

In 2005 Isracard, owned by Bank Hapoalim, made NIS 120m. in profits. Leumi Card made NIS 63m. in the same period, and Visa Cal earned NIS 90m. in profits.

## Arkia Gets Scheduled Status

Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz has granted Arkia Airlines its first scheduled operator license for flights to Larnaca, Cyprus, which El Al recently dropped, and to Dublin, Ireland.

The Transportation Ministry said Mofaz approved Arkia's request to fly between Ben Gurion and Larnaca International Airport because of the importance of keeping the route open between the two countries.

El Al notified the ministry last month that it would stop its flights beginning March 1 due to the low income generated by the route.

El Al flew four flights a week to the Greek island city in summer and three in winter. An Arkia representative said it would operate two to four flights a week, depending on the season.

Meanwhile, Mofaz also upgraded Arkia's status on its flights to Dublin from being a charter flight operator to a scheduled flight operator. The carrier will provide one scheduled flight a week to the Irish capital, starting in the summer.

## Greens: State Should Fund Haifa Cleanup After Oil Refinery Sale

Under the terms of the Haifa Oil Refineries sale, the state is no longer responsible for the repair of environmental damage; they now become the buyers' responsibility.

Nevertheless, the executive director of the Israel Union for Environmental Defense (Adam, Teva Vedin), Tzipi Iser Itzik, claims that part of the amount the state received from the sale should be used to address Haifa Bay hazards and pollution prevention.

"This is the right time to allocate resources produced from the sale for the benefit of the public and environment in the Haifa Bay," Iser Itzik said.

"For years, the state has avoided addressing in a systematic

and comprehensive manner the many environmental problems that the refineries created in the area. With their sale, the excuse of a lack of resources to fund a cleanup can no longer be bandied about."

According to forecasts, the future cost of preventing environmental damage and modification of the industry to an advanced state is estimated at NIS 800m.; the cost of claims related to the pollution of the Kishon River is estimated at NIS 650m.

## MKs Support Move to Scrap Wisconsin Plan

The Knesset Labor, Welfare and Health Committee last week said it would support scrapping the Mehalev "welfare-to-work" program, commonly known as the Wisconsin Plan.

During the panel's meeting, Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Eli Yishai said Mehalev had been a failure and that he had already notified all those involved that it would not continue beyond July, when contracts for the two-year pilot expire.

Yishai added that only 8% or 9% of participants had managed to find work.

The Wisconsin program, which began operation in August 2005, has been consistently criticized for attempting to force unemployed people who are elderly, disabled or totally unsuitable for employment to participate in the program full-time or have their welfare benefits stopped.

Interestingly, the Bank of Israel last week expressed a different opinion about the Wisconsin program. In a position paper it issued, the central bank said that while it had experienced problems in its first two years, the problems should be corrected and the program should be continued and even expanded.

## 8% Rise in Assisted-Living Units

A Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Israel report shows that the number of assisted-living units for the elderly rose by 8% in 2006, with an additional 700 units planned to be built this year.

According to the study, Mishan is the largest assisted-living network in Israel, with the highest

# Tourism Industry Concerned By Herzog's Departure

Many who work in the country's tourism industry have expressed their deep disappointment that Isaac Herzog agreed to give up the tourism portfolio for the Social Affairs Ministry, fearing that his efforts to rehabilitate the industry following the war would now go down the drain.

Leaders of industry groups recalled that he insisted that northern tourism operators be properly and quickly compensated and successfully wrangled more marketing money out of the Treasury, while also pushing for implementation of other projects to boost tourism.

They noted that Herzog himself had expressed a reluctance to leave the post, knowing he was leaving important work unfinished.

"We are very sorry that he is leaving," said Ami Etgar, director general of the Incoming Tour Operators Association. "First, because he was a good tourism minister, and second, because tourism in Israel is still shaken up following the Lebanon war and is in need of continuous leadership."

"He understood the sector's problems, was very active and had a wonderful way of expressing himself in English, which is very important when dealing with elements abroad," said Etgar. "This coming and going within a few months is not good for tourism."

Tour operators in the north were especially disappointed and expressed their protest over Herzog's departure.

"In the summer of 2006 we experienced a catastrophe here. We have barely managed to recover, and if we manage, it's mostly thanks to the minister's blessed activity," said Chaim Barom, director general of the Western Galilee Tourism Association.

"The industry in its present



Will tourism be affected by a change in ministers?

state cannot wait around, and the new minister will need a running-in period, which may cause damage."

This was echoed by Eli Gonen, president of the Israel Hotel Association.

"The arrival of a new minister is a sign of another period of stagnation in the tourism industry," Gonen said. "We feel that we are going to lose this year. It's not going to be an easy 2007, and if we don't wake up, it will affect 2008 as well."

His replacement, Esterina Tartman of Yisrael Beiteinu, has raised some fears of her own. Some quarters are concerned that the party's allegedly racist image abroad might cause damage to the sensitive tourism industry, and note that Tartman herself has made anti-Arab remarks.

Others are worried that all the plans recently put into place — including priority investment areas based on a report by Ernst & Young — will be changed to conform to Yisrael Beiteinu's ideology.

The priority investment areas model excludes Judea and

Samaria, focusing instead on the Galilee and Yerushalayim, as well as rural tourism in Arab communities.

Ministry officials expressed concern that investments in Arab communities might be tossed aside because Tartman will oppose them.

They had further cause for worry when Channel 2 revealed Sunday that Tartman, who was seriously injured in a car accident 10 years ago, has been classified by the National Insurance Institute as being 52% disabled and unable to work more than four hours a day.

According to the report, her ability to listen, remember and concentrate was affected by the accident.

Tartman responded to the report Sunday by saying, "Unfortunately, 10 years ago I was in a car accident that has caused me pain ever since. I hope to be an example to many people that despite a body in pain, the spirit can remain strong and stable."

Tartman added that she took pride in not allowing her handicap to limit her functioning.

## PATH TO STABILITY continued from page A25

Keep up-to-date with the latest educational methodology, upgrade your skills by attending professional development seminars, and inspire yourself by focusing on the inherent value of your work and on the impact you can potentially have on your students' lives. If you are convinced that you are indeed a dedicated, talented and professional teacher, others will believe you.

When working with private students, conduct your lessons professionally. Begin on time; do not answer telephone calls during a lesson and make your students feel important.

The first few students will probably be the most difficult to find. Once you establish yourself as a successful tutor, however, you will likely find that clients will start flocking to you.

As the demand for your services increases, you can notch your prices up gradually. Hopefully, you will eventually reach the point where you are so swamped with work that you will be able to give up your regular teaching job and focus on what you enjoy: working one-on-one with private students.

# Plastic and Rubber Exports to Double

The plastic and rubber industry is expected to double its exports within six to seven years to \$4b. annually because of an increase in world demand for these products, says Dr. Ilan Tessler, chairman of the plastic and rubber manufacturers association in the Manufacturers Association and CEO of Plasson.

In 2006, plastic and rubber exports increased 10% to \$2b.

Among the items in high demand are plastic packaging products, agricultural products, construction components, medical implements and household items. Tessler notes that the world trend to replace aluminum, carton and paper with plastic materials is part of the reason for the rosy outlook.

The plastic and rubber industry



(KHENG GUAN TOH)

hired 100 new workers last year, for a total of 21,300. There are still 300 positions that need to be filled by skilled workers. Tessler estimates that within six to seven years, the number of plastic and

rubber exporters will increase by 20% to 180 exporters, compared with the current 150 companies.

Likewise, he believes that an additional 10 to 15 countries around the world will import Is-

raeli plastic and rubber products, over the 50 that already do so.

The largest market for plastic and rubber products is the United States, with \$413m. in exports; Britain takes second place, with \$230m., followed by Germany, with \$174m., Italy, with \$152m. and France, with \$110m. Among other countries importing products are Australia, Canada, Mexico, India, China and Argentina.

Tessler also added that 25 plastic and rubber manufacturers exported \$48m. in products to Arab countries, which is a 10% increase above last year.

Arab countries mainly import plastic agricultural products, plastic sheeting and boards for hothouses, sprinkler systems, irrigation systems, home and garden needs and disposable dishes.