

ISRAEL INSTALLS SEVENTH PRESIDENT WITH PAGEANTRY AND HOPES FOR PEACE

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 13 (JTA) -- Israel spared little in its lavish inauguration Thursday of the seventh president of Israel, Ezer Weizman, the hawk-turned-dove politician and former air force commander.

Outside the Knesset prior to the swearing-in, the red carpet was rolled out, an honor guard stood at attention and blaring trumpets heralded the transfer of presidential power from incumbent Chaim Herzog to Weizman.

Inside, following a farewell speech by Herzog, who held the presidency for 10 years, Weizman, 68, took the oath of office for the five-year, largely ceremonial post. The sound of shofars signaled that the transition was completed.

Knesset Speaker Shevach Weiss proclaimed the traditional "Long live the president of Israel!" which those assembled echoed three times.

In his 15-minute speech, Weizman recounted Israel's struggles to establish itself as a state where world Jewry would settle, celebrated how much the country has developed since its inception and sounded his hopes for peace.

He said that while problems such as social inequities have not been eliminated, there have been tremendous achievements that compare favorably to those of far bigger countries, and this in spite of constant threats to Israel's survival.

He said it is Israel's mission to sound a positive message about itself so that more Jews will be drawn to make aliyah. He also said that the successful integration of the immigrants who have already come should be considered vital to Israel's security.

Final Plea For Electoral Reform

Weizman observed that the course of his own life, particularly his military endeavors, has paralleled that of the country.

He said he had hoped all his life for the day Israel would realize peace so that the death and suffering that had punctuated Israel's short existence would end and the country could focus on developing economically, socially, educationally and culturally.

Today, Weizman said, all of the nation's efforts must be invested in the current peace process. But he also made a point of noting that the Arabs joined this process only after they realized they could not destroy Israel and did not want to miss the chance to develop the Middle East economically and culturally.

Weizman said he hoped peace with the Arabs would be realized during his presidency.

Herzog, in his speech, recounted the changes that had occurred and the challenges Israel had faced during his decade in office.

He also pointed to the weaknesses in the structure of the Israeli government and called for electoral reform that would enhance democracy and increase the stability of the national leadership.

He said there needs to be a clearer separation of government powers and more accountability by Knesset members to the public.

NEWS ANALYSIS:

ISRAEL'S SEVENTH PRESIDENT LIKELY TO HAVE DIMINISHED POLITICAL ROLE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 13 (JTA) -- It seemed only fitting that the inauguration of Ezer Weizman as Israel's seventh president should take place this week in the midst and in spite of the dramatic coalition crisis that engulfed Israeli politics.

For Weizman will have a much less political role than his predecessors when a new reform goes into effect with the next Knesset elections.

Until now, one of the president's key functions in a largely ceremonial post was to choose, after general elections, the Knesset member whom he judged to be best-suited to forge a stable political coalition and form a government. The president also now performs that function should the government collapse after losing a Knesset no-confidence vote.

In the next Israeli election, however, citizens will vote twice: once for the party of their choice and once for the politician they want to be prime minister.

This direct ballot for prime minister means that in no political circumstance will it fall to the president to choose between vying leaders -- a role that can assume much importance if the competing parties and blocs are closely balanced.

It was a realization of the post's diminished political influence that the Knesset's election last month of Weizman, a politically controversial dove, caused no political ripples, even among the right.

To the contrary, Weizman's winning smile and engaging personality have prompted a wall-to-wall warmth in the Knesset that ensures a happy inauguration.

Weizman and his many well-wishers hope and believe that these same qualities will ensure a sustained noncontroversial atmosphere around his presidency.

If so, Weizman will have broken with a penchant in his long career, as an air force officer and then politician, for being at the center of every passing storm.

Irrepressible, with a vocabulary often spiced with bad language picked up during his days with Britain's Royal Air Force, Weizman has managed to offend most leading Israelis at one time or another over the years.

But most of those offended have ultimately been reconciled by his great charm and infectious bonhomie.

Strong Belief In Peace Process

Weizman started out in politics on the right. He orchestrated Likud's election victory of 1977 and was appointed minister of defense by a grateful Menachem Begin.

Weizman nudged and prodded Begin toward signing the Camp David accords and the peace treaty with Egypt, but resigned in disgust at what he felt was the late premier's reneging on peace commitments, including those involving Palestinian autonomy.

Weizman went on to lead a small but influential Yachad party he founded, which sided with

Labor in the unity governments of the 1980s and moved steadily toward the more dovish wing of Labor, advocating talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

He managed to emerge from all of this a popular and well-loved national figure.

Weizman's hardest task as president, as he acknowledges, will be to keep his more controversial thoughts and feelings bottled up inside.

The president in Israel is expected to express the nation's "consensus" -- an elusive commodity even for such mild-mannered of his predecessors as Ephraim Katzir and Chaim Herzog.

Weizman follows in the footsteps of his late uncle, Chaim Weizmann, who served as Israel's first president (and spelled his last name differently).

The elder Weizmann died in office embittered because he felt that Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion had constructed the presidency specifically to keep Weizman at arm's length from the real seat of power.

The younger Weizman, though having lost his only son in a fatal accident last year and suffering from a military injury, seems to harbor no bitterness in his makeup.

Approaching 70, he appears reconciled to his detachment from power. But sources close to Weizman believe that despite the limitations of the role, he intends to play his part -- perhaps a vital part again, as he did at Camp David -- in bringing Israel and its other Arab neighbors into an era of peace.

NINTH ROUND OF PEACE TALKS ENDS WITH REGRET OVER LACK OF PROGRESS

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, May 13 (JTA) -- The ninth round of Middle East peace talks ended this week amid statements of regret that more had not been accomplished in three weeks of intense discussions between Israel and its Arab negotiating partners.

The regrets, at least on the Israeli side, were tempered with a sense that the negotiations had been useful and that the parties had managed, at last, to discuss some issues of substance.

But the Arab parties, notably the Palestinian and Syrian delegation leaders, were blunt in declaring that no progress had been made.

The talks are expected to resume sometime in June.

As the round of talks drew to an end Thursday, the U.S. government, in its role as co-sponsor and self-declared "full partner" of the peace process, was trying a last-ditch effort to get the Israelis and Palestinians to agree on a joint statement.

The Americans, by presenting both sides with an American draft of a joint statement, apparently hoped that if the parties agreed to sign off on it, this round of talks would have ended on a note of progress.

On Wednesday night, American officials invited Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to discuss the document at the State Department. The Israelis attended the meeting, but the Palestinians did not show up.

Palestinian chief negotiator Haidar Abdel-Shafi told reporters Thursday that his delegation did not see any "validity" in going to the State Department "to receive a paper."

He said that the Palestinian negotiators had since received a copy of the American statement

and that they had discussed it with American officials Thursday.

Negotiations on the statement were continuing Thursday at the State Department.

At news conferences Thursday, in separate hotels in downtown Washington, first the Arab delegations and then their Israeli counterparts offered fairly downbeat summaries of the past three weeks.

"It is disconcerting and embarrassing to tell you again that we have made no progress in the ninth round," Abdel-Shafi told reporters.

Abdel-Shafi said the Palestinians and Israelis disagreed over issues of territorial jurisdiction and the powers of a future elected Palestinian self-governing council.

'Leaving Here With Mixed Feelings'

Elyakim Rubinstein, the chief Israeli negotiator with the Palestinians, had a less bleak message for reporters. "We are leaving here with mixed feelings," he said.

On the positive side, Rubinstein said the Israelis welcomed the establishment during this ninth round of working groups that were set up to deal with autonomy, water and land control, and human rights concerns.

But he complained that the working groups' deliberations were suspended by the Palestinians before having "a chance to achieve enough."

Overall, he said, "time has not been wasted" because each side now knows where there are gaps in their respective thinking and where bridging the gaps could be possible.

Similarly, in the Israeli-Syrian talks, the Israeli negotiator gave a more positive presentation than his Arab counterpart.

Israel's chief negotiator with the Syrians, Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich, said Thursday that he had "mixed emotions" about the progress of the talks.

He said the fact that the two sides were able to pick up virtually where they left off five months ago was a positive sign, since Israel and Syria do not have a history of friendly relations.

Syrian chief negotiator Mowaffak al-Allaf, on the other hand, had few encouraging words.

"There is no progress whatsoever during the ninth round," he told reporters Thursday.

The Israeli-Syrian track was bogged down throughout the round over definitions of terms.

The Syrians have offered Israel "full peace," in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. But the Israelis are waiting for the Syrians to delineate what they mean by "full peace" before discussing the territorial concessions they are prepared to make.

On the Israeli-Jordanian track, things seemed to be in something of a holding pattern.

Jordanian negotiator Abdel Salam al-Majali told reporters Thursday that unless there is "good enough progress" on the Palestinian track, it is "unlikely" there will be great progress on the Jordanian track.

"We do not want ever to see the peace cut into small pieces," Majali said. "It should be comprehensive."

In the Israeli-Lebanese talks, the two sides debated respective proposals. The Israelis on Thursday presented the Lebanese with a series of questions relating to a Lebanese document given to Israeli negotiators earlier this week.

Earlier in the round, the Israelis had proposed setting up a working group to deal with military issues.

FARRAKHAN'S OVERTURES TO JEWS FAILING TO IMPRESS THEIR TARGETS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, May 13 (JTA) -- Louis Farrakhan, the militant Black Muslim leader, is in the midst of one of his periodic efforts to convince Jews that he is not as bad as they think he is.

Every few years Farrakhan makes a spate of overtures to individual Jews who he feels can carry a message back to their constituents.

In the past few weeks, he has played the music of Felix Mendelssohn to try to impress the Jewish community with his good will, and has entertained a Jewish gossip columnist at his home for dinner.

Over the past several months, he has tried to initiate meetings with Jews in several cities, some of whom are religious leaders and some of whom are representatives of Jewish organizations.

Over the years that he has been extending similar offers, a handful of those invited have met with him over dinner at the Farrakhan home in Chicago, although most have turned down these opportunities as well as invitations to appear with him on stage.

Those who have spurned his invitations say that his magnanimous rhetoric about wanting reconciliation with the Jews has not been matched by any changes in practices that many consider to be overtly and profoundly anti-Semitic.

According to Alberto Mizrahi, a Conservative cantor in Chicago, who was invited to join Farrakhan in a performance for the Nation of Islam leader's 60th birthday on May 17, "this is a classic example of someone who cries wolf once too many times.

"Every spring there's an outreach to the Jews and then he says 'they don't like me, they don't want me.' If he proves, even over a short time, that he changes his verbiage, then perhaps we can participate," said Mizrahi.

Last month, Farrakhan made a splash in The New York Times by performing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto at a conference on classical music and the black musician, which took place in Winston-Salem, N.C.

His choice of Mendelssohn was apparently supposed to be symbolic of his desire to reconcile with American Jews, although Mendelssohn's family converted to Christianity.

'Singing Quite A Different Tune'

But only days before, Nation of Islam representatives had disrupted an exhibit on black-Jewish history in Roxbury, Mass., wanting to include their own panels on Jewish responsibility for the slave trade and Jewish spying on blacks.

The mixed message was typical of Farrakhan, said Kenneth Stern, program specialist on anti-Semitism at the American Jewish Committee.

"On the one hand he's playing music and on the other, he's singing quite a different tune in promoting anti-Semitism," Stern said.

One Chicago Jew who accepted a recent Farrakhan invitation is the popular society columnist Irv Kupcinet, known to readers of the Chicago Sun-Times as "Kup."

Kupcinet joined Farrakhan and his aides at the Farrakhan home for dinner in early May.

Kupcinet, whose column has appeared in the pages of the Chicago Sun Times five times a week for the past half-century, was impressed by what the Black Muslim leader had to say.

Since the dinner, Kupcinet has mentioned

Farrakhan's desire to better relations with the Jews several times in his column.

"He was saying he is evolving and changing, as we all are. He emphasized that he no longer says the white man is the devil, and he says 'we hope to keep evolving and have rapprochement with the Jewish community,'" Kupcinet told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Kupcinet said he hopes to arrange a meeting for Farrakhan with area rabbis and Jewish leaders within the next several weeks.

If he does, one Chicago resident who plans to attend is Reform Rabbi Robert Marx.

Marx had dinner with Farrakhan twice, once in 1989 and once the following year.

The "dinners were friendly, cordial, tended to ramble at the end, and ended with our feeling that we ought to quietly explore opportunities of rapprochement," Marx said.

"He was respected by a significant segment of the black community," said Marx, and "we hoped to change his attitudes about Jews."

Soon after that, Marx extended two written invitations to Farrakhan, to come meet with Jews next on "Jewish turf," to "look for some concrete results from our dialogue."

There was "no response whatsoever," said Marx. "Silence."

Requests to interview Minister Farrakhan for this article were not answered.

Has Not 'Cleaned Up His Act'

Sherry Frank, who runs the Atlanta office of the American Jewish Committee, was one of those approached by the Nation of Islam to meet with Farrakhan in early October, shortly before tens of thousands of Atlantans filled the city's Dome arena to hear Farrakhan.

She and the other invited Atlanta Jewish leaders turned him down.

"When he comes to town, he sells 'The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews' and 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,'" said Frank, referring to two tracts widely regarded as anti-Semitic. "There's nothing that tells me he's cleaned up his act."

"The Secret Relationship," published in 1991 by the historical research department of the Nation of Islam, purports to reveal the central involvement of Jews in the black slave trade.

According to AJCommittee's Stern, "The Secret Relationship" is "one of the top 10 anti-Semitic writings of this century.

"There is no greater slander to create in the black community than that Jews are responsible for slavery."

In his recently published book, "Holocaust Denial," Stern writes that the Nation of Islam's weekly newspaper, The Final Call, "regularly features anti-Semitic tirades."

Said Stern in an interview, "From time to time over the years, Farrakhan has said he wants to talk or have dialogue with the Jews, so it's not entirely new," said Stern. "But it has always been disingenuous and continues to be."

According to Michael Kotzin, director of the Chicago Jewish Community Relations Council, before Jewish leaders meet with Farrakhan, he should "pull back" from publishing "The Secret Relationship" and "tell his people so."

Added Kotzin, "Until that happens it would be inappropriate for a representative of the Jewish community to meet with him, because it could be seen as playing into his hands without any prospect of doing good."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

20-YEAR-OLD IMMIGRANT FROM UKRAINE IS NOW THE BEAUTIFUL FACE OF ISRAEL
By Michele Chablin

TEL AVIV, May 13 (JTA) -- In spite of the difficulties facing new immigrants, there are some inspiring success stories.

Take Yana Khodyrker, formerly of Ukraine. In Israel just two years, Khodyrker is already a well-known face throughout the country.

In March, the comely university student was named Miss Israel 1993, and on May 21 she will represent the country at the Miss Universe Contest in Mexico City.

The 20-year-old from Kiev beat out more than 2,000 hopeful young applicants to win the Miss Israel Contest, which was organized by the women's magazine La Isha.

"When friends of mine suggested I enter the contest, I didn't take it very seriously, but I thought it would be fun," Khodyrker said during a Tel Aviv photo shoot last month.

"But really, I didn't expect to win," she maintained.

By international standards, the prizes awarded to Miss Israel are quite modest: Khodyrker received a red sports car, clothes and other gifts, but no money or scholarships.

During her year as the reigning Miss Israel, she is contractually required to appear in advertisements for several of the contest's sponsors, such as Gottex bathing suits and Ellen Betrix cosmetics.

This year, more than 2,000 young women entered the contest, says Daniella Shapira, an editor at La Isha. Of these, 30 became finalists.

According to Shapira, the contest is open to all single Israeli women, age 17 and up. After filling out a form, the editors invite the applicants to come in for an interview.

During the interview, the applicants are required to wear bathing suits "so that the judges can see the girl's figure," Shapira said.

Orthodox And Arabs Generally Don't Compete

"The contest is open to all Israeli citizens, regardless of religion. But since most religious Jewish girls, and the majority of Arab girls, will not don a bathing suit in public, they do not compete in the contest," Shapira said.

Arab women wishing to enter a pageant may enter the Miss Arab World Contest, which has a more modest dress code.

In their search for Miss Israel, the judges take many factors into consideration, said Shapira.

"The girls must have a pretty face, a good figure, and be at least 1 meter, 70 in height (5 feet, 6 inches). She must be at least a high-school senior, with plans to serve in the army or Sherut Leumi (National Service).

"She must also have good grades, engage in extracurricular activities and do volunteer service to those in need."

The contest and its criteria have drawn harsh criticism from women's advocacy groups, which maintain that beauty contests demean women by casting them as sexual objects.

"I very much object to these kinds of contests on the grounds that they focus on a woman's body at the expense of her other attributes," said Anat Hoffman, who monitors the image of women in the media for the Israel Women's Network.

"The judges rank the contestants according

to a rigid formula of beauty that few women conform to. Winners must be very tall, very thin and have very little body hair. And it helps to be blond.

"Look at this year's winner. She looks just like a Barbie Doll. Is this the image Israel wants to convey to the world?" Hoffman asked.

Khodyrker declined to comment on the charges against the contest, preferring instead to concentrate on the job at hand: a beauty shoot for the Betrix cosmetics firm.

In a small room at the back of the Ben Lamm photo studio, Khodyrker studied English as a makeup artist fussed over her blond locks and searing blue eyes.

She then slid into the clothes chosen for her: a sexy midriff top and safari shorts.

She was a bit stiff as she posed before the camera and conceded that she was still "a bit nervous doing modeling shoots. Before winning the contest I had never done a modeling job, so this is all very new to me," she said in fluent Hebrew.

"I know this is a little hard to believe, but entering a beauty pageant was the last thing on my mind when I came on aliyah with my parents and younger brother two years ago.

"I was a first-year chemistry major in Kiev when we moved to Israel, and I'm majoring in biology at Tel Aviv University. These days, I try to juggle my studies with my modeling."

Juggling the two is sometimes difficult, she admitted.

"It's hectic right now, with my class work and the modeling jobs, but I'm determined to finish university and get my degree," she said.

"When I won the contest, my parents told me, 'We're proud of you, but getting your degree is more important than modeling, and we expect you to find a balance.'"

"Yana definitely has a future as a model," said Ben Lamm, the photographer. "She is very beautiful, and she has all the qualities it takes to be a successful model: great eyes, a beautiful body, graceful hands. Most important, she has brains and she's nice to work with."

Khodyrker blushed when she heard this.

"It's easy to get swept away by this kind of talk, but I'm determined to keep a steady head and to remember how difficult it was in the beginning, when we first arrived in Israel."

After two years in the country, she said, "I'm finally starting to feel at home. It took a while, but my family has finally sorted things out. My parents are working, and we just purchased an apartment in Rishon le-Zion. We've learned the language, and things are getting easier."

POP LYRICS AIN'T NECESSARILY SO
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 13 -- Representatives of Israel Broadcasting Authority's committee on language and other Hebrew scholars met this week with members of the recording industry to look into how to improve grammar in popular radio songs.

IBA's language adviser, Ruth Almagor, reportedly insisted that the objective was not censorship but the prevention of a grammatical abuse of Hebrew.

The music industry representatives agreed to come up with a mechanism whereby the lyrics would be given to language experts for their evaluation.