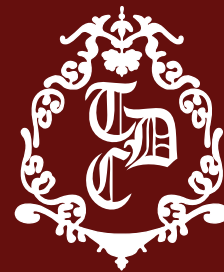


The Diplomatic Club



April 2009



PEOPLE

I WISH A GREAT
FUTURE FOR
ISRAEL

MIDDLE EAST DIGEST

LITHUANIAN
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FACTS

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PIRATES?



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Accounting	Roded Rinegold
Legal Support	Mati Simchovitz Law Office

The Diplomatic club Magazine
Printed monthly

Tel: 972-3-562.20.61/2
Fax: 972-3-562.02.12
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www.diplomacy-club.com

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This issue was composed in the atmosphere of the Passover, Easter and coming Shavuot Holidays.

Shavuot marked the end of the barley harvest, and the beginning of the wheat harvest. In honor of Shavuot's status as the "Day of First Fruits" and the "Harvest Festival", many kibbutzim and moshavim organize special celebrations revolving around these themes, including ceremonies in which new produce from the kibbutz or moshav is highlighted.

The Diplomatic Club will organize the
CHEESECAKE COMPETITION

This event will take place on the end of May, 2009, Herzeliya Pituah.

Context of event:

The Event will start at 10:00 a.m. Every country will bring a cake or other cheese/dairy product.

Recipes should be sent before to the Diplomatic Club Management and will be printed in a brochure and published in the Diplomatic Club Magazine.

The jury will include the most popular Israeli chefs: Ruth Keenan (chef and writer for Yediot Haharonot), Beni Saida (chef and writer) and Arik Porat (chef).

The jury and group of TV reporters will move from table to table. Each representative will introduce him/herself and country.

Categories for cheese cake competition are: 1. Visual 2. Taste 3. Creation

The Israeli cheese cake will be present in-life by chef Chaim Cohen (tentative).

During the competition the honorable jury will choose the best dish and the winner will receive a basket of cheese valued at 500 NIS.

All participants will receive a smaller basket of dairy products as well.

The Final will end with Israeli music by one of the participants of the local Eurovision contest.

We expect the participation of the guests in honor: Women in politic life, business women that will present they cheese cakes.

This idea was accepted enthusiastically by all Israeli media (News TV Channel 1,2,10, and newspapers) that agreed to broadcast and report on the Event on the same day.

We are looking forward seeing you all at this festival of milk products.

Sincerely Yours,
Julia Verdel
General Manager
The Diplomatic Club - Israel

I WISH A GREAT FUTURE FOR ISRAEL

By Tamar Dressler



Ambassador Noemy J. Baruch is not the typical ambassador, the impressive woman chose diplomacy as a second career after many years in the fashion design business in Costa Rica. She believes that nothing is out of reach if you work at achieving it. From the offices of the Costa Rican Embassy in Ramat Gan, it seems she has fully implemented her method.

Despite her experienced demeanor, she quickly reveals that Israel is her first international posting and unravels an unusual and inspiring life story.

She was born to a family of Jewish Polish immigrants in Costa Rica. Noemy Baruch's father, a Holocaust survivor, instilled in his 5 children the importance of education beyond all. And Ambassador Baruch followed his lead. After attending Architecture school in Costa Rica, she began her career as a children fashion designer and managed her own business for some 20 years. But nearing the age of 40 and already a mother of two, she decided it was time for an extreme change.

"Coming from a family of immigrants, I wanted to repay my country for all that it has given me. At first I closed my fashion business and enrolled in the University again to study political science, it was a life changing experience, I enjoyed my field of studies greatly and met many young people, this also allowed me a better understanding of my children who were going at the time through the same experience of acquiring a university education" she recalls.

Upon graduation she joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as Director of International Cooperation, setting the agenda on international aid issues, "it was

totally different than my former career and very exciting, representing my country at the UNDP (United Nations Development program) for example was definitely a fulfilling experience"

After five years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baruch completed the diplomatic core exams and was appointed Ambassador to Israel, where she's been serving for the past 6 years.

"Israel is a very interesting place to serve in, it is great fun but also very complicated, after 6 years one can grasp a better understanding of the Middle East, you learn to measure what is truly important and what are merely media spins.

I have served here in the war and during 3 elections and I've learned to be very careful about what I write back to the Ministry on Costa Rica. I am following closely the issue of Gilaad Shalit, but it is very hard for me to understand, I see no balance in the equation. I have been here when the bodies of the two dead IDF soldiers were returned; it was the saddest moment, seeing the two black coffins.



I put my efforts into positive things such as peace and alternative methods for co-existence and I have great hopes for a two state solution.

Being a seasoned diplomat after 6 years in Israel, Baruch shifts the focus to the more relevant issues other than politics, March 8th is the International Women day and Ambassador Baruch discusses in length women rights and status in Costa Rica and in Israel.

"Women were given the right to vote in 1948 in Costa Rica, long before any other country in Latin America and before many European countries as well, growing up as a Jewish woman in a Catholic country, I never felt discriminated against or underprivileged, despite being a Catholic state, religion is separated from the state and I never felt any discrimination as a Jew. Women in Costa Rica have equal representation in all sectors which is something that still needs improvement here, in Israel.

I meet many women on the private sector who have lead roles and positions but much less in the political sector, I think that might be derived from the fact that Costa Rica has no army and Israel values its mili-

tary and still sees men as commanders and this needs to be changed.

I followed Tzipi Livni's recent campaign and I saw her opponents trying to down play her abilities because she is a woman but still- she won. I hope she will be a good opposition leader if Kadima finally doesn't join the government.

Ambassador Baruch divorced from her first husband while working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; she is now re-married to an Israeli. "People change and not everyone is willing or able to accept that change in their partners".

Her daughter followed in her footsteps, coming to visit her mother in Israel some years ago, she fell in love with the country and decided to move to Israel where she is now married and a mother of a 9 months old baby girl, Baruch's first grandchild.

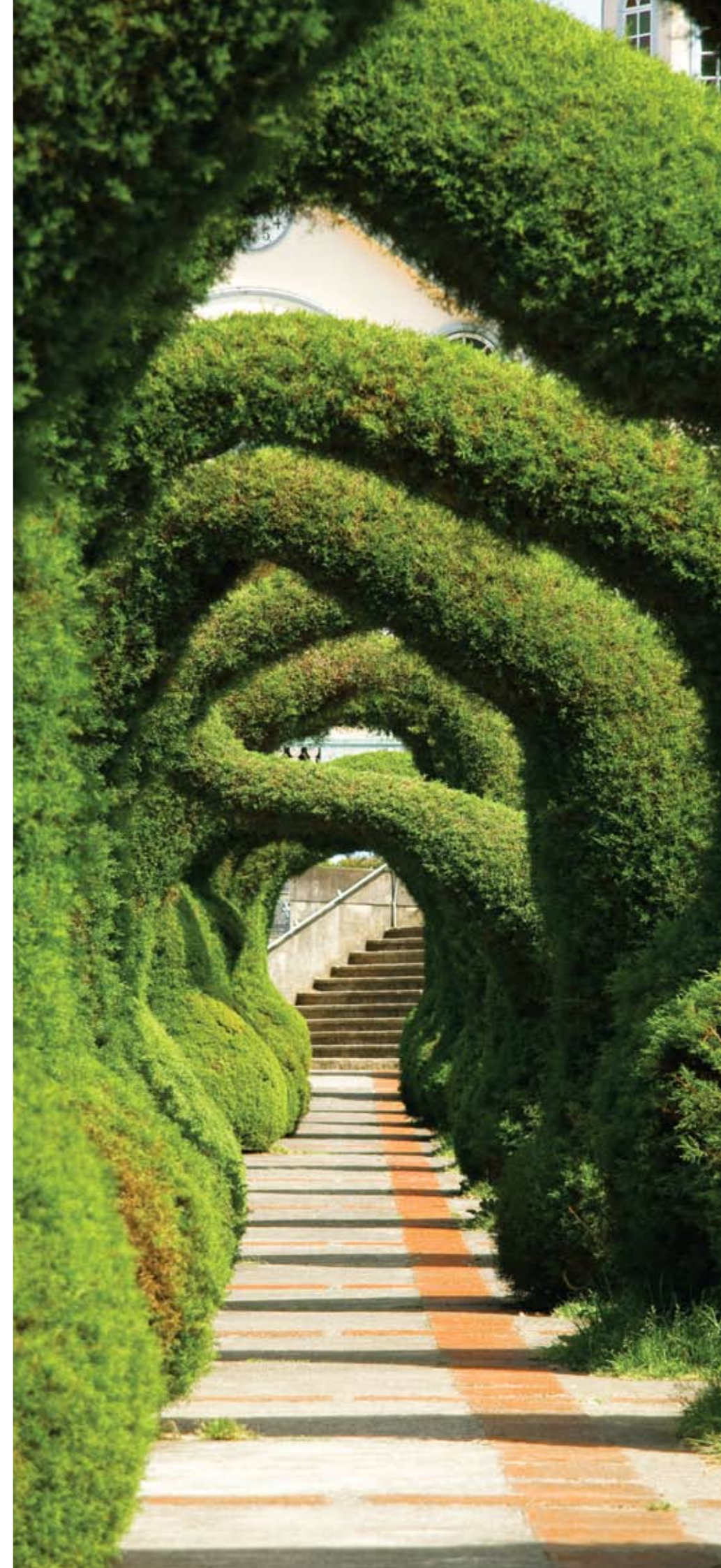
"despite my Jewish background, I quickly learned that Israel has a greater variety of people, traditions and folklore than I knew, I discovered Jewish communities I never knew existed before, I enjoy discovering new traditions and Israel is the place for this, I hope this diversity never disappears"

Baruch enjoys a very active social life which she does not limit to the diplomatic circle "I have friends from many sectors in Israel, artists and writers and many, many others; I believe it is the way to truly understand the country. For example, this is my way to understand the meaning of military service, a concept we do not have in Costa Rica and its importance to Israeli society. I also frequent art shows, I visit Shenkar fashion college nearby and see great young designers, I understand that many young Israeli fashion designers are working in Europe and I can see why, and of course I enjoy the different cuisine"

During her tenure, Baruch worked on developing business connections and tourism between Israel and Costa Rica " Israelis enjoy the freedom and beauty of our country, we encourage tourism and also do our best to assist business and technology initiatives between the two countries"

Elections will be held in Costa Rica in the beginning of 2010, and Noemy Baruch knows she might than be recalled or posted elsewhere after 7 years, but she is sure she will be content anywhere she goes " I seem to have that ability to always see the half full rather than half empty glass".

Having grown fond of Israel, the only Costa Rican embassy in the Middle East, Baruch wishes that Israel will see a day when Palestinian and Israeli mothers alike will no longer have to send their children to the heart of the conflict, and hopes that day is soon to come. ■



LITHUANIAN NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Photos by Mark Stranger

On February 16 Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in the State of Israel arranged a festive commemoration of the 91st anniversary of the restoration of the State of Lithuania. Knesset members, Government representatives, business, culture and academic elite, diplomatic corps, journalists and Lithuanian community guests have gathered to celebrate Lithuanian National holiday.

Lithuanian ambassador Ašta Skaisgirytė Liauškienė congratulated everybody on the occasion of the National holiday and expressed her sincerest gratitude for support, warmth and friendship which she experienced in Israel in the capacity of the Ambassador of Lithuania. This was the ambassador's farewell evening.



From the left: Amnon Dotan, The Chairman of Israel Federation of Bi-National Chambers of Commerce and Industry; H. E. ambassador Ašta Skaisgirytė Liauškienė; H. E. ambassador Yitzhak Eldan, Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Aleksandras, son of H. E. ambassador Ašta Skaisgirytė Liauškienė.



Lithuanian and Israeli anthems were solemnly performed by singer Aliza Blecharovitch Goldberg (in the left)



the staff of Lithuanian Embassy in Tel Aviv with their family members (H. E. ambassador Ašta Skaisgirytė Liauškienė in the middle)



participants



participants

IOSCO 2009 TO OUTLINE NEW ROLE OF REGULATORS IN TODAY'S GLOBAL MARKET SETTING

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOCUS HIGHLIGHTED AT LAST WEEK'S G-20 SUMMIT AT WHICH WORLD LEADERS PINNED ECONOMIC CRISIS ON LACK OF PROPER REGULATION

The organizing committee of IOSCO 2009 (www.iosco2009.org), the global securities regulators' most important annual event, announced today that the conference, to be held in Tel Aviv, Israel, June 8-11, will outline the new role regulators will play in stabilizing the global financial markets, as well as analyze the responsibility that national regulation and deregulation played in the crisis.

The importance of developing a comprehensive new role for regulators was magnified at last week's G-20 Conference in London at which world leaders said that "major failures in regulation had been the fundamental causes of the current economic crisis." The G-20 also vowed to impose stronger restraints on hedge funds, credit rating companies and executive pay as well as moved to establish a new Financial Stability Board that will allow greater means of communication between regulators and the IMF in providing early warnings of potential threats.

"In the wake of the 2008 crisis, regulators will inevitably face a new and vastly expanded mission, said Prof. John Coffee, a professor of law at Columbia University and an IOSCO 2009 panelist. "It will no longer be enough to assure full disclosure and transparency; rather regulators must come to grips with the problem of systemic risk and impose a degree of prudential financial oversight over institutions that are indeed "too big to fail." If regulators do not learn from the immediate past, they will be destined to repeat it."

In addressing the new role of regulators, IOSCO 2009 will focus on the inter-relationship and importance of cooperation between bank and securities regulation, as well as consideration of different regulatory models or approaches aimed at crisis prevention. Additionally, panelists will present strategies to help regulators overcome some of the greatest challenges facing them in today's global market.

The conference will include world economic experts such as SEC Chairwoman Mary Schapiro, Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, S&P President Deven Sharma and UK FSA Chairman Lord Adair Turner, who will focus on the priorities for the reform of global regulation in his keynote address.

The annual IOSCO conference focuses on articulating international standards of conduct, promoting cooperation between securities regulators and facilitating seamless integration between financial markets. This year's conference will be hosted by the Israel Securities Authority (ISA) and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE). The Israel Securities Authority protects the interests of the investing public by supplying the needed transparency and regulation of the Israeli securities market and is the agency charged with leading Israel's regulatory development, while the TASE has and continues to drive Israel's capital market development through the provision of advanced platforms for the listing and trading of equity, debt and derivatives.



**PRESIDENT SHIMON PERES ANNOUNCES
THE "SECOND PRESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE,"
TO BE HELD OCTOBER 20-22 IN JERUSALEM
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF DOZENS
OF HEADS OF STATE, WORLD FINANCIAL
LEADERS, UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS AND
NOTABLES FROM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD**

THE PRESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD IN COOPERATION WITH THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY ANNOUNCED TODAY

In light of the success of the first Presidential Conference, "Facing Tomorrow," President Shimon Peres and the President of the Hebrew University, Menachem Megidor, announced their full cooperation in hosting the Second Presidential Conference, which will be held from October 20-22, 2009, in Jerusalem. It should be noted that the Hebrew University in Jerusalem will be a partner in the planning of the conference and will make all of its intellectual and research resources available for the conference as is relevant to the topics at hand.

The Second Presidential Conference will be focused on ways to turn the economic crisis into an opportunity and a turning point as we move into the future – the global future, the Jewish future, and the Israeli future. The conference will look at Israel's many successes, while examining the main challenges and best possible solutions for Israel's future and that of the world.

"Facing Tomorrow 2009" will bring the best minds together under one roof to address difficult challenges and to try to pave the road to a better tomorrow. Like the first Presidential Conference, heads of state, world economic leaders, presidents of universities, and honored guests from

throughout the world will be invited, and there will also be a strong connection with the Jewish world.

President Shimon Peres said, "Today I am proud to announce the Second Presidential Conference, which will be held in Jerusalem and which will highlight Israel's many successes. Israel is a world leader in a great number of fields, and particularly against the background of the world economic crisis, Israel can stand out because of its successes and the developments it has given to the world."

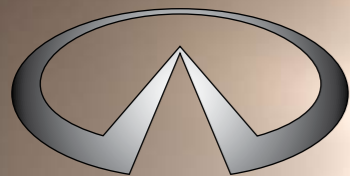
Menachem Megidor, President of the Hebrew University, said, "I am happy and proud today – the Hebrew University's cooperation in the Presidential Conference is of the utmost importance, and I see tremendous importance for the people of Israel, the Jewish people, and the whole world in advancing these types of conferences. In Israel, in the best case, we think about the coming day, and in the worst case, about the coming hour. There are many fewer discussions about what will be 20 years down the road. It is important that the Jewish people engage in long-term thinking and think about more than just the problems of the day."

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I N F I N I T I

FX 50

In keeping with Infiniti's well defined product strategy, the new FX is inviting in every dimension, from the nimble feel of its quick and controlled response to driver input, to the ride comfort provided by its Dual Flow Pass shock absorbers and quick response to body motion inputs, to the unique "Infiniti feel" under acceleration and braking.

Infiniti's designers and engineers' overall goal in the development of the second-generation FX crossover was to enhance its "sports car ability" while adding refinement - without compromising either side of the equation. The new FX's creators also wanted to give the vehicle a more "human" feel, despite its mechanical strengths, by integrating the latest technology with owners' lifestyles.

The new FX50 is designed to be highly adaptive to both the driver and driving conditions, utilizing a long list of Infiniti technologies and systems, including Variable Valve Event & Lift (V-VEL) engine technology, Adaptive Shift Control, Suspension with active Continuous Damping Control

(CDC), Rear Active Steering, Around View Monitor, Intelligent Cruise Control (Full Speed Range) and Intelligent Brake Assist (IBA).

The new Infiniti FX continues with the breathtaking exterior styling and "sports car proportions" that helped the original stand out from all other performance luxury crossovers on the market. The FX blends the substantial lower body of an SUV with the long hood, stretched wheelbase, short front and rear overhangs, low overall height and elegant upper body more commonly found on sports cars - conveying its strong performance personality and breakthrough design architecture at a single glance.

The Infiniti FX's sporty interior is designed to combine a driver-oriented cockpit/command center with a warm, modern, comfortable passenger environment - all wrapped in rich, natural materials. The high-tech interior design includes an Infiniti signature "double-wave" instrument panel and white-and-violet electroluminescent gauges.

The Infiniti FX50 features a new powerplant, which makes it debut on this model - an advanced 5.0-liter V8 that is mounted low in the chassis to help lower the FX50's center of gravity.

The new Infiniti FX50 is a radical expression of sport and utility - designed to stand out by every measure. With the most highly demanded features in class included as standard equipment, FX50 combines advanced technology with exceptional levels of performance, style, luxury, safety and quality.



EX 37



I N F I N I T I

EX AT A GLANCE

- Unique combination of style and practicality
- Intelligent four-wheel drive
- Advanced features including Around View Monitor
- Potent 3.7-litre V6 engine producing over 320HP
- Advanced seven-speed automatic
- Superior build quality

Any new car buyer wanting a vehicle with the style of a coupé and the versatility of a four-wheel drive crossover would have had to buy two cars to satisfy every need.

But that's about to change. The launch of the Infiniti EX37, the world's first compact coupe crossover, opens an entirely new market segment for Europe's newest car brand.

Boasting avantgarde coupé looks and a practical, luxury interior with the commanding driving position and four-wheel drive traction expected from an SUV, the EX really does provide the best of all worlds.

It's the perfect fusion of a compact Crossover and a stylish coupé: there's nothing quite like it on the market today ... though we are certain that rival manufacturers will quickly

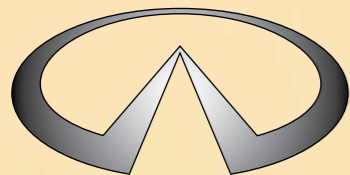
try to follow suit with their own variations on the theme.

Built to the same exacting standards as all Infiniti models, the EX37 offers an exceptional combination of elegance, style, performance and technology.

It is the first production vehicle in the world to benefit from the advanced Around View Monitor system that gives the driver a bird's eye view of the vehicle while it's being parked and the unique 'scratch shield'.

EX is a refreshing new take on the crossover concept. By blending coupé looks with SUV ability and sports estate practicality, it really does create a totally new breed of car. Add in excellent driving dynamics, superb quality and innovative features and the result is engaging, elegant and exciting.





I N F I N I T I

G37

For many years, designing a successful four-door sports sedan has been regarded as the preserve of the German manufacturers. But that is about to change... and it's the Infiniti G37 that's ready to upset the status quo.

Ironically, it's the huge success of models from the German 'establishment' that's the biggest chink in their otherwise impenetrable armour. Their resulting ubiquity no longer appeals to buyers seeking individuality.

"The Infiniti G37 will be sold in one of the most competitive sectors in the market and there's no doubt it is up against some very impressive opposition with a fiercely loyal customer base," says Jim Wright, Vice President, Infiniti Europe.

"But not only does the G37 match or better the establishment when it comes to style, dynamic performance, equipment levels, value, and the entire ownership

experience, it has genuine exclusivity on its side."

Infiniti G37 is a credible, confident challenger delivering substantial performance and rear-drive dynamics in a convincingly individual package. "The typical buyer of a G37 will be a free thinker, someone who appreciates quality and service and who doesn't want to follow the herd," says Bastien Schupp, Marketing Director, Infiniti Europe.

Testing every Infiniti in the harshest of conditions and over thousands and thousands of kilometres ensures the durability and peace of mind that buyers can expect from the products.

"The Infiniti G37 has the style and performance, the quality and the equipment expected from a car in its class, but with the added bonus of exclusivity. The G37 is ready to stir things up," says Nicolas Tschann, Product Manager, Infiniti Europe.

G37 AT A GLANCE

- Distinctive 'sophisticated-sports' styling
- Rear-wheel drive driving dynamics with availability of Four-Wheel Active Steer
- All-wheel drive version available
- Potent 3.7-litre V6 engine producing over 310PS – change to 320 HP
- Six-speed manual or advanced seven-speed automatic

CLASS LEADING PASSIVE SAFETY FEATURES WITH:

- Six airbags
- Pedestrian-friendly pop-up bonnet
- High level of standard equipment including "Scratch Shield" paint



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Cordelia – an experience in the heart of Jaffa

When magic and touch meet for dinner the story of Chef Nir Zook

"Due to the magical atmosphere and to the quality of the dishes, Cordelia finds its way into the list of the ten finest restaurants in Israel" Daniel Rogov, Haaretz

"Gentlemen, what a charm" Gill Hovav, Timeout

"The Cordelia restaurant, Noa bistro and Jaffa bar all faithfully represent all that is beautiful about Jaffa: with plenty of good taste provide by Nir Zook you get romance at its best" Shament magazine

"Where the food is as dreamy as the location" Ofer Zemach Jerusalem post

Much like many other young and promising chefs, Nir Zook began cooking in his mother's kitchen where dreams of Michelin Stars took shape in his mind. He later trained under some of the world's famous culinary names, and much not like many other young and successful chefs - has his own restaurant. Beginning the shooting star he is, Nir Zook appeared and rose to recognition with the blink of an eye-and made it big time. At age of 29, chef and food visionary Nir Zook is already the head of a mini-culinary empire. He appears on television cooking shows, has already written two cookbooks, is a food columnist for an Israeli successful newspaper-Yediot Aharonot and spends his free time traveling the world looking for the imagining new recipes, as well as collecting decorative objects for his restaurants.

This young, charismatic and creative culinary personality can be often be found at the compound named after him on the historic Yafet Street in Jaffa, which houses his

Cordelia restaurant ,Noa Bistro and Jaffa Bar. Located next to the flea market and art galleries of the old city of Jaffa. Cordelia is named after the daughter of Shakespear's King Lear to evince royalty and love.

Cordelia certainly promises a one of a kind dining experience. Nir's food is merely an extension of the atmosphere. The creativity of the food is an important element as the taste itself. Serving classic French dishes enhanced with a Middle Eastern touch. These creative dishes include Artichoke hearts filled with shrimps, Noodle and pickled sea bream carnival, Enterecot with truffle oil and mushroom, Grey mullet and mussels and crispy celery, Mushroom cream and fresh shitakki ravioli, chocolate and cardimmon ice cream in Courvoisier, gnocchi in raspberry and a platter of goat cheeses that the chef's brothers make on their cheese frame. The 'degustation' menu, is 7 course gourmet meals that is updated monthly, from which diners choose from select appetizers, entrees and dessert.

Cordelia | Noa | Jaffa | Nir Zook

Cordelia Chef Restaurant, Nir Zook plaza, Yefet 30 Str., 1 Hazchuchit path, Jaffa | Tel: 03-5184668, email: cordelia@netvision.net.il

POPE TO MAKE RARE VISIT TO ISRAEL IN MAY, FOLLOWING MONTHS OF JEWISH-CATHOLIC TENSION



POPE BENEDICT XVI IS SET TO VISIT ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES IN MAY 2009 AFTER ACCEPTING AN INVITATION BY PRESIDENT SHIMON PERES. THE VATICAN AND ISRAEL ARE SAID, THUS, TO HOPEFULLY END THE HIGH TENSION OF RECENT MONTHS BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE OVER THE INITIATIVE OF CANONIZING POPE PIUS XII.

This visit, which would be the third visit of a pope to Israel since the establishment of the state, has not yet been officially confirmed.

Peres met about month ago with Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Antonio Franco, the pope's envoy to Israel. Franco told the president that Benedict would respond positively to an invitation from Israel. The president sent the invitation, and a positive response was indeed reportedly received.

Since the visit has not yet been publicly confirmed, no preparations are underway in the Foreign Ministry or the Vatican. However, the Pope's arrival is apparently planned for the second week of May.

The tension began after calls came by ultra-conservatives at the Vatican to expedite canonization on the 50th anniversary of Pius' death. The process began during the time of the previous pope, John Paul II, but both he and the present pope were aware of the harsh criticism such a move could engender

in the Jewish world, which accuses Pius XII of remaining silent and not protesting the extermination of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

The debate was fanned by the Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, who said a few months ago that the pope would not visit Israel until a change was made in the caption to two pictures of Pius XII in the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, which state that Pius' response to the murder of Jews during the Holocaust is controversial. The captions also state that when Jews were deported from Rome to Auschwitz, Pius did not intervene.

The caption caused a diplomatic storm in the past when the papal nuncio threatened to boycott the Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem in protest over the caption, although he did attend the ceremony.

The Vatican has since distanced itself from Gumpel's statements. Pope Benedict's



spokesman said the caption is not a factor in his decision on whether to visit Israel or not. Social Affairs Minister Isaac Herzog also contributed to the dispute when he told Haaretz a month ago that Pius' canonization was "unacceptable." The Vatican demanded that Herzog apologize for the statement.

However, Benedict praised Pius' actions during the Holocaust and criticized historians who said he did not help to save Jews. In a meeting a few weeks ago with Jewish leaders, Benedict was asked to delay the canonization process until all the documents in the Vatican archives involving the period of the Holocaust were released, a process that is expected to take about another seven years. The pope told the delegation he was "seriously considering" the matter.

In other meetings at the Vatican, understandings were obtained that the canonization process would not be rushed.

Another source of tension between Jews and the Vatican was Benedict' decision to bring back the ancient Latin mass which calls for the Jews to recognize Jesus. Following Jewish protests and the announcement by Italy's Jewish community that they were severing ties with the Vatican, a representative of the pope said the verse in question was a wish, and not a call on Catholics to missionize among Jews.

The pope is also expected to visit the Palestinian Authority, apparently in Bethlehem. This could be one of the diplomatic obstacles of the visit because of the legal ambiguity of the PA's presidency in light of the struggle between Fatah and Hamas.

Another stumbling block could be a papal visit to Yad Vashem because of the controversial captions. This matter might be resolved

by having Benedict visit only the monuments at Yad Vashem, not the museum.

Rabbi David Rosen, head of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations said of the expected visit: "If the information is correct, I am sure the pope will be warmly received by Israel's leaders and its people."

The President's Residence declined to comment on the report. The secretary of the Apostolic Nuncio's office in Israel said he could neither confirm nor deny the report.

Pope Paul VI visited Israel in 1964, even before the Vatican recognized the state. In 2000, Pope John Paul II visited the country.

Israel announced that it plans to invest NIS 5.7 million in a religious ceremony led by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit .

The Church of the Annunciation, believed to be the site of Mary's house where according to biblical tradition the Angel Gabriel appeared and announced that she would give birth to Jesus, is seen between the branches of an olive tree March 29, 2009 in the Galilee town of Nazareth in northern Israel. Pope Benedict XVI is scheduled to pray in the church and hold an open-air mass on the nearby Mt. Precipice . The ceremony is expected to draw 35,000 worshippers.

Organizers will still need to recruit funds for a satellite communication infrastructure to transmit the mass to a worldwide audience. They must also arrange security measures and organize transportation.

The Vatican is expected to send Israel its guidelines and requests for the ceremony over the coming days. As of yet, Israel has received only the plan for the ceremony's set, part of which will comprise ritual artifacts



WHO ARE SOMALIA'S PIRATES?

Pirates have been around as long as people have used the oceans as trade routes. The earliest documented instances of piracy are the exploits of the Sea Peoples who threatened the Aegean and Mediterranean in the 13th century BC. In Classical Antiquity, the Illyrians and Tyrrhenians were known as pirates, as well as Greeks and Romans. The island of Lemnos long resisted Greek influence and remained a haven for Thracian pirates. During their voyages the Phoenicians seem to have sometimes resorted to piracy, and specialized in kidnapping boys and girls to be sold as slaves. By the 1st century BC, there were pirate states along the Anatolian coast, threatening the commerce of the Roman Empire.

Due to the clan-based organization of Somalia and the lack of a central government, combined with Somalia's location at the Horn of Africa, conditions were ripe for the growth of piracy in the early 1990s. Since the collapse of the state, boats illegally fishing in Somali waters were a common sight. Pirates at first were interested in securing the waters before businessmen and militias became involved. Acts of piracy temporarily subsided following the rise of the Islamic Courts Union in 2006. However, pirate activity began to increase after Ethiopia invaded Somalia in December 2006. Since 2005, many international organizations, including the International Maritime Organization and the World Food Programme, have expressed concern over the rise in acts of piracy. Piracy has contributed to a rise in shipping costs and impeded the delivery of food aid shipments. Ninety percent of the World Food Programme's shipments arrive by sea, and ships have required a military escort.

According to the Kenyan foreign minister, Somali pirates have received over US\$150 million during the 12 months prior to November 2008. More than 130 attacks, including close to 50 successful hijackings, were reported in 2008, threatening the vital shipping lane and spurring the international community into joint naval action.

Today's pirates are mainly fighters for Somalia's many warlord factions, who have fought each other for control of the country since the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991. Their motives? A mixture of entrepreneurialism and survival, says Iqbal Jhazbhay, a Somali expert at the University of South Africa in Tshwane, as Pretoria is now called.

"From the evidence so far, these primarily appear to be fighters looking for predatory opportunities," says Mr. Jhazbhay. They operated "roadblocks in the past, which were fleecing people as a form of taxation. Now they've seen the opportunities on the high seas."

Initially, one of the main motives for taking to the seas – working first with local fishermen, and later buying boats and weapons with the proceeds of every ship they captured – was "pure survival," says Jhazbhay, explaining that armed extortion is one of the few opportunities to make a living in lawless Somalia.

"It's spiked more recently because of a spike in food prices," he says. Now it has become a highly profitable, sophisticated criminal enterprise hauling in millions of dollars in ransom payments.

WHOM DO THEY WORK FOR?

The pirates mainly work for themselves.

Much of the piracy seems to be based out of the Puntland, a semiautonomous region on the northern shore of Somalia that broke away from Somalia soon after 1991. Thousands of pirates now operate off Somalia's coast, although there are no accurate numbers on precisely how many there are.

United Nations monitoring reports on arms smuggling in the Horn of Africa have pointed to evidence that pirate gangs have established relations with corrupt officials of the Puntland government. They bribe port officials to allow the pirates to use Eyl and other ports as their bases of operation, and to bring some of their captured ships in for safekeeping while the pirates negotiate ransoms with the ships' owners. There is also evidence that expatriate Somalis living in Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and throughout the Persian Gulf may be feeding information to the pirates about ships that have docked in those regions and may be heading toward the Gulf of Aden and other pirate-infested areas.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THIS PIRACY?

The money seems to be distributed by warlords to their families and friends, and then further outward toward their fellow clan-members, says Jhazbhay.

There have been charges recently that local Islamist groups may be linked to the pirate gangs, and may have begun to use piracy as a source of funds to buy weapons. Certainly, Is-

lamiist groups such as Al Shabab – an insurgent group formed after the Islamic Courts Union lost control of the country last year in the wake of a US-backed invasion by Somalia's neighbor, Ethiopia – have used pirate gangs to smuggle weapons into Somalia, which is currently under international weapons sanctions. But the evidence is thin, as yet, that Islamist groups are using piracy on the high seas as a funding mechanism.

"The last thing the Islamists want to do is give an unnecessary provocation to the major powers, who might come after them in a big way," says Richard Cornwell, a senior analyst at the Institute for Security Studies in Tshwane. "What experience tells us is that if the Islamists did take control of Somalia, piracy would stop overnight. They don't want warlords gaining arms and money outside of their control."

IS THERE AN AL QAEDA CONNECTION?

While the CIA's chief, Gen. Michael Hayden, suggested recently that Al Qaeda was beginning to expand its reach in the Horn of Africa, and possibly reaching out to radical local Islamist parties such as Al Shabab in Somalia, there appears to be little evidence of a connection between international Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda and piracy.

"There may be some loose elements among the Islamist groups that have tie-ups with the pirates, because the movement is fractured into six or seven different groups, and each may have its own problems getting funding," says Jhazbhay.

HOW DID THEY GET SO GOOD AT TAKING SHIPS?

Practice, practice, practice. More than 90 ships have been attacked off the coast of Somalia this year. Seventeen ships remain in the hands of Somali pirates. The Saudi owners of the Sirius Star, the oil tanker taken Nov. 15, are reportedly in contact with the pirates, possibly to negotiate the release of the ship, its crew, and the estimated \$110 million cargo of crude oil.

"What staggered the mind is that this capture was 400 nautical miles out to sea," says Mr. Cornwell. "That's far deeper water than anything we've seen before. But with a GPS they can hijack to order." Using a mother ship – often an old Russian trawler – to prowler deeper waters for their target, they can offload smaller

boats to move in close and overtake the ship, and climb up with hooks and ladders, and sub-machine guns.

"With a fully laden tanker ship, you have a fairly low free board, so it is easy to get up on board from smaller boats," says Cornwell. "Tankers are an obvious target of opportunity."

HOW WILL IT AFFECT SECURITY AND TRADE?

Somalia is under international weapons sanctions, and warlord groups continue to fight both against the Ethiopian peacekeeping mission and against each other. But an influx of money is likely to mean a further influx of weapons to an already wartorn land.

"Regionally, I think the major problem is that piracy has given some groups the chance to lay their hands on money," says Jhazbhay. "There may be \$30 million in ransom money received in recent years. Once they [the various armed groups] get that kind of money, they can buy a ground-to-air missile. Getting [a hold of] arms can affect the struggle for freedom in Somalia, and that affects the whole region."

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO STOP THEM?

Currently, the NATO alliance, the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, and a host of other countries have ships patrolling the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden – an area of approximately 1.1 million square miles – to prevent piracy.

Somali pirates tried to take over an Israeli-owned merchant ship while it was sailing some 700 kilometers off the shores of east Africa.

The vessel was flying the Maltese flag, and none of the crew on board was Israeli.

Early Saturday morning, the pirates started chasing the ship in two speed boats and opened machinegun fire on it. They were unable to board the ship thanks to a barbed wire that surrounded the deck. When news of the incident reached the headquarters of Zim Shipping Services in Haifa, they contacted NATO marine forces in the Gulf of Aden via the Foreign Ministry and the Israeli Navy.

A British jet was dispatched to the scene and reported back that the pirate ships had turned back. Zim CEO Idan Ofer said that he wished "to thank the crew and the captain for their bravery and resourcefulness. And special thanks should go to the NATO headquarters that dispatched the aircraft, and the Foreign Ministry and the Navy, that helped us establish the contact with NATO."

"The international community must put an end to this dangerous phenomenon of piracy off the shores of Somalia and restore maritime safety," he said.

There was a performance of The Sandra Bernhard Show at the Holon Theatre on February 27. Accompanied by her musicians, this was a one-night-only performance. The Diplomatic Club Israel distributed tickets to the diplomatic corps on this occasion during the celebrations for International Women's Day. Attending the show along with the general audience were Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and members of the diplomatic corps in Israel.



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