

ASSIGNMENT SHEET

ANALYST'S SECTION

Date Assigned: _____ Date Due: _____ Category: 4a Country: IS

Special Instructions:

ASSISTANT'S SECTION

Source: (#2549) Yitzhak Okef. "Ex-Minister: Catastrophe not till '87"
Jer. Post 2/5/86

Data:

Haim Lvati

Interview with "one of the persons who shaped and established Israel's water policy" See attached

Comments:

Ex-Minister:

LA-TIMES

Jerusalem 1030

2/5/86

Catastrophe not till '87

At Water-Shake



Haim Gvati (Israel Sun) 2 - 05 - 1986

HAIM GVATI is an expert on water. Among the many jobs the 85-year-old has held are: secretary of Kibbutz Hameuhad movement, director general and Minister of Agriculture. As such he is one of the persons who shaped and established Israel's water policy, which today is facing problems.

"Wells are drying up or turning saline, the Kinneret is at its lowest level and most of the artificial water reservoirs are dry at the start of the summer. Who is responsible?"

"We didn't make a mistake in our concept! There is no need to hang anyone or put people in jail for the sorry situation of today's water resources," Gvati said.

But to use up all the water to the very last drop? - 05-1986

"Yes we should use water to the very last drop, otherwise the water lies idle deep in the earth while above ground this same water could be used to water several thousand dunams of land."

"What must be done is to ensure that every last drop of water is put to good use and not wasted. I have been in this country for about 60 years, and there are cycles of rainy years and dry years. But I must admit that I find it hard to remember such a tough situation as we are facing today. The rains this winter came after two consecutive years of dry winters, and they were way below average, and worst of all they came in long intervals so not much water seeped into the underground reservoirs."

"There is no need to search for scape goats; we all know that this can happen, that there will be dry years. I can be an angry prophet too, and tell you that if next year will also be dry we will face a catastrophe. But that is the situation we are dealing with here and we are in the hands of the mercy of the Almighty."

"If we want to build this country we have to use water. Water is one of the few natural resources we have, like the land from which we can grow food for local consumption and to earn money from exports. So of course we must exploit this natural resource." - 05-1986

"But like every other exploitation we also drew red lines, up to what level we can draw water. The Kinneret, for example, is at its lowest level in history. I remember the Kinneret being at low levels and I also remember the Kinneret being at such a level that good sweet drinking water was sent down the Jordan to the Dead Sea because the Kinneret was overflowing," he said.

Asked if the farmers are not stealing water when they exceed their irrigation water quotas, Gvati replied, "No."

"The distribution of water is in the hands of the government. This winter the government allowed the farmers to exceed their quotas despite the difficult situation, for the simple reason that no one believed Febru-

ary and March would be so dry, and we could not let the crops of the farmers dry up.

"But now we have a state of emergency in the water field, and we are going to cut on the quotas; and if the situation becomes worse during the summer we will cut even further," he warned.

Some experts claim that the present cut is too small and the quotas should be cut much more.

"It is always like that; experts demand a larger cut in quotas. Water officials see only water and the farmers see how their production is being lowered without water. This matter concerning quotas is just like any other matter in the country whether it be political or economic; you can only reach an agreement by compromise. This is why I told you straight from the start that you cannot find anyone to hang, because there is no one that is guilty for the present sorry situation. If you want to blame someone then it must be the Lord above."

Concerning the future and if there was no need to change the present concept of the use of water in agriculture, he said that in general Israel was going in the right direction, by trying to produce more crops for export.

"We are already overproducing for the local market so all our efforts must now go to the export market. Here we must continue to search for produce that will give us highest yields, profits and use the smallest quantities of water."

"For example if we could grow 1,000 dunams less of cotton and instead use it for flowers we could save water and receive about 10 times the money that cotton fetches. The motto here is to grow more intensive crops, and to utilize water in a more efficient manner. Believe me that it is easy to say these things but to translate this into reality is no easy matter. In agriculture everything comes after labouring and sweating quite a lot," he said.

Gvati concluded that the situation isn't all that bleak.

"We have had such bad times in the past; this is part of the cycle. I believe that farmers should never make a yearly profit and loss account, but should do this every several years. In this way the cycle with its peaks and lows evens out. The same holds true with water; there are rainy years and dry years."

YITZHAK OKED