

Asian Amity:

Prof. Ruth Arnon Named Senior Vice President (President Elect) of AASA



As a small country, located at the confluence of Europe, Asia and Africa, Israel is uniquely attuned to the need for international cooperation. Israel's close scientific ties to the Americas have long been recognized. The U.S.-Israel BSF, BARD and BIRD-F Foundations date back to the mid-1970s. The dramatic growth in Israel's close S&T ties with Europe reshaped its expanding cooperative network throughout the 1990s. Israel contributed \$43 million to the European Union (EU) Fifth Framework Program in 1999 (garnering \$54 million of competitive joint project funding in return, see *The FORUM*, Winter 1999) and is active in the



Israel Academy President Prof. Jacob Ziv toasts Prof. M.S. Jhon of Korea, the AASA's first president, while Prof. Ruth Arnon looks on.



ESRF, EMBO and CERN. But don't forget Asia. From time immemorial Israel has always maintained close cultural and trade ties with Asia, although for some time, pan-Asian scientific cooperation has lagged behind its Western counterparts. This made it difficult for Asia to act as a whole, even in such a non-political area as basic science.

Part of the problem was the lack of a strong central framework for pan-Asian S&T cooperation. Nonetheless, over the last decade, Israel has developed fruitful relationships – including high-level visits and binational workshops – with individual Asian countries, such as India, China, Russia, Korea and Thailand. Cold War, Sino-Soviet other international political tensions long made establishing a strong inter-Asian academic forum particularly difficult. Recent changes in the political climate, however, encouraged the founding of the Association of Academies of Science in Asia (AASA) in Seoul, Korea, in September 2000. The second General Assembly was held in the Russian “Science City” of Novosibirsk. The third General Assembly was recently held, under the sponsorship of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, in Jerusalem (October 14-17, 2002). Senior participants from China, Russia, Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Nepal, Mongolia and several FSU countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) attended. The meeting also included a 2-day scientific session on “The Impact of Biotechnical Advances in Asia,” an area of considerable mutual interest.

At the Jerusalem meeting, Prof. N. L. Dobretsov (Russia) was elected the AASA’s new president, replacing Prof. M. S. Jhon of Korea. Prof. Ruth Arnon of the Weizmann Institute of Science and former Chairperson of the Israel Academy’s Division of Sciences (1995-2001) was elevated from Vice-President to Senior Vice-President, a position tantamount to President-elect. One of Israel’s most outstanding immunologists and a co-discoverer of the multiple sclerosis drug Copaxone, Prof. Arnon was recently (2001) awarded the prestigious Israel Prize for Medicine and appointed to the European Research Advisory Board.



Profs. Jhon and Arnon toast Prof. N.L. Dobretsov, of Russia, the new president of the AASA

The AASA has already begun establishing “regional coordination centers” to pursue joint research of regional interest. The first such center, in Irkutsk, Russia, is studying boreal forests, large freshwater lakes and space weather, taking advantage of local institutes and expertise. Other joint projects may well require funding from the Asian Development Bank and similar organizations.

The meeting was organized by Mr. Bob Lapidot, Director of the Israel Academy’s International Division; and the scientific session was organized by Prof. Arnon. At the gala opening ceremony, attended by the ambassadors and other diplomats from participating countries, Israel Academy President Jacob Ziv expressed his “wish for the Association and for the Asian region as a whole that this initiative will include additional participants from the Middle East...for the benefit of inhabitants of the entire area.” The AASA’s next meeting is scheduled for two year’s hence, in Iran.

