

IMPORTANCE TO ISRAEL OF NEGEV & EILAT

1. Roughly 60 per cent of the total area of the State of Israel is the rugged, semi-arid and, until recent years, barren region known as the Negev: Israel's Southland. Yet only about 10 per cent of the country's population resides in this part of the land.

2. The Negev, therefore, plays a paramount role in the efforts of Israel's planners to arrive at a rational distribution of the country's growing population -- in two major ways; (a) by opening up more and more tracts of land to farming, through irrigation, particularly in the northern Negev, where the soil itself is potentially fertile; (b) by exploiting the region's substantial mineral resources to build up the area industrially.

3. With the National Water Project still in its initial stages of operation, the possibilities of agricultural development at the moment are limited. Major emphasis has been placed, therefore, on the development of such natural resources as potash, bromine, phosphates, copper, petroleum, natural gas, gypsum, limestone, marble, glass-sand and clay.

Worldwide Demand for Fertilizers

4. Israel is one of the few countries fortunate enough to have within close geographic proximity substantial quantities of the three basic elements in the manufacture of chemical fertilizer: phosphorus, potassium and nitrogen. She has thus been able to respond, in some measure, to the steadily growing worldwide demand for fertilizer, particularly in Asia, where undernourishment and starvation pose a major problem and more and more countries are discovering the importance of chemical fertilizers in their struggle against hunger.

5. The year 1957 was a turning point in Israel's efforts to turn the barren, Southern Negev into an industrial region. The quarries in the Negev have been expanded and modernized and have shown a steady increase in production. From a total output of some 300,000 tons in 1957-58, the figure rose to over a million tons in 1966-67. Japan alone in 1965 purchased 35,000 tons of phosphates and 49,000 tons of fertilizers. Plans call for further expansion and an output of 2,400,000 tons by the year 1970.

6. Since most of this production goes into exports (\$9 million worth in 1962-63, \$15 m. in 1963-64, \$23 m. in 1964-65 and \$80 m. envisaged for 1969-70), it has been an important foreign currency earner and a vital factor in Israel's efforts to reduce her balance-of-payments gap.

Eilat: Maritime Outlet to Asia and Africa

7. Eilat, at the southern tip of the Negev and the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, is Israel's sole outlet to the markets of Asia and East Africa. By deepening the harbour, tripling the length of the wharf and installing new facilities for the storage and loading of raw materials, the Government has converted the port from a potential to an effective link between Israel and the developing world, and traffic through Eilat (in both directions) has increased from 179,000 tons in 1961/62 to 340,000 tons in 1964/65.

8. In addition to serving as a port of egress for Israel's mineral exports to the East, Eilat is also the port of entry for a growing number of imports, the most important of which undoubtedly is petroleum. Israel's vital interest in keeping this maritime lane open at all times

may be measured not only by the fact that its closure would cost the State many millions of dollars a year because of the necessity of importing and exporting products from and to other and far more distant countries; such a closure would jeopardize Israel's economy by severely curtailing her economic links with East Africa and the entire continent of Asia.

To Sum UP:

9. The experience of recent years, taken together with Israel's plans for the future, make it clear that the continuing development of the Negev region and of its southern maritime outlet, the port of Eilat, are not only a social-scientific challenge -- as has so often been expressed in the 'Making the Desert Bloom' slogan -- but a vital economic interest. To fructify the soil of the area, to exploit to the hilt its vast and, to a large extent, as yet untapped industrial potential, around the nucleus of a petrochemical complex centered on Arad, in the northern Negev: these are the tasks Israel has set itself to fulfil and in whose successful realization, in the long run, lies the key to the country's ability to create a truly viable economy.

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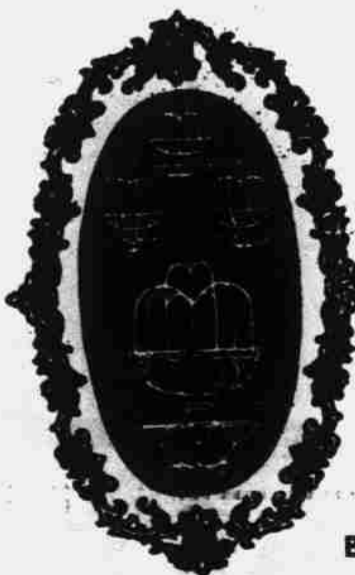



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