



## MOREIRA LIMA

BRAZIL'S AMBASSADOR  
TO ISRAEL

BY NEIL SANDLER

*"Like Brazilians, Israelis have the same informality, and happy appreciation for life. That is why they like each other so much,"* says Brazilian Ambassador Moreira Lima.

The Brazilian Ambassador had never been to Israel before he was posted here in February 2003, just before the Iraq War. Upon his arrival he was impressed with Israel's modernity and has been very encouraged by the improvement of Brazil-Israel relations.

Ties have been strengthened in cultural and economic fields as seen in the exchange of high-level visitors in the last three years. Then Vice-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited Brazil in March 2005 and met President Lula. In May, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim visited Israel and met with Olmert and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. These important visits resulted in the reestablishment of high-level governmental contacts. For the first time, Brazil and Israel established a mechanism for diplomatic consultations, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding in May, inaugurated last December in Brasilia.

Negotiations between Israel and Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) for the establishment of a free trade area started last February and the Ambassador hopes they will be concluded this year. A level playing field for commercial exchanges will boost Brazilian and Mercosur business with Israel, he says.

In 2005, Brazilian business delegations came to Israel on three different occasions: during the visits of the Foreign Minister, of the Minister of Industry and Trade, Furlan, and of the Governor of Sao Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin, now running for the Brazilian presidency in the coming elections, next October.

On the Israel side, a delegation from the Manufacturers Association of Israel accompanied Vice-Prime Minister Olmert on his visit to Brazil. It laid the groundwork for two Memoranda of Understanding signed last year with the MAI and the Business Federations of the States of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

In January 2006, an important agreement to avoid double taxation entered into force between Israel and Brazil. For Ambassador Moreira Lima, it is an important instrument to boost more bilateral business and investment. Agreements for cooperation on agriculture, health and customs have also been negotiated, he said.



Trade between Brazil and Israel has grown from \$400 million to almost \$800 million in 3 years. Brazil is Israel's largest trade partner in Latin America. Brazil has presented record exports in the last three years, but Israel still has a surplus due to significant exports of chemicals and fertilizers. Exports range from meat, soy orange juice to equipment for cellular phone and jewelry. Avionics is one of the sectors in economic and technological bilateral cooperation. Brazil is the largest producer



of medium-size commercial aircraft in the world. Ambassador Moreira Lima brought Embraer to Israel to demonstrate the company's new family of 100 seat commercial jets.

Brazil is a "melting pot", having the second-largest Jewish community in Latin America. Two Brazilian TV stations have been covering daily events in Israel since the Ambassador's posting. Brazilian music, soap operas, and movies are very popular in Israel. Ambassador Moreira Lima launched Brazilian films, such as the acclaimed "City of Gods", at the 2003 Eilat Festival. Every year a Brazilian Film Festival is organized in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa. Capoeira, the popular Afro-Brazilian martial art, is a part of the Israeli physical educational system. In 2005, there was the largest exhibition ever of Brazilian naive art in Israel, during the visit of FM Amorim. Last year, by invitation of the Tel Aviv Mayor, Ambassador Moreira Lima celebrated the National Day of Brazil in Dizengoff Square with thousands of people, an event which was widely covered by the media.

Brazil, with a population of 186 million, has a border with 10 countries with a length longer than the distance from Rio to Jerusalem. Brazil also has great historical experience in negotiating treaties and, according to the Ambassador "to make the best politics and

economics out of its geography, converting frontiers into cooperation areas”.

Ambassador Sergio Eduardo Moreira Lima was born in Rio de Janeiro. He served in the Brazilian Embassies in Washington, Lisbon, in the Brazilian Mission to the United Nations, and was Deputy Ambassador in London, before being posted as Ambassador to Israel. Ambassador Lima and his wife, Ana Maria, feel "at home" in Israel. They say Israelis and Brazilians have the same happy appreciation for life, enjoy freedom, and are informal. Like Brazilians, Israelis are also a people from many different cultures. Ana Maria organized the traditional "Meet my Country" with the International Club. She visits hospitals, enjoys antiques and interior design, and has re-designed their home into an even more beautiful gathering place in Herzliya Pituach. Ana Maria has organized parties for the Governors of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, members of the Brazilian Parliament, Brazilian Ministers and other authorities at the Ambassador's residence.

Ambassador Moreira Lima and his wife have supported in Israel some philanthropic institutions such as the Tsad Kadima, which assists children afflicted with cerebral palsy.

They have a son and two daughters. One daughter, Juliana, is a journalist in Brasilia for *Correio Brasiliense*, specializing in Fashion, and has just received a scholarship for a Master's Degree in Fashion Journalism at the London College of Fashion. His son, Sergio, and daughter Patricia, live in



London. Sergio, is a graduate of London School of Economics, and works for Barclay Bank. Patricia has a public relations firm in London. All three children visit their parents regularly, enjoying their stay in Israel. They have been here twice, and will be visiting again in June. They also feel as much at home here, as in Rio.

Ambassador Moreira Lima plays tennis at Accadia in Herzliya Pituach with a group of diplomats and Israelis. There is a large Brazilian community in Israel with around 10,000 members. The Ambassador is always raising the profile of this community which strengthens Brazil-Israel ties. Among some of its prestigious members are the architect of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, David Reznik, and Myrna Herzog, the world-famous viola da gamba musician, whose Wind and Sea project of combining Villa Lobos and Dorival Caymmi songs was launched in one of the concerts at the Ambassador's Residence. Last year, Ambassador Moreira Lima distinguished Professor Samario Chaitchik, a Brazilian-Israeli physician and scientist, with the Rio Branco award, the highest decoration of the Brazilian foreign service.

The Brazilian government has a representative office in Ramallah, and has an Ambassador-at-Large to the Middle East. The Embassy has just opened an honorary consulate in Haifa. Ambassador Moreira Lima believes Israel can make an important contribution to the region and to the world in science and technology. The Ambassador notes the high level of the diplomatic corps in Israel, due to the importance of the region as a "nerve center". It can affect the price of oil, interest rates, availability of capital and investments, world tensions and so forth, so countries carefully watch what happens here. He maintains strong relationships with other diplomats, including those of Latin America and the Portuguese-speaking countries, Portugal and Angola. With Brazil's almost 200 million people, Portuguese is one of the most widely-spoken languages in the world.



Ambassador Moreira Lima periodically gives lectures at Israeli Universities, such as Ben Gurion of the Negev, The University of Haifa, The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, The Truman Center for Advancement of Peace, Tel Aviv University and has an upcoming lecture in June at Bar Ilan University. His lectures focus on Brazilian civilization and Brazil-Israel relations. He often mentions the participation of Brazil in WWII, with 25,000 soldiers, embedded in the American Army, where his uncle was a hero brigadier in the Brazilian Air Force.

He also recalls with emotion the ceremony at Yad Vashem, when the late Brazilian Ambassador in Paris during the Nazi occupation, Souza Dantas, who saved over 400 Jews, was considered a Righteous among Nations.

The Embassy services over 40 requests for consultations per day, and recently the Brazil-Israel travel visa requirements were abolished. Servicing over 2000 Brazilian citizens in Palestinian territories is also challenging for the consular sector of the Embassy. The Ambassador is encouraged by the high level visits in 2005 and 2006 and is looking forward to enhancing this trend.

Tourism to Israel from Brazil has grown strongly in the last two years, as Brazil is the world's largest predominantly Catholic country, with many Evangelicals as well. Arkia has begun direct charter flights to Brazil, and Ambassador Moreira Lima showed nothing but optimism for the future of Brazilian-Israeli relations. ■