected head of the Labor Party in June, beating out relative newcomer Ami Ayalon and making his political comeback following five years in the business world. Barak, who put his business affairs in order and disassociated himself from these activities, has stepped into his new role as defense minister. He'll certainly have his work cut out for him as Gaza rages out of control. The Olmert government is engaged in constant battles for survival, and Barak will undoubtedly use what may be a limited time in office to demonstrate his leadership abilities, with the hope of swaying Israeli public opinion in his favor come election time.



Abbas calls for order



Barak-in-a-box — Labor's new leader casts a successful ballot

### THE PA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The Palestinian Authority is in a more precarious position than ever as Mahmoud Abbas attempts to regain control of the Palestinian street by criminalizing Hamas and dissolving the Palestinian government. Abbas's efforts may be too little too late. Whether Abbas will be successful depends on a number of factors. The primary among them are support provided by the international community and Israel's taking the necessary steps to offer Abbas the credibility he so desperately needs.

In recent days, confidence-building measures that Israel has undertaken include the transfer of funds to Abbas, the removal of roadblocks, the release of Fatah prisoners from Israeli jails, and the removal of 250 individuals from Israel's wanted list, including local Tanzim leader Zakariah Zbeidi. In return, these former wanted men have agreed to lay down their weapons. In addition, Israel has agreed in principle to allow Nayef Hawatmeh to enter the Palestinian Authority for a limited time. Hawatmeh was the mastermind behind the 1974 attack on a school in Ma'alot, in which 26 students were killed.

Recent events in Gaza have proven to be the greatest test of Abbas's time in power. As the dust begins to settle, a strong Palestinian leadership will be required to play a critical role in determining the future of the Palestinian people, and it is questionable whether Abbas and the recently installed government, led by Prime Minister Dr. Salam Fayad, are up to the task.

## THE PAGE BEFORE LAST

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# Hail the Peresident

**O**n Sunday, July 15, Shimon Peres became Israel's ninth president, hopefully putting an end to one of the uglier chapters in the country's political history. Given that Peres's two most recent predecessors – Moshe Katsav and Ezer Weizmann – were both forced to leave the presidential residence under clouds of suspicion (and in Katsav's case, that would be stating things rather diplomatically), one would think – indeed hope – that Peres, Israel's eternal elder statesman, would regard restoring some semblance of honor to the highest office in the land as one of his primary tasks.

Peres, while commanding a great deal of respect abroad, has frequently been shunted aside in the domestic arena and, until now, had been unable to win even a single election. One rather memorable scene shows Peres addressing (and being heckled by) members of his own Labor party. In a fit of excitement he called out, "I'm a loser? I'm a loser?" – to which his fellow politicians responded with a resounding "Yes!" Certainly not one of his finer moments, but one that perfectly exemplifies the curse that has seemed to dog Peres for most of his political career.



Associated Press

*A place of his own ... at last*

In Israel, the position of president is one that is largely ceremonial, one that involves diplomatic savvy, whose ideal candidate is an individual with excellent interpersonal skills. Shimon Peres would seem like the ideal candidate. So no one was more surprised than he when Likud candidate Moshe Katsav won the presidential elections seven years ago, despite the fact that Peres had been considered the clear front runner. Following what must have been a humiliating defeat, Peres did what he's always done. He picked himself up and soldiered on. Refusing to give up, he gracefully took his leave, despite having reached an age far beyond the usual retirement age and waited for another opportunity.

As for Katsav's stint in office, in a country where members of the public have ceased to be shocked by the goings-on of its politicians, Katsav has managed to shock nonetheless.

In handing down Katsav's plea bargain agreement, Attorney General Menahem Mazuz stated that the charges listed in the agreement were very grave and should not be taken lightly. He did not want to risk inflicting even greater damage on the office of the president in the eyes of Israelis, and he wanted to spare the pain and global humiliation of a trial. The Supreme Court, however, may yet have the last word on this.

Which brings us back to Shimon Peres. At a time when global support for Israel is on the wane, choice of leadership and the image presented to the world are critical. Israel cannot afford any more blows to its already precarious image, and it would seem that the government has finally realized this. Peres, who managed to win the elections *despite* the fact that he received full backing from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will have his work cut out for him as he attempts to restore in Israelis a sense of pride for Israel's highest office while doing his best to represent his country's interests in the world community.

We can only wish him the best of luck.